

The world is not a foreign land

Curator: Quentin Sprague

Education resource

An Ian Potter Museum of Art and NETS Victoria touring exhibition



Ngarra
Katcha 2006
synthetic polymer paint on paper
50 x 70 cm
© Courtesy Ngarra Estate and
Mossenson Galleries, Perth



This exhibition has received development assistance from NETS Victoria's Exhibition Development Fund Grant, supported by the Victorian Government through Arts Victoria, a division of the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.

The world is not a foreign land brings together work by Timothy Cook, Freda Warlapinni, Djambawa Marawili, Nyapanyapa Yunupingu, Ngarra and Rusty Peters. Crossing three geographically and culturally distinct regions—the Tiwi islands, the Kimberley and North-east Arnhem Land—each artist presents sometimes strikingly different perspectives on what constitutes Indigenous contemporary art. However, seen together, their work also reveals a series of productive and meaningful relationships; a network of connections that ask audiences to reconsider how certain objects and, by extension, certain practices, might relate beyond the confines of existing categories.

The Potter's partnership with National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS) Victoria, along with the substantial and generous support of the Australia Council's Visions of Australia and the Contemporary Touring Initiative, will also enable *The world is not a foreign land* to travel to Drill Hall Gallery at the Australian National University, Canberra; Cairns Regional Gallery, Qld; Tweed Regional Gallery, Murwillumbah, NSW; Flinders University Art Museum, Adelaide, and Latrobe Regional Gallery, Morwell, Vic, in 2014–16.

This resource is designed for both students and teachers of VCE Art and Studio Arts, Units 1–4. The resource details specific aspects and concepts relevant to each of the study designs although teachers can easily adapt content to different outcomes and key knowledge areas as required.

Teachers can review the content of this resource with flexibility to address the needs and interests of students.

This resource includes:

- An introduction to the exhibition that provides a curatorial context from the Ian Potter Museum of Art Director, Kelly Gellatly.
- A national map identifying the regional areas that are the homelands to the six artists whose work features in *The world is not a foreign land* that provides a geographic context.
- Artists' profiles that describe the background of each artist, including a biography of professional practice and a list of resources that supports further independent research for students.
- Broad cultural information included for general knowledge. This information should not be independently applied to a study of an individual artist and their work as it cannot support an authentic understanding of the diversity of Aboriginal culture.
- An interview with the exhibition guest curator Quentin Sprague that presents insight into the selection of works and organisation of the exhibition *The world is not a foreign land* and highlights relationships between both artworks and artists. Sprague responds to questions about the preparation for the exhibition in a dialogue with Joanna Bosse, Curator, at the Ian Potter Museum of Art.
- A guide for teachers that offers tasks specific to VCE studies which can be undertaken



in preparation for visiting the exhibition



when viewing the exhibition, in the gallery



and tasks to be considered for teaching and learning programs back in the classroom.

- Profiles of remote community art centres that present a valuable resource for students to investigate the ways in which the artists work, the processes they engage with and the importance of their relationships to work production.

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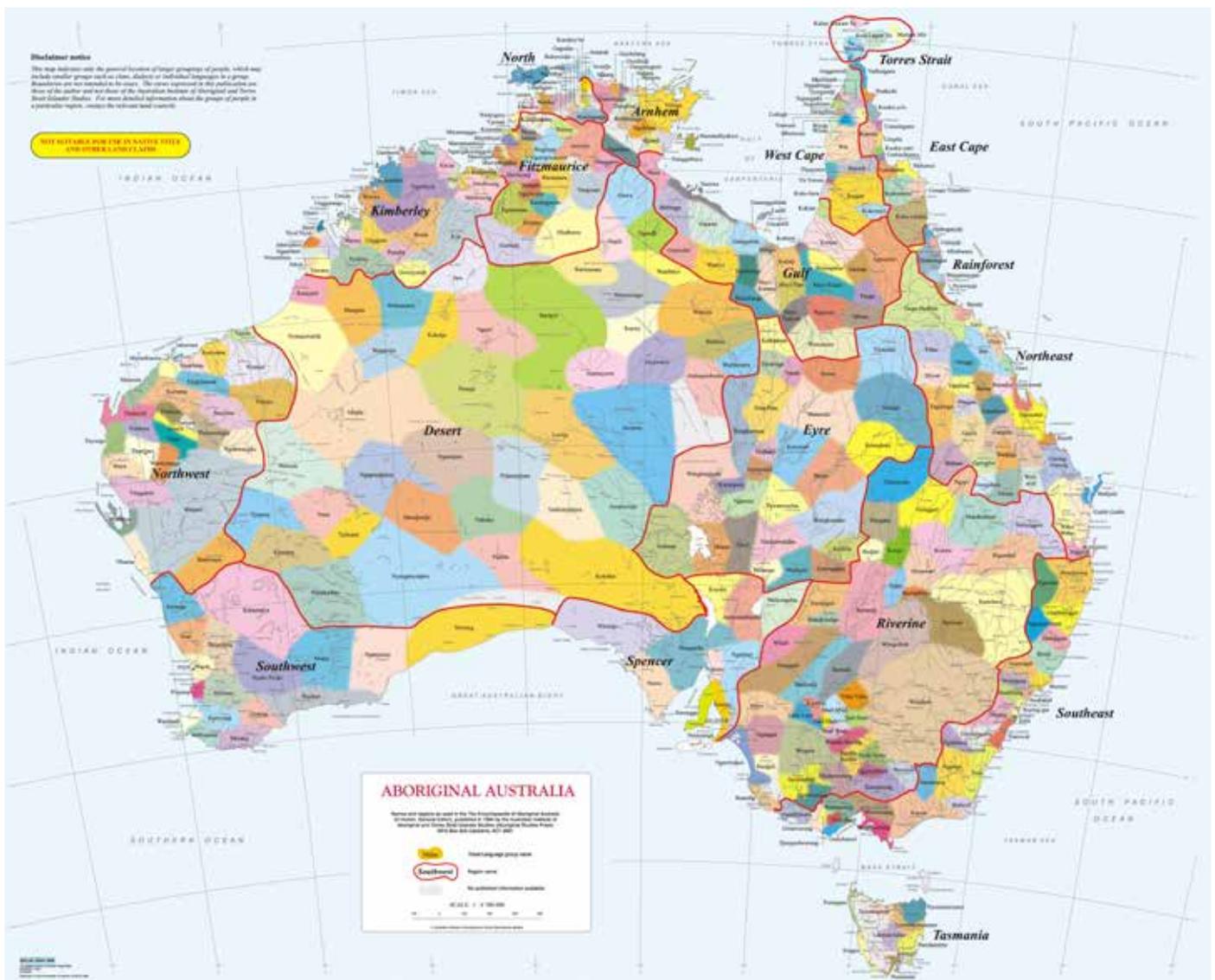
Introduction to the exhibition

Following on from Quentin Sprague’s earlier curatorial project, *Groundwork*, which was presented at the Ian Potter Museum of Art in 2011 and brought together the work of Indigenous artists Janangoo Butcher Cherel, Mick Jawalji and Rammy Ramsey, *The world is not a foreign land* continues Sprague’s desire to establish different entry points into and dialogue around the work of some of this country’s most interesting Indigenous artists. As such, it is deliberately propositional in form and intent, gently, yet insistently, interrogating the manner in which Indigenous practice, as both art historical discipline and framework, has been written about, positioned, curated and consumed.

By juxtaposing the seemingly disparate work of Timothy Cook, Djambawa Marawili, Nyapanyapa Yunupingu, Ngarra, Rusty Peters and Freda Warlapinni—together representative of the vastly different cultural practices and beliefs and geographic regions of the Tiwi Islands,

North-eastern Arnhem Land and the East and West Kimberley—this skilfully crafted exhibition and accompanying publication encourage those who willingly embark on its journey to focus on the unique creative output of the individual artists (an approach that is simply a given for non-Indigenous practitioners), while similarly acknowledging the deeply embedded cultural and spiritual connections that underpin and inform their respective bodies of work. As a project, *The world is not a foreign land* doesn’t attempt to neatly wrap these concerns nor provide a definitive standpoint, but instead opens up a space for contemplation and thought that quietly speaks of the possibilities of, and revelations within, a new paradigm.

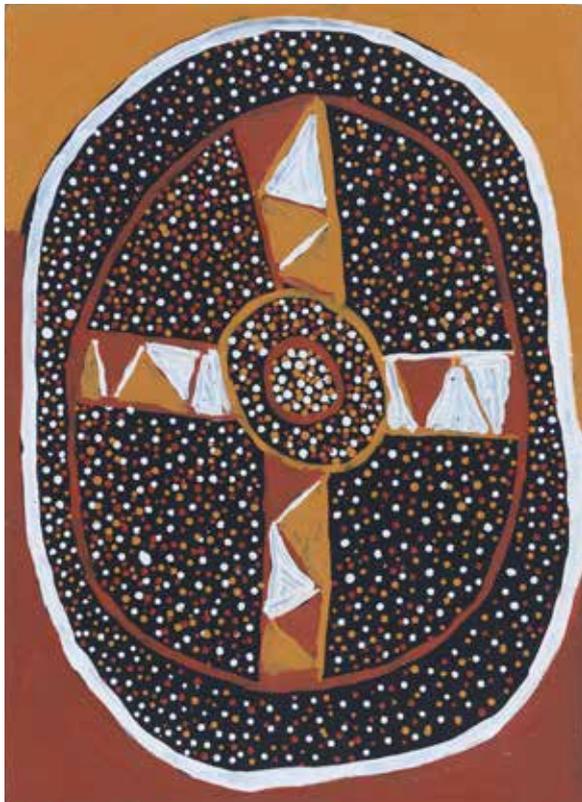
Kelly Gellatly, Director
The Ian Potter Museum of Art



This map is just one representation of many other map sources that are available for Aboriginal Australia. Using published resources available between 1988–1994, this map attempts to represent all the language, social or nation groups of the Indigenous people of Australia. It indicates only the general location of larger groupings of people which may include smaller groups such as clans, dialects or individual languages in a group. Boundaries are not intended to be exact. This map is NOT SUITABLE FOR USE IN NATIVE TITLE AND OTHER LAND CLAIMS. David R Horton, creator, © Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS and Auslig/Sinclair, Knight, Merz, 1996.

