

# GALLERIES

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## **bark paintings** *and pukamani* *poles*

**Pukamani** poles are Aboriginal burial poles in which the bones of the dead are buried. Two hundred of them from Central Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory were exhibited at the Sydney Biennale in 1988 and later acquired by the Australian National Gallery in Canberra. They symbolise the two hundred years of European settlement in Australia and the Aborigines who have since died.

On the pink floor of the **Rebecca Hossack Gallery** (until 3rd August), poles from Bathurst Island have been grouped in a similar way to form a memorial. Each pole is made from a hollowed out log or tree trunk and decorated with ochres. The designs show the journey of the soul from the place of death to its

final resting place.

Bark paintings represent the 'traditional' side of Aboriginal art. However, Aborigines only began painting on bark in the 19th century. Most of these works were either destroyed or left to the elements, and production on a larger scale only dates from the 1960s when they were mostly created for the tourist industry. It is only more recently that they have moved into art galleries. These barks, collected by Rebecca Hossack on several trips to Yirrkala, a mission on the north east tip of Arnhem Land.

A particularly good example is a work by Narritjin which illustrates the story of a burial by dividing up the surface of the bark into five distinct areas – the

Bark Painting  
Ochre on Tree Bark  
Rebecca Hossack Gallery



lozenge shapes represent three graves. Three women hold dilly bags on their heads while a man plays his clap sticks. The pattern between the two other graves, for such it appears at first glance, most likely represents the rivers and land this tribe belongs to. Painted with yellow ochre and black this bark also displays very fine cross-hatching made with a brush of human hair, often a feature of barks. There may be more than one interpretation of a painting but only a certain one may be given away to an outsider,