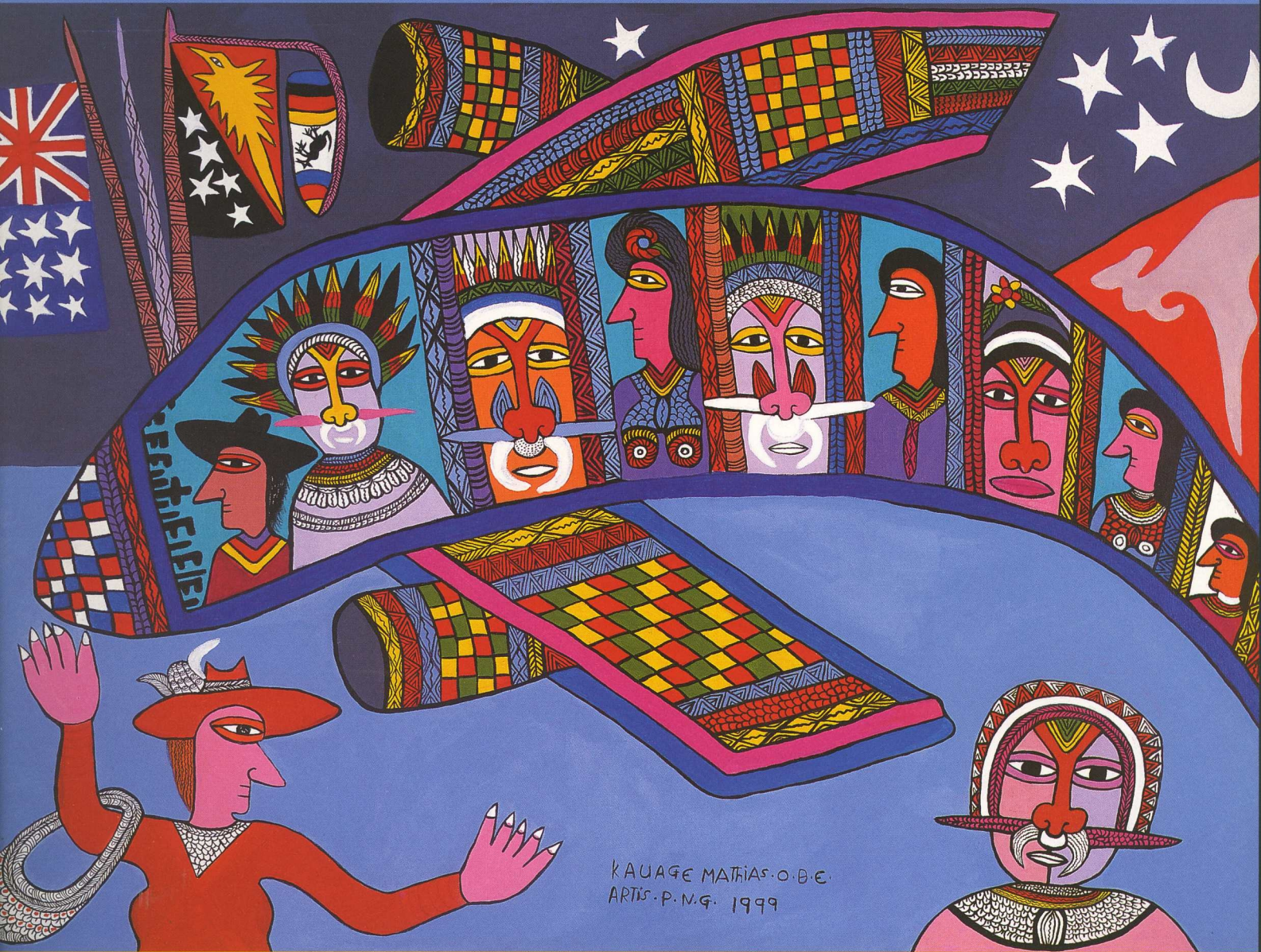


Singsing

THE ART OF MATHIAS KAUAGE



Saturday 23 August – Sunday 12 October 2003

Mathias Kauage, Papua New Guinea's leading artist, died in May 2003. This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of the artist, as a tribute to his life and work. Arranged with the Rebecca Hossack Gallery, London.

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Singsing

THE ART OF MATHIAS KAUAGE

Mathias Kauage, OBE, was born in 1944 or 1945 in Mingu No. 1 village, near Gembogl, in the area of Papua New Guinea known as Chimbuland or Simbu in the isolated Western Highlands. He died in May 2003.

Kauage attended school for two months in 1950 or 1951. He ran away because the teacher beat him. But, he was impressed by the teacher's drawings of helicopters, lorries and aeroplanes. 'I really thought that teacher could draw, and even now I can still remember the things he drew.' He got work as a labourer on coffee and rubber plantations.

Right: 'Woman with Wallaby', 1970
Pen and ink drawing
70 x 50.5 cm



Far right: 'The Queen in a light tunnel at the opening of the Glasgow Museum of Contemporary Art', 1999
Acrylic on canvas
150 x 130 cm



In 1967, he moved to Port Moresby, and worked as a cleaner at the Administrative College. The German artist Ulli Beier wrote that 'Life in Port Moresby fascinated and frustrated him. He was fascinated by the mixture of people and cultures and by the cars, motorbikes, aeroplanes and helicopters. But he was deeply frustrated, because he had to do a boring job, for a minimum wage and suffer the insults and humiliations from a racist labour overseer.'

It was in Port Moresby in 1969 that Kauage first went to an art exhibition. The experience changed his life. As Ulli Beier wrote, 'He was so impressed by this strange and puzzling event that he decided to make drawings himself...Through a friend he sent these drawings to Georgina (Beier, an artist)...when Georgina finally met Kauage, she realised that

these pitiful scribbles did not reflect the personality of the man. Kauage was... 'rather like a volcano about to erupt'. It took many weeks before Kauage revealed any originality in his drawings at all...Once he had made his first real breakthrough (with drawings of insects) his life totally changed.'

Mathias Kauage had, again quoting Ulli Beier, a 'uniquely original vision of the world'. He was part of the 'Naïve Group' of artists, a title that reflects their style, not their perceptions of the world.

Despite global recognition as Papua New Guinea's most successful and original artist, Kauage found it hard to survive as an artist. As Ulli Beier wrote, 'The political instability, the poverty and the violence of Port Moresby and above all the lack of recognition in his own country are making it hard for Kauage to find the motivation to work. Only when he gets the chance to...spend a few months overseas his old energy, his exuberance and his sense of humour return. When he visited us in Sydney in 1998/99, he worked *all night, every night* and produced some of his greatest paintings ever.'