Artist profiles

Timothy Cook
(Tiwi, Melville Island, born 1958)



Timothy Cook
Kulama 2013
natural pigments on paper
106 x 76 cm (sheet)
© Courtesy the artist and Jilamara Arts & Crafts Association, Melville Island, NT and Seva Frangos Art, Perth

Timothy Cook began painting at Jilamara Arts & Crafts Association in Millikapiti on Melville Island in the late 1990s. Renowned artists Freda Warlapinni and Kitty Kantilla provided important early influences on his practice, as did the work of older artists such as Deaf Tommy Mungatopi who Cook recalls painting in the community long before Jilamara was established in 1989.

Cook's work is widely celebrated for drawing a classical style of Tiwi painting into dialogue with his own individual take on Tiwi tradition and history. His paintings picture a hybrid space in which iconographic representations of Tiwi ceremony—in particular the once-annual ceremony known as the Kulama—are often positioned in relation to the Catholic cruciform. Emblematic of the influence of the missions that held sway on the islands for much of the twentieth century, Cook's explicit appropriation of such a charged colonial signifier (effectively subsumed within his paintings by Tiwi systems of belief) presents evidence of a unique intercultural heritage.

Cook is represented by Seva Frangos Art, Perth, and Aboriginal and Pacific Art, Sydney, where he has held regular solo exhibitions since 2002. His work is held in a number of key public and private collections including the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, and the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane. He has recently exhibited in *Parallel collisions: 12th Adelaide Biennale of Australian Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide (2012); *APT7, the 7th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2012–13); *Under the sun: the Kate Challis RAKA Award 2013*, the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne (2013); and *My country, I still call Australia home: contemporary art from black Australia*, Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2013).

Further reading

Bullock, N & Alexie Glass-Kantor (eds), *Parallel collisions: 12th Adelaide Biennale of Australian Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 2012.

McLean, B, 'Timothy Cook and Pedro Wonaeamirri: Opposites attract', in Diane Moon (ed.), *Floating life: contemporary Aboriginal fibre art*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 2009.

Seva Frangos (ed.), *Timothy Cook*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 2014 (forthcoming).

Djambawa Marawili (Yolngu, Madarrpa clan, born 1953)



Djambawa Marawili
Dhakandjali 2013
natural pigments on wood
182 x 19 x 19 cm
Courtesy the artist and Buku Larrnggay Mulka
Centre, Yirrkala, NT; and Vivien Anderson Gallery,
Melbourne

Djambawa Marawili AM is one of the most successful Yolngu artists of recent times. He has spearheaded a number of significant innovations within the tradition of Yolngu art. Key among these is *buwuyak* (invisibility), a development that has seen Marawili and his contemporaries move beyond the overt figuration often employed by their immediate forebears.

While to Western eyes, *buwuyak*—marked by the dense patterning of *minyitji* (sacred clan designs)—appears to be a move towards abstraction, the opposite is in fact true. The shimmering fields that Marawili often employs to overlay and obscure distinct figurative elements are embedded with textual meaning: they can, quite literally, be ‘read’ by Yolngu eyes. This inversion points towards the formal and conceptual elasticity that activates much Indigenous contemporary art and, in particular, is a hallmark of contemporary Yolngu practice.

Marawili’s paintings generally depict the ancestral story associated with Yathikpa, the bay into which the burning ancestral being B̄aru plunged and transformed from his human form into that of a crocodile. The complex designs of Marawili’s paintings often depict associated aspects of this event in elemental form: smoke, fire, fresh and salt water comingle and, as they do, render the diamond-patterned skin of the crocodile in a constant state of becoming.

Marawili began painting in the early 1980s and in addition to his art practice, he is also a highly respected cultural and political leader. In 2010 he was awarded an Order of Australia (AM) for services to the arts. In 2013 he was appointed to the Federal Government’s Indigenous Advisory Council.

Marawili is represented by Annandale Galleries, Sydney. He has participated in solo and group exhibitions in Australia and internationally, including *Zones of contact: 2006 Biennale of Sydney*, *The 5th Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2006), and *The 3rd Moscow Biennale* (2009).

Further reading

Gregory, B (ed.), *Buwuyak: Invisibility*, Annandale Galleries, Sydney, in association with Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala, NT, 2003.

Morphy, H, *Becoming art: Exploring cross cultural categories*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2008.

Morphy, H, *Ancestral connections: Art and an Aboriginal system of knowledge*, University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Marie Brody, A (ed.), *Larrakitj*, Australian Capital Equity, West Perth, 2011.

Ngarra (Andayin, c. 1920–2008)

Ngarra
Untitled 1998
fibre-tipped pens on paper
29.7 x 42 cm
Collection of Ngarra Estate, courtesy
Mossenson Galleries, Perth



Ngarra was an important cultural figure in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, where he was responsible for the maintenance of traditional law across a vast area extending from the West Kimberley to the East Kimberley. He began painting in the mid-1990s after a life spent working on the region's cattle stations.

As one of the only contemporary Andayin artists, Ngarra was uniquely placed in relation to the painting traditions of the East and West Kimberley. Although the planar and iconographic aspects of his work recall both, his idiosyncratic painting style was essentially his own. His unique cultural position, combined with his celebrated sense of independence, enabled him to take his work in new directions. He was one of the first artists in his immediate region to begin using coloured acrylic paint on paper, and also produced a large series of small-scale fibre-tipped pen drawings on paper, many of which he used as studies for larger paintings.

Ngarra also played an important role in encouraging others around him to begin their own art practice, including the late Gija artist Mick Jawalji with whom he worked closely for a number of formative years. Much of Ngarra's work was completed in Derby at the house of his close friend, Kevin Shaw, an anthropologist who, at Ngarra's insistence, took on the role as intermediary between Ngarra and the art world. His work's subjects range from personal memories and finely-tuned observations of his region's history to the ancestral narratives of his traditional country.

Although well recognised within his lifetime, Ngarra's work remains under-represented when compared to many of his contemporaries. His work is held in a number of private and public collections, including the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, and the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth. In 2000, a solo exhibition of his work was held at the Western Australian Museum, Perth.

Ngarra's estate is represented by Mossenson Galleries, Perth and Melbourne, where he held a number of highly regarded solo exhibitions during his career.

Further reading

Tapper, N, 'Remembering Ngarra', *Australian Aboriginal Art*, issue no. 1, March, 2008.

Shaw, K, *Mates: images and stories from the Kimberley*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2003.

Skerritt HF, 'A master of tradition and innovation', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 December 2008.

Sprague Q, 'Outside history: Mick Jawalji and Ngarra', *Art Monthly Australia*, issue #244, 2011.

Nyapanyapa Yunupingu
(Yolngu, Gumatj clan, born c. 1945)



Nyapanyapa Yunupingu
Untitled 2012
natural pigments on bark
158 x 51 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

Nyapanyapa Yunupingu's recent practice takes a strikingly divergent approach to that of many of her Yolngu contemporaries. Initially recognised as unique for drawing personal narratives and memories into her bark paintings and prints—a sphere usually reserved for ancestral narratives and clan related iconography—her approach has since taken a step towards what we might categorise as outright abstraction.

Although this development appears to echo the shift represented by *buwuyak* (invisibility, see notes on Djambawa Marawili), Yunupingu's loosely hatched works possess a key difference. The fields of her paintings are marked by an absence of the *minyiji* (sacred clan designs) that activate the work of artists like Djambawa Marawili and place their paintings within clearly defined networks of clan relations and ancestral responsibility.

An early group of Yunupingu's 'abstract' paintings were titled *Mayilimirriw*, a Yolngu Matha word that translates literally as 'meaningless'. These works set the tone for what has become the basis of her practice. In them, finely brushed line-work extends across each painted ground, gathering together in sections that collectively map each painting's temporal development. A shift in palette, perhaps from white to red or yellow, or the inclusion of a square or circle, creates haphazard compositions and suggests aspects of both the built and natural environment of her North-eastern Arnhem Land home.

In 2011 Yunupingu's series of fibre-tipped pen drawings on acetate led to the collectively realised digital animation work *Light painting*, which was included in *All our relations: the 18th Biennale of Sydney* (2012). Yunupingu is represented by Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, where she has held four solo exhibitions since 2008. In 2012 she was included in *Undisclosed: 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial* at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. She has been a winner (new media category) of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (2008).

