

ART BEYOND Philip Vann

The London art world today is increasingly enriched by the showing of art of primordial vision and exploratory power from around the world, whether Islamic, Inuit, Australian Aboriginal, African or from many varied cultures. 'Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East' at the British Museum exhibits works by over 75 artists, ranging from 1960s painters who incorporated Arabic calligraphy into scintillating compositions, to contemporary artists who use Arabic (sometimes Hebrew) script in richly transfiguring, provocative ways. Sadly, after 20 years of exhibiting contemporary artists from the Arab diaspora, London's **Luft Gallery** has just had to close but it may not be the last word. If sponsors can be found, this much needed centre will be revived.

Since she opened in 1988, **Rebecca Hossack** has pioneeringly shown works by Australian aboriginal artists, as well as great artists from other cultures – such as Mathias Kaurage from Papua New Guinea and Qaana from Ethiopia. She makes illuminating juxtapositions – as when she exhibited work by Kalahari Bushmen and art from the central Australian desert. 'The art could not have been more different. And yet it is interesting how this joyful reverence for the natural world is expressed so differently in these very similar physical cultures.' She says that 'I have to go further and further to find original artists. Last January I went to work with the Spinifex people – who had no European contact and retained a

strong culture. In unbelievable heat, I got to know them, and the artists came to England for the show. It was wonderful that the BM bought two paintings.'

Over the years, some highly diverse aboriginal artistic communities and some brilliant individual painters have come to light – notably Robert Campbell Junior, Emily Kngwarreye and Ginger Riley Munduwalawala. The beautifully ambitious linocuts of incredible intricacy by Denis Nona, an ex-fisherman from the Torres Strait Islands, are on through August – each work, says Hossack, 'like a Homeric tale' – while an exhibition of vibrant paintings by Sid Domic, a professional rugby player of aboriginal descent who lives in England, opens from 18 August. A fine range of Australian aboriginal paintings is being shown outside London, coincidentally, at **Zimmer Stewart** in Arundel, Sussex, 5 to 13 August).

Hossack says she has talked to Ken Mantel of the **Narwhal Inuit Art Gallery** (re-opening in September) about collaborating on an exhibition of Inuit and Australian aboriginal art: 'There's so many similarities in the beliefs and cultures.' Ken and his wife Tija developed their love for Inuit art – primarily sculpture, but also prints and drawings – while living in Canada. In 1983, they set up their gallery in Chiswick. At its core is a permanent collection, which tours British public venues and includes classical, formative carvings from the 50/60s, which consummately evoke a timeless Inuit culture.



The role of the **October Gallery** in introducing non-western (and radical Western art) to London over the last 26 years has been inestimable. Closed during this summer, it reopens in October after major refurbishment. Artistic director Elisabeth Lalouschek points out the 'interesting correspondences' in some of its shows, juxtaposing, say, 'William Burroughs and artists from the Amazon, China and Africa'. Director Chili Hawes speaks of artists going beyond 'the original form of their cultural traditions and mythology – though beautiful and gracious – to create a new form, a new way.' This is clear in works they have shown by the Ghanaian El Anatsui (now in the BM's African Galleries), whose sculptures transform metallic detritus into mystical cloths of gold and Yoshida Kenji, whose application of silver and gold leaf to panels, exquisitely updates Japanese tradition in glowing meditative abstracts ■

Top: El Anatsui 'Earth Cloth' 2003
October Gallery

Left: Dennis Nona 'Dhagal Zug' 2006
Rebecca Hossack

Centre: Sheojuk Etidloole 'Longboat' 1997
Narwhal Inuit Gallery

Below: Wijdan 'Calligraphic abstraction'
Jordan 1993. British Museum

