

magnificent 16-foot-long dreaming, "Five Stories at Arnapipe," by Norbett Lynch Kngwerraye. The price was higher than those in the outback, but Kahn paid Sotheby's \$10,000 for the painting, which had been consigned for private sale.

Outside Australia, Kahn has added 21 more paintings, acquired from dealers in New York and London. One of his most expensive paintings, "Wannayara" by Mick Gill Tjakamarra, was bought at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery in London last spring for \$13,000. In all, Kahn says, his 34 works have cost a total of \$160,000.

But Kahn has long since run out of room to display the paintings in his Miami office—especially since many are more than 12 feet long. So some of his canvases are in storage. "They're not made for Florida glass houses," says Kahn.

While dreamings are new to the commercial art world, they have been an important part of the Aborigine culture for as long as 30,000 years. For millennia, rocks and bark have served as canvases.

Today, as then, the paintings, while abstract, depict ancestral stories, conveyed in artistic code. Squiggles, lines and circles can be symbols for sacred sites, water, snakes or whatever is central to a story or theme. Dreamings are perhaps best described by

Tjakamarra's "Wannayara"
Kahn's cost: \$13,000.



Tjapanangka's "Wedgetail Eagle Dreaming"

travel writer Bruce Chatwin as "a spaghetti of *Iliads* and *Odysseys*."

But the dreamings have deep meaning for the painters, and link them with their ancestral past and with their surroundings. They are by no means simple, decorative doodlings. But the stories they tell remain obscure to most non-Aborigines. Most Aborigines living in the central desert speak little English. Kahn, for example, knows little of the stories told in his paintings. For him, the art speaks for itself.

Dreamings have been created using modern paints only since 1971, before that the media were natural pigments. That was the year a government art teacher, Geoff Bardon, gave acrylic paints to people on the Papunya settlement (north of Ayers Rock) to paint murals on the schoolhouse. The adult men covered the walls with extraordinary dreamings.

Bardon, quick to see the income potential, provided canvases and more paints. And tourists responded.

Dreamings are now the biggest means of income for central desert Aborigines. Aboriginal cooperatives and government art advisers broker the dreamings to galleries in coastal cities and abroad.

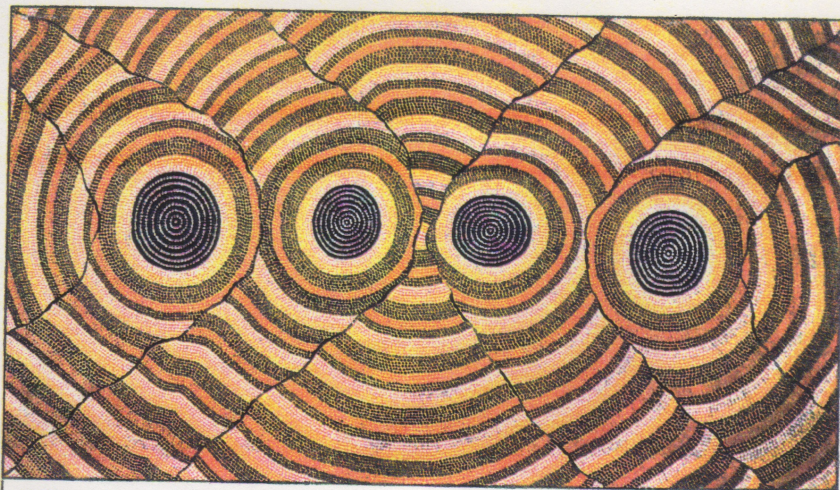
Major art dealers have not yet been won over, however. Some find the art kitschy or too ethnic. But museums are more responsive.

Collector Kahn is convinced the art will have broad appeal, once sufficiently exposed. He points to the success of the Asia Society's show and to Harvard University's recent exhibition of Holmes à Court's collection. To let

the public see more dreamings (no major U.S. museum owns any), Kahn has budgeted \$128,000 over the next three years to exhibit his collection, which has already been booked at the University of Miami's Lowe Museum (Dec. 12, 1991 to Jan. 26, 1992) and at a new gallery in Salzburg, Austria in July 1991.

Kahn insists he has no intention of ever selling the Aboriginal works that he is lending for exhibit but instead plans to leave them to his children. "I want to be part of the discovery," says Kahn, "and to cause something to happen."

For more on Aboriginal art, the best source is the book *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*, prepared for the Asia Society exhibit in 1988. It's available for \$65 from the Asia Society Bookstore, 725 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10021.



William Sandy Pitjantjatjara's "Bush Tucker Dreaming"