Further reading

McMaster, G, 'Ntotemuk: commonalities among great differences', in Catherine de Zegher & Gerald McMaster (eds.), *All our relations: the 18th Biennale of Sydney*, Biennale of Sydney Ltd, Woolloomooloo, NSW, 2012.

Sprague, Q, 'White lines: the recent work of Nyapanyapa Yunupingu', *Discipline*, no. 3, pp. 59–68, 2013.

Cubillo, F, *Undisclosed: 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2012.

Rothwell, N, 'Smoke and flame', *The Weekend Australian*, 24 November 2012.

Rusty Peters
(Gija, born c. 1935)

Rusty Peters
Berrngalanginy
(*Eaglehawk Dreaming*) 2008
natural pigments and
acrylic binder on canvas
150 x 180 cm
Courtesy the artist
and Warmun Art Centre,
WA; and Short Street
Gallery, Broome, WA



Rusty Peters' densely composed paintings draw on the interwoven historical and mythological narratives of the East Kimberley landscape. The celebrated depth of his work is perhaps most apparent in *Waterbrain* (2002), the twelve metre-long multi-panel painting he developed following a series of long discussions with the arts advisor Tony Oliver. Concerned with 'birth and rebirth and the development of knowledge and understanding through life', *Waterbrain* explores the Gija concept that consciousness begins in water and that all human development stems from this.

As well as establishing a painting practice in his later years, Peters has been an important figure in cultural education throughout his life. He helped to establish the Warmun School in the 1970s and has since participated in cultural maintenance programs on a regular basis. In 2008 Peters established the *Gelengu Gelenguwuru New Media Project* alongside Phyllis Thomas, Ned Sevil and Anna Crane, a collective aimed at utilising new media in aid of cross-generational cultural transmission.

Peters' work is represented in a number of collections including the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. He has participated in a number of major exhibitions including *Blood on the spinifex* (2002) and *Country in mind: five contemporary Aboriginal artists* (2006), both at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne; *Parallel lives: Australian painting today*, Tarrawarra Biennial, Tarrawarra Museum of Art, Yarra Valley (2006); and *True stories*, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (2003).

Further reading

Lynn, V (ed.), *Parallel lives: Australian painting today*, Tarrawarra Museum of Art, Healesville, Vic., 2006

Starr, B (ed.), *Blood on the spinifex*, the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne, 2002.

Bosse, J (ed.), *Country in mind: five contemporary Aboriginal artists*, the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne, 2006.

Perkins, H (ed.), *One sun one moon: Aboriginal art in Australia*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2007.

Freda Warlapinni (Taracarijimo)
(Tiwi, Melville Island, c. 1928–2003)



Freda Warlapinni
Pwoja 2001
natural pigments with
acrylic binder on paper
56 x 76 cm
Courtesy Aboriginal and Pacific Art, Sydney

Freda Warlapinni was born in her traditional country, Mirrikawuyanga, on Melville Island and, after being taken away from her parents, was raised by Catholic missionaries at the Garden Point settlement. She commenced painting within a secular context when she was in her seventies and quickly became a leading figure among the older generation of Tiwi artists. Alongside her friend Kitty Kantilla, her distinctive work helped Tiwi art become recognised within the broader canon of Indigenous art in Australia. She also played a strong mentorship role at Jilamara Arts & Crafts Association in Milikapiti, initially guiding younger artists such as Timothy Cook and Pedro Wonaeamirri as they began to establish their own artistic practices.

Warlapinni's work is most often titled *Pwoja*, a Tiwi term that refers to the designs painted on the bodies of dancers for ceremonial performance. Although Tiwi art is marked by strikingly consistent formal parameters, individual inflection remains highly regarded. Warlapinni's often starkly applied networks of ochre lines, referred to in Tiwi as *mulypinyini* and painted on either white or black backgrounds, provide something of a signature in her work. Retaining the looseness of execution that many younger Tiwi artists associate with an older style of painting, she managed to express a surprising repertoire of movement within this reductive framework.

Championed throughout her short career by Gabriella Roy at Aboriginal and Pacific Art, Sydney, Warlapinni's work is held in numerous public and private collections in Australia and overseas, including the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

Further reading

Roy, G (ed.) *Taracarijimo (Freda Warlapinni)*, Aboriginal and Pacific Art, Sydney, 2004.

Isaacs, J, *Tiwi: Art, history, culture*, Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Vic.

An interview with guest curator Quentin Sprague and Potter curator Joanna Bosse

Joanna Bosse: You've described this exhibition as 'a particular kind of curatorial exercise'. The term 'exercise' indicates an open-endedness or speculative basis to your approach. Why is this important?

Quentin Sprague: I'm sure you'd agree that 'open-endedness' is a good quality to cultivate in an exhibition, even if curators might generally be expected to provide something didactic or definitive. However, having said that, surely at one level all exhibitions contain a sense of speculation, even if it is simply the kind of space they create for the audience to think between the objects or practices on display and the possible relationships these might represent.

Curatorial consideration

As an exhibition, *The world is not a foreign land* was driven by two overlapping frames that tracked its research and development. The first concerned artists whose work, when seen together, would reflect something specific about their local context (which we can expand in more detail later). The second, which is relevant to your question, was simply about bringing together a group of artists whose work, I felt, would highlight new ways of thinking in-between these local contexts—between the different regions or cultural groups or art histories within which each lives and works. In this sense it's about highlighting different relationships—whether formal, or material, or poetic—that will, I hope, activate areas of overlap, resonance, even contradiction. (I say 'I hope' because there's only so much you can picture without seeing the actual work in the space.)

The speculative aspect also emerges in relation to Indigenous contemporary art. Would you agree that although we've seen plenty of thematic group exhibitions occur within the broader frame of contemporary art that take a similar approach, they are not so common in relation to Indigenous contemporary art? So the question is—how might we make an exhibition like that with this art? What are the opportunities and/or potential stoppages?

It is interesting to consider the idea of the 'local context'. I agree that the majority of exhibitions of Australian Indigenous art are based on geographic and cultural affinities, which has been necessary in order to articulate the specificities of cultures against the idea of a 'pan Aboriginal art' and to develop knowledge of local art histories. Those exhibitions have given audiences the capacity to read and understand Indigenous contemporary art at a broad level. It strikes me that you're interested in Indigenous art at a personal level too, at the level of an artist's individual practice. So the paradigm of the group exhibition—bringing together artists across generations, geographies, media—is useful. Is the challenge with an exhibition like this, where, for artists, their cultural context is paramount, to not discount that in an effort to emphasise the personal?

Meanings and messages, cross-cultural and personal communication

As a mode of cross-cultural communication, Indigenous contemporary art remains very important. This function has become especially prominent since the 1990s, which is when the art world really began to grapple with a critical language of exhibition-making (and writing) that attempted to reflect Aboriginal ways of thinking and doing. It was no longer enough to simply continue to imperfectly frame the diversity of Aboriginal practices within the boundaries of the western art world. I would even go as far as saying that a number of survey exhibitions of specific regions, or artists, that we've seen since then—*Crossing country* (*Crossing country: The alchemy of Western Arnhem Land art*, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2004, curated by Hetti Perkins) for instance—are among the most significant exhibitions staged in recent decades in this country, and that we are yet to really unpack their implication in terms of the emergence of contemporary art as a distinct period style. So, I absolutely agree with you—a certain kind of exhibition-making has provided a key means of communication, in a sense enabling a level of cross-cultural understanding that had largely been foreclosed elsewhere.

Curatorial frames of reference

Yet, having said that, this exhibition is of another register. As I mention above, it's the space between different works that interests me—how to set differences into play, that kind of thing—rather than setting out to make the definitive statement about, say, Yolngu art, or Tiwi art. Other curators have done this type of exhibition, so it's the other sort, the exhibition that focuses in on the personal level, as you put it, that has driven the ideas here.

However, this doesn't mean encouraging audiences to disregard the specific cultural aspects of the work. These remain absolutely central—it's sort of impossible to remove this frame of reference, even if, for whatever reason, you wanted to. In fact, I'd think it would be difficult to stand in front of a work by Rusty Peters for instance, and not sense the feeling for place that activates his work and his thinking as an artist. His work, as with the work of the other artists in the exhibition, looks a certain way. Its local context is articulated through the fact of what it is—both materially and formally.

You're one of a small number of curators who have worked directly with Indigenous artists for extended periods in different art centre contexts. I can understand if your desire to create an exhibition environment that allows an artist's work to communicate across categories stems from this experience—managing an art centre means that every day you're in the studio, exposed to the complexities of the artistic process and acutely aware of individual agency.

The impact of research and experience on curatorial considerations

I've worked on the Tiwi Islands and in the East Kimberley, so I do have a general sense of the kind of social structures that underwrite the production of Indigenous contemporary art and I feel these are very important and often overlooked. I've also travelled to other localities as well—to other art centres—so I also recognise that although there are many similarities between places and the ways in which artists work, there are also divergences and these are equally revealing. One thing you learn quite quickly is that northern Australia is patterned with numerous intercultural art histories, all of which, although deeply contingent, have their own character. This is something that you can't help but recognise, in part because, in my experience, artists are usually quick to differentiate themselves from Aboriginal art in a general sense.

One thing you realise if you spend any amount of time in these spaces is that there are levels of presumption that guide the reception of Indigenous contemporary art in the broader art world. The tensions that this raises are, for me, what activates any successful exhibition of Indigenous art practice. I mean, what constitutes a 'painting' in a cross-cultural context? Is it the same thing that constitutes a painting in a modernist/western sense? What is a studio, and what do we expect artists to do there?

These sound like naïve questions, but I think they are very valuable. Part of what Aboriginal art urges us to do is re-evaluate the cultural bias of these kinds of categories and, in doing so, seek some sort of intercultural equivalent. During the research for this exhibition I travelled to the Tiwi Islands, North-eastern Arnhem Land and the East and West Kimberley, primarily to visit artists and the community art centres that manage their work. As a curator, I came to see this as the equivalent of a studio visit in a western context—where you visit an artist and discuss their new work in the space in which it is made. Ideally you gain a sense of materials, of the references that artists circulate through their workspaces, the kind of thinking that drives their practice, these sorts of things. For any curator, studio visits are essential—they get you closer to the site of production and, hopefully, illuminate the kind of procedural thinking that artists employ.

Community based art centres, artist practice and arts administration

When you apply that ideal to Indigenous contemporary art you learn just as much, but to do so you have to suspend expectations. The ideal of a 'studio' is fundamentally challenged. For instance, as an interloper, it can be very hard to establish effective and meaningful communication with an artist. You find yourself relying on third parties—the art coordinators and managers who are usually well-versed in operating between art worlds and whose perspectives can be very revealing—to guide your engagements and act, at one level, as translators. Studios are also often collective spaces, which causes you to shift your thinking again. I'm not sure what aspects of this process are evident in the final exhibition, but it has informed the thinking that has underwritten it.

Let's move to discussing the work of the artists in the exhibition and the relationships between them. For instance, the coupling of the authoritative ancestral bark painting by Yolngu statesman Djambawa Marawili with Nyapanyapa Yunupingu's densely painted barks that have been labelled, by comparison, as 'meaningless' (a truly radical concept within the Yolngu painting tradition).

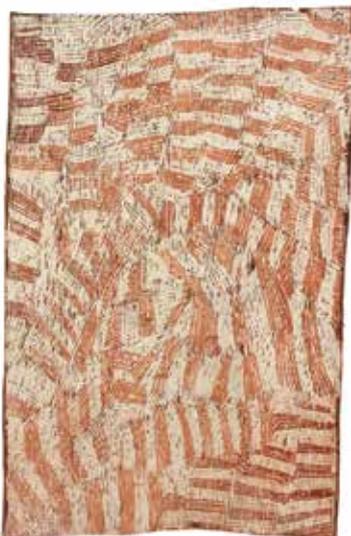
Relationships between the artworks, Djambawa Marawili and Nyapanyapa Yunupingu

Could you talk about your interest in the work of these two artists?

I was interested in trying to show that, even though both Marawili and Yunupingu practice within the same cultural context, their work is very different. It's a great example of how, by looking closely at a region, and at individual practices in particular, new kinds of relationships come to the fore.

Yunupingu's work in the exhibition reminds us to look first and not to always feel the need to 'know' what a circle or a mark means. In fact, in her case these aspects are often entirely self-reflexive. They simply create a space for the eye, or a kind of formal ballast from around which the painting extends quite organically. The titles of her work often make this point explicitly. For example, 'Mayillimiriw'—a title that has been used in the past for Yunupingu's 'White paintings'—is a Yolngu Matha word that translates, literally, as 'meaning-less'. It's actually quite a provocative idea in relation to broader understandings of Indigenous contemporary art. But this 'meaningless' is, of course, relative. Yunupingu's work has been celebrated by the art world. It looks beautiful, it echoes the reductive moments of late modernism, it reveals things about its context of production in a material sense.

It's a perfect example of the kind of relationship the exhibition sets up when you see her work in comparison to Marawili's. His work defines the opposite pole of current Yolngu art; a space where, from a Yolngu perspective, every mark is laden with textual meaning, quite literally 'readable' in terms of ancestral and clan connections. From this perspective, Yunupingu's work is seen as very minor indeed. I mean, in a context where individual status is contingent on the articulation of collective bonds and responsibilities, why would someone choose to paint nothing? It's the western context that creates the space for this to happen and be celebrated. Beyond format and material, Marawili's major painting *Buru*, (2007), which depicts the ancestral events associated with the birth of fire, actually has a greater resonance with Ngarra's or Rusty Peters' work. These artists also paint epic narrative—ancestral stories and their relation to the land.



Nyapanyapa Yunupingu
Pink and white 2011
natural pigments on bark
82 x 54 cm
Private collection,
Melbourne
© Courtesy the artist
and Buku Larrnggay
Mulka Centre, Yirrkala, NT



Djambawa Marawili
Buru 2007
natural pigments on bark
223 x 98 cm
Collection of John Churchin,
Sydney
© Courtesy the artist and
Buku Larrnggay Mulka
Centre, Yirrkala, NT

Relationships between the artworks

Similarly, Yunupingu's work also finds different points of traction within the exhibition; areas of overlap that pull otherwise disparate practices into alignment, however briefly or tenuously. The looseness of Freda Warlapinni's mark-making, or the roughness of Timothy Cook's paintings, are good examples.

There are of course similar interests and intentions that manifest in artists' practices across different Aboriginal cultures, however, the predilection to focus on cultural affinities often renders these unseeable. That's exactly why this show is different.

Aesthetics and subject matter in the artwork of Ngarra and Rusty Peters

I like that the exhibition sets up a relationship between Ngarra's small-scale and delicate fibre-tipped pen drawings and Rusty Peters' austere monumental ochre canvases. In terms of Andayin knowledge and law, Ngarra was generally revered by Gija as a great leader (as you know, the late Gija artist Timmy Timms once described him in equivalent terms to the Pope) and yet this cultural knowledge of immense significance is conveyed in relatively modest drawings. Ngarra's work speaks with the same ambition as Peters' does, and in this context we're able to reflect on that.

Yes, I like that relationship too—the idea that a similar gravitas can be embodied by both big and small works. I've always enjoyed that aspect of small works, they draw you in and can enclose you in quite an intimate space.

For that reason Ngarra's drawings form another key aspect of the exhibition. They were made over a decade ago and have never been shown before, simply because they are so unusual within the canon of Aboriginal art, and within his practice they were quite peripheral. By that I mean it was his paintings on paper and canvas that took precedent in his commercial exhibitions, which is where the focus was. Perhaps because of this contrast, the drawings embody something totally unique. They are far more propositional than so much work you see, simultaneously studies for larger paintings (at least in some instances), and works in their own right.

The works included in the exhibition are part of a much larger series, which were still in the care of Kevin Shaw, an anthropologist who was based in the West Kimberley and at whose house Ngarra would paint and draw, quite separately from the broader community. It's a fascinating archive that ranges from the kind of planar pictures of country that form the majority of the works in the exhibition, to observations of plants and animals and regional history.



Ngarra
Untitled 1998
 fibre-tipped pens on paper
 29.7 x 42 cm
 Collection of Ngarra Estate, courtesy
 Mossenson Galleries, Perth

Presentation techniques within the exhibition

I wanted to maintain a sense of this 'archive' in terms of the works' displayed in the exhibition, not to isolate them on the wall but to try and communicate something of their nature as sketches. Having them occupy the space in a different manner to much of the other work—displayed in purpose-built vitrines—is an attempt to shift the viewers' experience of them, and to emphasise their difference as material objects.

From their small enclosed spaces to the expansive canvases of Peters is a stretch, but I think you are right: there's a real sense of affinity between the two, whether or not it's a similar approach to depicting landscape or a sense of ambition, as you put it.

Meanings and messages of the artworks

I'd like to discuss another of the unexpected relationships that emerge as a consequence of the exhibition. You've touched on Nyapanyapa Yunupingu's work and its lack of specific Yolngu content or iconography. Seeing her work in relation to the reductive ochre paintings by Timothy Cook, makes me wonder whether those lines and marks are also 'empty' of cultural meaning. In Cook's paintings about the Kulama ceremony, he uses one repeated iconic form, the circle (and dot), to symbolise a whole ceremonial cycle. In the context of Tiwi art, they are reductive in the extreme. While Yunupingu's and Cook's works are culturally and materially unrelated, seeing them in the same environment allows a reflection on mark-making and what is being embodied by a simple form, or stroke.

Yes, that's what I hope viewers will begin to think about—that 'open' relationship between form and intent that bridges otherwise distinct traditions of art making.

Cook's paintings, like you say, are firmly embedded within a reference to a particular ceremony, not so much to its ongoing performance but to its status as an enduring symbol of Tiwi culture. Anyone who is familiar with his work will know that his paintings have become increasingly marked by the repetition of certain iconography associated with this subject. This is particularly apparent in the sequence of six large works on paper that are included in the exhibition, where essentially the same set of motifs are repeated, with minor variation, from one to the next.



As you say, these works explicitly reference the Kulama ceremony, which might be best understood as the life-affirming corollary to the other major Tiwi ceremony, the Pukamani, which concerns death and the afterlife. But in Cook's paintings this isn't a simple translation between subject and form; like Yunupingu's work they've always struck me as very individual interpretations. The most revealing aspect of Cook's work from this perspective is his use of the Catholic cruciform—not only as a reference to the mission history on the Tiwi Islands, but also, as an unavoidable expression of cultural hybridity—the contemporary inheritance of recent Tiwi history. Cook usually presents this charged symbol against a backdrop of stars and frames it within concentric circles that might refer to, among other things, the full moon, the ceremonial ground of the Kulama, circles of spectators and participants.

But at some stage, each of these aspects, including the cruciform, might simply become formal devices—ways to 'solve' a painting. So, I think you're right in suggesting that there's a point of overlap here with Yunupingu's paintings.

Staying with the work of Timothy Cook, the inclusion of Freda Warlapinni's paintings (and, in the iteration of the exhibition at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the two 1954 Tiwi barks* from the collection of the South Australian Museum) is a classic articulation of influence. You obviously want to convey a generational influence between these artists?

At an early stage of the exhibition's development, I was more concerned with trying to articulate specific examples of artistic dialogue, whether between contemporaries or generations. The ideas that subsequently emerged moved beyond this, as we have just been discussing, but the work from the Tiwi Islands still reflects the notion of artistic dialogue in an intergenerational sense. As with the rest of the exhibition, it's the interplay of similarities and divergences that I hope make this selection revealing and allow these relationships to be tested in a one-to-one fashion.

*The Tiwi barks mentioned here are not part of the tour.

Timothy Cook
Kulama 2013
natural pigments on paper
106 x 76 cm (sheet)
© Courtesy the artist and Jilamara Arts & Crafts Association, Melville Island, NT and Seva Frangos Art, Perth

Tiwi bark paintings from the Mountford expedition of 1954

***Please note that these artworks are not part of the tour**

The Tiwi bark paintings are part of a group collected by Charles Mountford during a National Geographic research expedition he led to the Tiwi Islands in 1954, and now held at the South Australian Museum in Adelaide. At the art centre at Milikapiti on Melville Island where Cook practices, there's a binder of largely black and white reproductions of the works Mountford collected which artists will leaf through from time to time. It's interesting to consider how this kind of re-engagement might activate a set of relationships between an object and its copy, and the mediated ways in which culture might pass from the hands of one generation to another via various intermediary routes. It's productive to remember that this is never as simple as the transmission of some kind of immutable 'tradition'—things are in flux; they change.

Cook's paintings in particular have often been understood as re-tooling elements of the Mountford barks to a new end, so it seemed like an opportunity to actually see them in the same environment. How similar are they? What basis have they provided for current practice like Cook's? Likewise with Warlapinni's work. She's an artist who is widely understood to have played an important mentoring role at the art centre with artists of Cook's generation, so the exhibition gestures towards this relationship as well.

But I also felt the inclusion of the two older barks would make a broader point. As with the majority of Indigenous contemporary art, all the work in the exhibition can be drawn back to similar historical points of exchange where the necessity of cross-cultural communication premised the creation of new kinds of material objects. There's something very contemporary about this. In fact, if we understand all the work here as outcomes of dynamic histories of exchange, rather than reiterations of traditional practice, we get somewhat towards establishing its character as contemporary art. This is the kind of thinking that the work on display here activates.

Teacher notes

In this resource, suggested tasks and reflective questions support students' research to address key knowledge and skills articulated in VCE Studio Arts Area of Study 3 in both Units 1 and 3 and VCE Art Area of Study 1 in Units 1 to 3.

Suggested approaches are provided for teachers to inform the development of tasks for Unit 4 in both Art – Discussing and debating art and Studio Arts – Art industry contexts.

Further classroom discussions and tasks to be led by teachers may also provide students with the opportunity to reflect upon and evaluate their own art making explorations undertaken in Unit 1 and their progress through the individual design process of Unit 3 in Studio Arts. Similarly students of Art can draw upon discussions to support the development of reflective annotation of their art practices utilising the Analytical Frameworks appropriate to Units 1 and 4.

Teachers can use the reflection questions to support classroom discussions to assist students practice in the use of appropriate art language and terminology applicable to the relevant studies. Collaborative classroom discussions can offer a rich resource for students to draw upon when annotating their own working practice. This practice supports students to develop concepts and assist their responses to reflective tasks.

Looking at the work

Before viewing the exhibition teachers can prepare students through preliminary discussions that focus on how different audiences may look at art.



Use the following questions to promote classroom discussions:

From a personal perspective:

- What is your cultural lens? Do you identify with a specific culture or a mixture of cultures? What do you know about these cultures? How have you come to know information: through broad general research, through family histories, anecdotes and stories or through direct first-hand experience?
- What do you understand as contemporary culture?
- What do you know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture?
- Can you differentiate what is historical information and what is contemporary knowledge? What is general information and what is specific?
- What do you value when looking at art: concepts and ideas, contemporary discourse, the craft of application, the complexity or simplicity of technique, and/or visual aesthetics?

Propose 'mindfulness' as a way to read artworks

Texts and commentaries about art influence our understanding of the art we look at. Make time to look at an artwork prior to examining other external information, such as didactic panels, catalogues or essays and instead extract information from bodily sensations and feelings evoked in the presence of art works.

- How often do you look at an artwork without thinking about what you know, allowing the work to communicate an affect upon your emotional sensibility only?

When viewing the exhibition



Select a painting to view that you are drawn to, stand quietly and examine it, note down the sensations you experience.

Look at the visual aesthetics of the work; explore the visual elements including scale and size, colour, lines and shapes, the relationship of different marks to other marks and symbols within the artwork.

Make notes on how the visual elements affect your experience of the artwork.

Consider:

How the colours, shapes and lines contribute to your feelings about the work?

Use descriptive language to support your note-taking. You may describe visual elements as, earthy colours, high contrast colours, rough and loose marks, broad expressive brushstrokes, highly patterned, recognisable figurative symbols, dense repetitive line.

You may consider:

How the placement of the work in relation to other works affects your viewing.

Back in the classroom



Research and locate information about specific artwork/s in the interview with guest curator Quentin Sprague and review the artist's biography.

Make notes regarding the affirmation of your viewing experience of the artwork in the exhibition and add any new information that contributes toward your understanding of the work.

Look at the website of the appropriate art centre where the artist makes their work, propose how the artwork has been made. Reflect on the following questions:

What materials and techniques have been employed?

Where was the work made? Propose how 'local context' may have influenced elements of the artist's work?

Research the artist's country and cultural knowledge typical to this geographic area and consider:

How has the artist drawn upon local cultural knowledge?

What aspects of the work are unique to the artist?

Summarise how the artist has reflected personal elements in their work?

How has your research expanded your understanding of the artwork?

Art - Formal, Personal and Cultural Frameworks, Units 1-3 and Studio Arts Units 1-3

Art and personal meaning—stimulus for student reflection and art making

What relationship does your artwork have to your life and experience?

How can your own artwork be linked to your personal ideas, thinking and beliefs?

What does land and country mean to you?

Do you have any sacred spiritual beliefs? Reflect on the value and purpose of expressing this content in your art making.

Investigate imagery and symbols representative of your personal and/or cultural identity, how could these visual codes be utilised to communicate personal beliefs and values in your own art making?

Art - Personal Framework, Studio Arts Units 1 and 3

Broader cultural context

...As a mode of cross-cultural communication, Indigenous contemporary art remains very important...

It is broadly understood that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are connected to country. It is commonly understood that the land is not only their home but also the source of spiritual connection to earth and all living things. People are identified with each other through a complex system of kinship that includes membership of clans who are connected to country of specific geographic regions. Each clan has a unique language, cultural practices and laws. The system of kinship and belonging requires the respect of specific social and cultural obligations of the clan.

Cultural practices including visual arts, respect and represent aspects of cultural obligations. In the remote communities of the Yolngu, Tiwi, Andayin and Gija people, visual artists often have a highly valued social status and many hold important political and educational leadership roles in their respective communities. Their artworks are often seen as a powerful communication for the transference of unique and sacred knowledge about cultural traditions and practices, yet within the exhibition *The world is not a foreign land*, unique approaches to art-making with an emphasis on a personal aesthetic is also evidenced.

Traditionally, many individual artists' paintings include symbols or imagery representative of the artist's connection to clan and country. To parallel this understanding in other contemporary cultures is difficult and is dependent upon the primary cultural understandings of groups and individuals. Some non-Indigenous Australians may identify themselves with a variety of historical or more recently discovered cultural family lineages. They may have access to visual representations that include European family crests, coats of arms, cultural festivals and celebrations or other symbols that represent cultural traditions and family stories to support knowledge of cultural identity.

Individual life experiences offer rich and diverse interpretations of cultural knowledge for individual artists both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

In this exhibition, selected artworks demonstrate both the dissemination of traditional cultural knowledge in conjunction with unique dynamic processes and the personal ideas of individual contemporary artists.

Task in the classroom



Review the map (on page 3) within this resource to identify the location of artists represented in *The world is not a foreign land*.

Within a geographical context, identify the ancestry that you connect with.

You may need to employ a world map to acknowledge your cultural background/s.

Find examples of cultural iconography relevant to your identity?

Can these symbols be utilised in your art-making? How may they assist in communicating your ideas or those aims you have identified in your exploration proposal?

Generating art making ideas; Art 1-3 and Studio Arts 1-3



Ngarra
Untitled 1998
fibre-tipped pens on paper
29.7 x 42 cm
Collection of Ngarra Estate,
courtesy Mossenson
Galleries, Perth

Arts practice

Contemporary Australian Aboriginal art offers insight into the richness and diversity of Indigenous cultures. Traditionally art presents an opportunity to share sacred knowledge amongst Aboriginal people and communicate with others something about the complexities of culture, sacred practice, knowledge and beliefs. The emergence of what is generally understood as the beginnings of contemporary Aboriginal painting began in the early 1970s in the central desert in Papunya, although art-making practices for the purpose of visual communication has always been embedded in Aboriginal cultural practices. The first Aboriginal artists collective, Papunya Tula, established in 1972, was an inspiration for many other Indigenous collectives throughout remote regions of Australia.

Since this time, a growing contemporary art sector has evolved in metropolitan areas with expanded Aboriginal populations. Currently many Aboriginal communities continue to live in the vicinity of their traditional lands some distance from large settlements. The network of community owned and operated art centres throughout remote areas provide a critical role in supporting arts practice and production. Arts centres are the mediation between artists living in these isolated regions and the audiences and buying markets for their art.

The artists represented in *The world is not a foreign land* work in remote art centres within their respective communities.

Yolngu artists

Djambawa Marawili and Nyapanyapa Yunupingu
Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala, Northern Territory
<http://www.yirrkala.com/theartcentre>

Andayan and Gija artists

Ngarra and Rusty Peters
Warmun Art Centre, Western Australia
<http://warmunart.com.au/>

Tiwi artists

Timothy Cook and Freda Warlapinni
Jilamara Arts & Crafts Association, Milikapiti, Melville Island, Northern Territory
<http://www.site.jilamara.com/>

Further information about the history and development of Aboriginal arts collectives can be found at <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/papunya-tula-art> and specifically through the websites of the arts centres that support the work of the artists in this exhibition.

Aboriginal contemporary art in remote communities

Seeking to pinpoint exactly when Aboriginal art became contemporary art might now seem redundant. After all, the arrival of Geoffrey Bardon in the tiny community of Papunya in 1971 is generally established as ground zero; it is this moment that provides a kind of *tabula rasa* for everything that follows...

The introduced medium of acrylic paint revolutionised existing creative practice and the rest, as they say, is history. By the 1980s surveys of contemporary art in Australia were hard-pressed not to include Aboriginal art. Leading this charge were the increasingly large and brightly coloured paintings of the desert artists. Seen in these terms bark painting was slower off the mark. Although significant examples of the medium were included in the 3rd Biennale of Sydney in 1979, it was acrylic painting that initially held the art world's attention. In fact it seems only recently that bark painting—through the practice of artists like John Mawurndjul and Djambawa Marawili, whose work features in this exhibition, has achieved some kind of adhesive pulse with the broader field of contemporary art. Indeed, if we look at the advent of Western Desert painting in Papunya we can see that there were two key features that retrospectively mark it as contemporary art, and neither of these relate specifically to its medium. First was the fact it was a culturally hybrid practice that engaged new forms to communicate between previously distinct worlds. Second, it possessed an insistent political intent, affirming a divergent cultural identity within Australia's national consciousness and thus manifesting Aboriginal ways of ordering the world. Measured by these criteria, the bark painters of Arnhem Land were making contemporary art long before Bardon arrived in Papunya. Far from being traditional in an ethnographic sense, theirs is a hybrid medium. Like the earliest paintings of Western Desert art, bark painting was also formed between cultures; initially commissioned in portable form by visiting anthropologists, it soon became a significant part of engagements between missionaries and local populations.

In recent years contemporary art has increasingly been defined through the simultaneous presence of various differences; cultural, material or otherwise. In this arena any medium can theoretically be made into contemporary art, and often is. It is also true that any medium can be made into art that is not particularly contemporary in any meaningful sense. It follows that bark painting is relevant here less because of what it is made out of and more because of what it does. Its function—like other forms of indigenous contemporary art—is to speak between worlds, and in doing so communicate something of the concurrent differences that define the contemporary condition.

Actions like the Bark Petition made this apparent long before the art world had a means to realise it. It is through this lens that we might begin to understand bark painting in truly contemporary terms.

Quentin Sprague, 'Why bark painting is contemporary art', *Guide to Indigenous Art Centres*, Australian Art Collector, Oct. 2013

Indigenous arts centre alliance
www.indigenousartcentres.com.au

Interpreting art

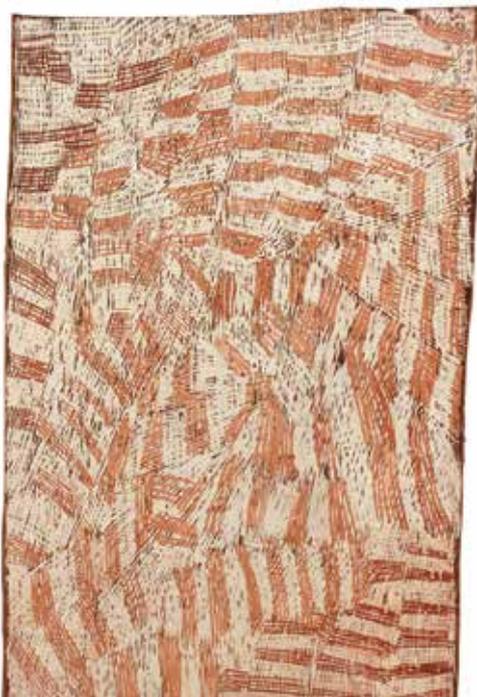
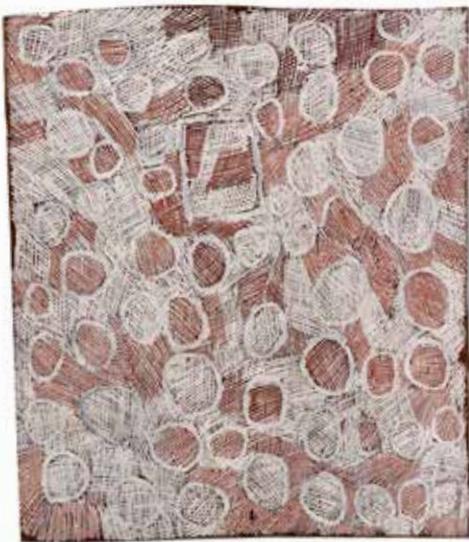
Yolngu artists

Yirrkala is on the east coast of the Gove peninsula in North-east Arnhem Land and is home to the Yolngu artists featured in the exhibition *The world is not a foreign land*. There are 13 clan groups within the Yirrkala community. Together these Yolngu clans form a social system of religious organisation that differs from neighbouring systems. The Yolngu Matha are divided into two moieties, Yirritja and Dhuwa, and individuals inherit membership of a group and its moiety from his or her father.

Many people live between Yirrkala and surrounding homelands. In 1963, the land owners of the Yirrkala community sent bark petitions to the Australian Government to protest against the Prime Minister's announcement that part of their homelands would be sold for bauxite mining. The painted designs on the barks illustrated Yolngu law and identified the traditional relations to the land.

Interpreting art ideas, materials and techniques

Task in the gallery



Yunupingu's work in the exhibition reminds us to look first and not to always feel the need to 'know' what a circle or a mark means.

Locate one of Nyapanyapa Yunupingu's artworks and view it purely as a visual aesthetic object.

Look at the work for as long as you can to evoke an emotional response.

Make notes in response to the following questions:

What feelings are evoked through looking at this work?

What is the surface texture of the work?

What materials have been used to make this work and how do you interpret them to make meaning?

How does the interplay of colours contribute toward your reading of the work?

How do the lines and shapes contribute to your feelings?

Can you identify and describe a specific style evident in Yunupingu's other paintings and artworks in the exhibition?

Consider descriptive language such as:

Highly patterned, dense cross hatching, geometric, abstraction of shapes, dense layers, tonal contrasts, haphazard composition.

Studio Arts- Unit 1 and 3 Art- Formal Framework

An early group of Yunupingu's 'abstract' paintings were titled 'Mayilimirriw', a Yolngu Matha word that translates literally as 'meaningless'. These works set the tone for what has become the basis of her practice. In them, finely brushed line work extends across each painted ground, gathering together in sections that collectively map each painting's temporal development. A shift in palette, perhaps from white to red or yellow, or the inclusion of a square or circle, creates haphazard compositions and suggests aspects of both the built and natural environment of her North-eastern Arnhem Land home.

Nyapanyapa Yunupingu
Mangutji #6 with square 2010
natural pigments on bark
93 x 80 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

Nyapanyapa Yunupingu
Pink and white 2011
natural pigments on bark
82 x 54 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
© Courtesy the artist and Buku Larrnggay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala, NT

Freda Warlapinni was born in her traditional country, Mirrikawuyanga, on Melville Island and, after being taken away from her parents, was raised by Catholic missionaries at the Garden Point settlement. She commenced painting within a secular context when she was in her seventies and quickly became a leading figure among the older generation of Tiwi artists. Alongside her friend Kitty Kantilla, her distinctive work helped Tiwi art become recognised within the broader canon of Indigenous art in Australia.

Warlapinni's work is most often titled *Pwoja*, a Tiwi term that refers to the designs painted on the bodies of dancers for ceremonial performance. Although Tiwi art is marked by strikingly consistent formal parameters, individual inflection remains highly regarded. Warlapinni's often starkly applied networks of ochre lines, referred to in Tiwi as *mulypinyini* and painted on either white or black backgrounds, provide something of a signature in her work. Retaining the looseness of execution that many younger Tiwi artists associate with an older style of painting, she managed to express a surprising repertoire of movement within this reductive framework.

Task in the gallery



Freda Warlapinni's work presents a freedom of creative expression beyond traditional applications and her paintings are highly popular amongst broad contemporary audiences.

- How has Freda Warlapinni employed line, colour, shape and movement to create aesthetic qualities and a distinctive style in her work?
- With consideration of the visual aesthetic can you propose why Warlapinni's work may have proven so popular outside of Tiwi communities?

Personal Framework – Art and Studio Arts Unit 3



- How may have Freda Warlapinni's background and early life impacted the development of her painting style?

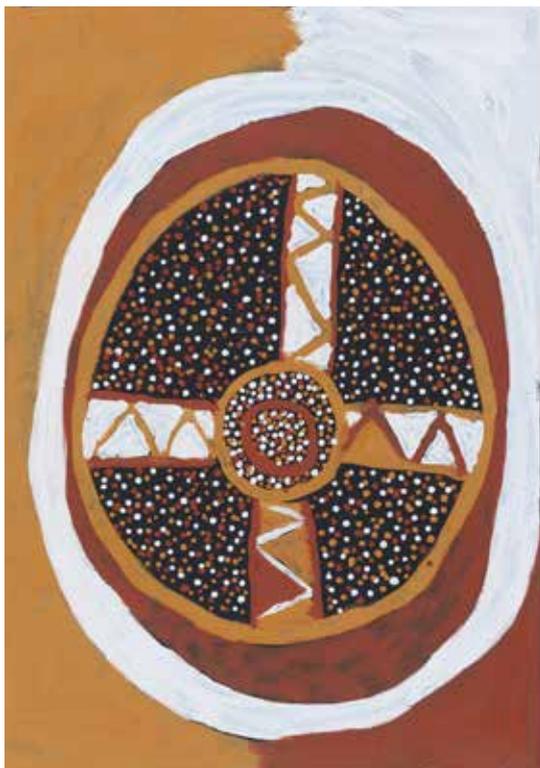
Personal Framework – Art and Studio Unit 2



Freda Warlapinni
Pwoja 2001
 natural pigments with
 acrylic binder on paper
 56 x 76 cm
 Courtesy Aboriginal and
 Pacific Art, Sydney

Timothy Cook began painting at Jilamara Arts & Crafts Association in Milikapiti on Melville Island in the late 1990s.

Cook's work is widely celebrated for drawing a classical style of Tiwi painting into dialogue with his own individual take on Tiwi tradition and history. His paintings picture a hybrid space in which iconographic representations of Tiwi ceremony—in particular the once-annual ceremony known as the Kulama—are often positioned in relation to the Catholic cruciform. Emblematic of the influence of the missions that held sway on the islands for much of the twentieth century, Cook's explicit appropriation of such a charged colonial signifier (effectively subsumed within his paintings by Tiwi systems of belief) presents evidence of a unique intercultural heritage.



Timothy Cook
Kulama 2013
natural pigments on paper
106 x 76 cm (sheet)
Courtesy the artist and Jilamara Arts
& Crafts Association, Melville Island,
NT and Seva Frangos Art, Perth

Interpretation of art ideas and use of materials and techniques

Task in the gallery



Consider what you know about Tiwi culture and Timothy Cook's religious background.

Examine his paintings and make notes to explore further back in the classroom.

Consider using descriptive language that references: Use of symbols and motifs (Catholic cruciform), expression of cultural hybridity, simple form, broad and loose brushstroke, blocks of colour.

Task in the classroom



With reference to the curatorial interview and the artist biography within this resource reflect on notes taken during your gallery visit and develop an annotated visual report that acknowledges an analysis of Timothy Cook's paintings, consider:

- What aspects of Cook's painting contain symbolic meaning?
- How has he used materials and techniques to develop a personal aesthetic?
- How has Cook interpreted subject matter, influences, cultural context and communication of his ideas and meanings in the Kulama paintings?

Formal Framework – Art and Studio Arts Unit 1-3

Examining relationships between the works

Djambawa Marawili is a senior artist producing both sculpture and bark paintings depicting important and sacred content. He began painting in the early 1980s and in addition to his art practice, he is a highly respected cultural and political leader. In 2010 he was awarded an Order of Australia (AM) for his services to the arts. In 2013 he was appointed to the Federal Government's Indigenous Advisory Council.

Marawili's arts practice is integral to his role as a ceremonial leader of the Madarrpa clan, his art becomes a direct communication used to support the spiritual well-being of his own and other related clans.

While to Western eyes, *buwayak*—marked by the dense patterning of *minyji* (sacred clan designs)—appears to be a move towards abstraction, the opposite is in fact true. The shimmering fields that Marawili often employs to overlay and obscure distinct figurative elements are embedded with textual meaning; they can, quite literally, be 'read' by Yolngu eyes. This inversion points towards the formal and conceptual elasticity that activates much Indigenous contemporary art and, in particular, is a hallmark of contemporary Yolngu practice.

Marawili's paintings generally depict the ancestral story associated with Yathikpa, the bay into which the burning ancestral being B̄aru plunged and transformed from his human form into that of a crocodile. The complex designs of Marawili's paintings often depict associated aspects of this event in elemental form: smoke, fire fresh and salt water comingle and, as they do, render the diamond-patterned skin of the crocodile in a constant state of becoming.

Nyapanyapa Yunupingu's recent practice takes a strikingly divergent approach to that of many of her Yolngu contemporaries. Initially recognised as unique for drawing personal narratives and memories into her bark paintings and prints—a sphere usually reserved for ancestral narratives and clan related iconography—her approach has since taken a step towards what we might categorise as outright abstraction.



Top to bottom

Djambawa Marawili
*Madarrpa/Dhudl-Djapu
larrakitj* 2007 (detail)
natural pigments on wood
307 x 16 x 16 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Buku Larrnggay Mulka
Centre, Yirrkala, NT; and
Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne

Nyapanyapa Yunupingu
Pink and white circle 2011
natural pigments on bark
109 x 60 cm
Courtesy the artist and
Buku Larrnggay Mulka
Centre, Yirrkala, NT; and
Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery,
Sydney

Task in the gallery



Curator Quentin Sprague presents a contrast in his selection of the work of two Yolngu artists,

...both Marawili and Yunupingu practice within the same cultural context and their work is very different...

Locate the work of both Marawili and Yunupingu and make notes to support a classroom discussion that compares and contrasts similarities and differences observed.

Reflect on the following questions to support note-taking;

How do the social, political, cultural or religious contexts of the artwork contribute to meaning?

How do you think the gender of the artists impacts their work?

How does your cultural background influence the interpretation of the work?

Art – Cultural Framework and Studio Arts Unit 1-2

Back in the classroom



Examine the biographies of both artists and develop a profile of the Yolngu artists, Nyapanyapa Yunupingu and Djambawa Marawili, to support a classroom discussion.

Share exhibition observations in small groups and use the following questions to promote discussion.

What are the distinctive aesthetic differences between the work of Marawili and Yunupingu?

Complete a visual analysis of selected artworks from each artist, identify the technical similarities and differences found in their work.

How may the personal histories and current lifestyles of both artists influence their art-making?

With consideration of the curator's intention, to present aspects of both cultural and personal identity, propose how this objective is supported through the inclusion of the work of Marawili and Yunupingu in *The world is not a foreign land*?

Task

Review the discussion and consider which artist's work has the most appeal to you. Reflect on your own perspective and consider how your life experience and values impact your interest.

Produce an annotated visual report that presents a comparison of both artists work that includes your own personal perspective.

Consider the following;

- visual analysis, techniques and materials, style (formal framework)
- the relationship of the artwork to the artist's life and experiences
- the influence of your experiences when interpreting the work (personal framework) and propose how each artist's choice of subject matter, materials and techniques may challenge artistic and social traditions (contemporary framework)

Art – Analytical Frameworks and Studio Arts Units 1-2 and 4

Gija artists

Gija Country extends throughout the East Kimberley region of Western Australia.

The land is highly significant to Aboriginal culture, for Gija people it holds sacred burial sites, ceremonial grounds, hunting places, history and Ngarranggarni. There is no, one Dreaming that is accepted by all Aboriginal people as the 'creation story'. This concept is identified in different areas and for Gija people it is known as 'Ngarranggarni'.

The landforms are all part of the Ngarranggarni and hold utmost importance. As custodians of the land, Gija people have certain obligations to care for the resting places of their spiritual ancestors and to ensure the land continues to be plentiful. Land is not something they own, but something that is a part of them and over which they have traditional rights. It is the basis of their spirituality. As custodians of the Ngarranggarni stories, Gija people have obligations to conduct ceremonies.

(extract Warmun Art centre <http://warmunart.com.au/home/>)

Rusty Peters' densely composed paintings draw on the interwoven historical and mythological narratives of the East Kimberley landscape.

Ngarra would paint and draw quite separately from the broader community. It's a fascinating archive that ranges from the kind of planar pictures of country that form the majority of the works in the exhibition, to observations of plants and animals and regional history.

...the exhibition sets up a relationship between Ngarra's small-scale and delicate fibre-tipped pen drawings and Rusty Peters' austere monumental ochre canvases. In terms of Andayin knowledge and law, Ngarra was generally revered by Gija as a great leader (as you know, the late Gija artist Timmy Timms once described him in equivalent terms to the Pope) and yet this cultural knowledge of immense significance is conveyed in relatively modest drawing.



...Ngarra's drawings form another key aspect of the exhibition. They were made over a decade ago and have never been shown before, simply because they are so unusual within the canon of Aboriginal art.



Rusty Peters
Smoke Dreaming 2008
natural pigments and
acrylic binder on canvas
150 x 180 cm
Works courtesy the artist
and Warmun Art Centre,
WA; and Short Street
Gallery, Broome, WA

From top

Ngarra
Lalgari and Yungan waiting for the wet season 2008
synthetic polymer paint
on paper
50 x 70 cm (sheet)
Courtesy Ngarra Estate and Mossenson Galleries,
Perth

Ngarra
Untitled 1998
fibre-tipped pens on paper
29.7 x 42 cm
Collection of Ngarra Estate,
courtesy Mossenson Galleries, Perth

Task in the gallery



Locate the work of Ngarra and Rusty Peters, spend some time examining the work and make notes about how scale and technique communicate to you.

Reflect on the words of the curator Quentin Sprague, *...Ngarra's work speaks with the same ambition as Peters' does, and in this context we're able to reflect on that.*

Consider what making pictures means to Ngarra and Peters:

Can you identify the ambition that both artists project in their work? Considering how important the land is to Aboriginal artists, make notes on the subject matter and propose the artists' intention in creating the work.

How has the work been displayed? Observe and make notes on how the work has been presented and how it may affect the meaning of the work.

Task in the classroom



Review the artist profiles of Ngarra and Peters

Share and review your exhibition observations and review notes in small classroom groups.

Organise a collective response to deliver to the class acknowledging the following:

Artist intentions

Comparison of each artist's work with reference to:
Visual analysis, technique, materials, symbols, style

The physical placement of the artworks in the exhibition and how this has affected your reading of the work.

Art – Formal, Cultural Frameworks and Studio Arts Unit 1-4

Professional practice

Quentin Sprague lived and worked in Aboriginal communities on the Tiwi Islands and in the East Kimberley, he also travelled to many other localities and visited art centres where the artists in this exhibition made their work.

In preparing for this exhibition Sprague aimed to show the local context of groups of artists from specific areas, highlighting the different ways artists have worked.



Back in the classroom

Review the websites of the art centres

Yolngu Artists

Djambawa Marawili and Napayapa Yunipingu
Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, Yirrkala, NT
<http://www.yirrkala.com/theartcentre>

Andayan and Gija Artists

Ngarra and Rusty Peters
Warmun Art Centre, WA
<http://warmunart.com.au/>

Tiwi Artists

Timothy Cook and Freda Warlapinni
Jilamara Arts & Crafts Association, Milikapiti, Melville
Island, NT. <http://www.site.jilamara.com/>

Respond to the following questions with reference to selected individual artists within the exhibition *The world is not a foreign land*;

- *How do artists work?*
- *What specific materials do they use to make their work?*
- *What are the techniques employed?*
- *What are their influences?*
- *What are some of the specific stories of the artists' country that they have permission to paint about?*
- *Are there any legal or ethical obligations artists need to adhere to?*

Prepare an annotated essay using the notes you have made, include references to:

Propose the ways artworks may reflect the artist's interpretation of subject matter, what are their influences and the cultural contexts of their work?

Analyse and discuss the ways artists employ materials, techniques and processes.

How are aesthetic qualities and styles developed?

Research and discuss legal obligations or ethical considerations involved in the use of the work of other artists when making new works.

Research the practices of artists working in metropolitan studios, how is their practice similar or different to those of Aboriginal artists working in remote art centres?

Studio Arts Unit 4 and Art Unit 2

Personal reflection

Where do you make your art?

Do you share your ideas, techniques, and materials with others? How do you do this?

How does shared practices affect your own art-making?

How important is your art-making to your everyday living?

What do you hope to communicate through your artwork and how can this communication be of value to others who view it?

Art and Studio Arts reflective annotation Units 1-4

Presentation of works

Task in the gallery



The key responsibility of an independent curator is to collaborate with artists to source appropriate artworks to realise their exhibition concept. Curator Quentin Sprague has a personal working history with contemporary Aboriginal artists. He travelled to remote communities and liaised with artists and art centre staff to source the work for *The world is not a foreign land*.

... it's the space between different works that interests me—how to set differences into play, that kind of thing—rather than setting out to make the definitive statement about, say, Yolngu art, or Tiwi art. Other curators have done this type of exhibition, so it's the other sort, the exhibition that focuses in on the personal level, as you put it, that has driven the ideas here.

In your experience viewing the exhibition has Sprague achieved his goal to present the individual styles and approaches of the artists?

Consider how curator, Quentin Sprague has presented Ngarra's drawings in a specific way.

...I wanted to maintain a sense of this 'archive' in terms of the works' display in the exhibition, not to isolate them on the wall but to try and communicate something of their nature as sketches. Having them occupy the space in a different manner to much of the other work—displayed in purpose-built vitrines—is an attempt to shift the viewers' experience of them, and to emphasise their difference as material objects.

Examine how Ngarra's artworks have been displayed, make notes as to how the artworks have been presented to demonstrate the artist's unique style.

How have other artworks been presented?

How has Sprague positioned the artwork throughout the exhibition to showcase the different relationships between the works? Consider relationships of scale, positioning, space between the artworks and in relation to how the viewer moves through the exhibition space.

Back in the classroom



Select two artists work to discuss how their work has been presented to highlight a specific relationship between these works.

Studio Arts Unit 4

Preparation for discussing and debating art

This resource supports senior art teacher knowledge of current issues and concerns regarding the context and future of contemporary Aboriginal Art.

Reflective questions dispersed throughout this resource offer opportunity for teacher navigation and consideration for inclusion in classroom discussions with students.

Content can be both confronting and challenging as it reflects the ongoing and current issues of our social and political culture. This content has not yet become part of a general contemporary discourse within Australia and therefore issues remain concealed and unresolved.

It is important for teachers to support discussions through offering a lens of awareness for students about the authentic value of sources of information.

Students can be encouraged to share their ideas and observations with mindfulness. Although valid, their contributions may be general or specific, culturally subjective, inclusive or informed.

The issues discussed may present a rich resource for a highly challenging task for those students who have the capacity to engage in reviewing current authentic and contentious 'art issues'

...One thing you realise if you spend any amount of time in these spaces is that there are levels of presumption that guide the reception of Indigenous contemporary art in the broader art world. The tensions that this raises are, for me, what activates any successful exhibition of Indigenous art practice. I mean, what constitutes a 'painting' in a cross-cultural context? Is it the same thing that constitutes a painting in a modernist/ western sense? What is a studio, and what do we expect artists to do there?

Art issues

To prepare for discussing and debating art with students, teachers may draw upon the student study of *The world is not a foreign land* and extend an inquiry to include further research. This may include internet research of selected topics, review of other artists and an investigation of the curatorial cultural constructs of other exhibitions.

In the classroom



Review a selection of contemporary Indigenous artworks, including artists work from *The world is not a foreign land* and other artist's work such as Vernon Ah Kee, Richard Bell, Bindy Cole and Maree Clarke.

What is important about contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art? Discussion may include points such as;

- Understanding Australia's history.
- Appreciating Indigenous values; respecting sacred diversity, valuing inclusive practices, promoting cultural respect.
- To support and sustain Indigenous art practices for spiritual and economic preservation.

What are the current issues for Contemporary Aboriginal Art?

Students could complete internet research along the following themes;

- Authenticity of remote artists work.
- The conflict of western curatorial constructs and Indigenous culture.
- The impact of the tourist industry and 'culture commodification' on contemporary Indigenous art.

To support students broader understanding, have them review 'authenticity' in relation to other artists' collective work or contemporary artists who rely heavily on the aesthetics of appropriated content.

Ask the question, *is it ethical to appropriate culture in art to make new artworks with no attribution or understanding of the sources of content?*

When designing a specific task for students to address discussion and debate of current art issues, it is important for them to articulate the issue before undertaking a writing task.

Issues may be defined as:

- The conflict between western curatorial constructs and Indigenous perspectives in the presentation of contemporary Indigenous art.

Supporting discussions may include:

A study of western curatorial constructs. Is there value and scope for inclusion of authentic cultural considerations in a contemporary exhibition?

What are the issues for the inclusion of cultural perspectives in relation to the authenticity and integrity of presenting and displaying artworks.

The importance of consideration for the needs and interests of audiences.

- What is 'culture commodification' and what is the impact on Indigenous art?

Supporting discussions may include:

What is the impact and validity of appropriation in art? Further questions for inquiry may include, what are the ethical considerations in appropriation? How does 'tokenism' impact authenticity in art?

- How do shared practices impact the issue of authenticity and ownership of artworks?

Extension research may take into consideration how other non Indigenous contemporary artists work collaboratively and how authenticity and ownership may or may not be resolved.

In their responses students can draw on the outcomes of classroom discussions, critical essays included in this resource and their findings from internet research.