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Aboriginal Art from Down Under

May 14, 2015 Susan Heywood No Comments

Aboriginal Art from the start in three London exhibitions.

The BP Exhibition Indigenous Australia: Enduring Civilisation at the British Museum



Artistic practice in Aboriginal Australia goes back a staggering 60,000 years and is the earliest recorded art on the planet. This ambitious exhibition explores the history of Australia from the perspective of the indigenous people, whose complex spiritual beliefs and practices are rooted in the primacy of *land*, as laid down by ancestral beings whose supernatural insights interpreted the birth of creation, the "Dreamtime", for posterity. Hundreds of tribal groups, each with its own language, creed and traditions had custody of a sacred legacy, which they expressed through the art and culture of their daily lives for millennia.

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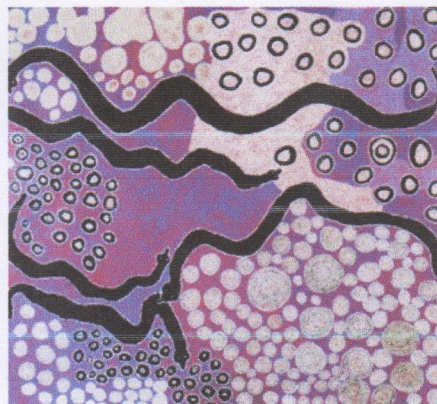
As has been said, "The history of Australia did not start in 1788." The fateful arrival of Captain Cook in 1770 marked the start of a process of disruption and appropriation which is still under debate today. Beginning with early examples of art and artefacts, the BM exhibition charts the persistence of the ideas which they embody, despite the impact of "civilisation" and throughout the harrowing struggle of these people to gain recognition of their rights and the restitution of their land.



For Aboriginal people the right to their ancestral land is inalienable, and as long as they live removed from it, "we are literally removed from ourselves." The show stresses the central importance of art as a rich, living culture and as a measure of belief. The vibrancy and diversity of artists and craftsmen, working with rudimentary materials - bark, leaves, shells, textiles, rock - is evident in the striking displays of objects, such as

masks, shields, hunting weapons and baskets, and from the dramatic, wall hung paintings. The liberal use of black, with earthy and strong primary colours is bold and schematic.

Geometric lines and circles convey important belief codes, in compositions which express powerful narratives and feature sacred creatures connected to fertility and funerary rites, such as Magpie Geese (the subject of a stunning 1988 bark painting by George Milpurru), the Rainbow Serpent and the Lightning Snake along with emblematic kangaroos, dingos and boomerangs. These panels are often the work of a team of artists, as in the lyrically coloured "Pukara" (see image to the right) and the monumental depiction of the potent ancestral figure Tjuntamurtu or "Short Legs", a motif from which has been incorporated into the Australian passport.



The initial impression may be of a naïve artistic tradition whose repertoire of repeated animal and plant motifs, blobs, curves and dots is deceptively decorative, but the residual power of these images is as

the outward expression of deeply held beliefs about a timeless landscape, its flora and fauna, and the origins and place of man within it. This exhibition is an excellent introduction to two other shows now running.

The BP Exhibition Indigenous Australia: Enduring Civilisation is on at the British Museum until the 2nd August 2015. Click [here](#) for full details.

Tracks: Land and Landscape in Aboriginal Art at Rebecca Hossack



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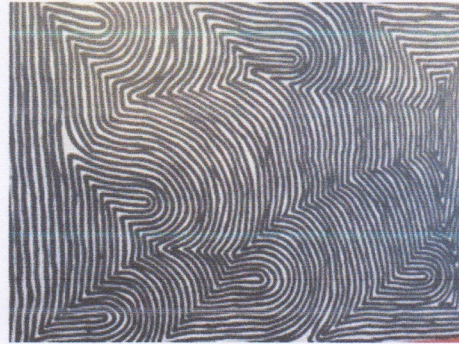
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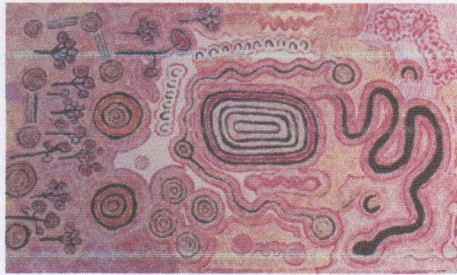
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25 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

Gallerist Rebecca Hossack's long standing mission to give recognition and status to the indigenous art of Australia drives a show of paintings, sculptures and carvings at her Conway Street gallery. These "Tracks" turn on the defining connection between man and the land which is deeply embedded in the Aboriginal psyche. A selection of high quality works from desert



communities such as Papunya, Spinifex, Ngukurr and Lajamanu reveals the originality and inventiveness of individual artists in their handling of intricate patterns and earth colours which trace the forms of nature: the delicate veining of leaves, the whorled, rough trunks and bark of trees, and the tracks of wild animals, birds and reptiles amid the forbidding, flat spaces of the immense landscape.



Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri is a pre-eminent modern artist whose trademark dot technique is deployed to powerful effect in "Emu Dreaming" (1996). Bright primary colours - red, yellow and blue - are anchored in fluid, organic borders of black and white in two versions of "Kulimarra" by Ned Grant (see middle image in

main featured image at top of post) and Carlene West respectively. Elcho Island bird sculptures and delicately incised totem like columns complement the potency of paintings and photographs spread around two floors of the Conway Street gallery.

Rebecca Hossack is personally committed to the fate of the Burrup Peninsula in Western Australia, where outstanding natural beauty is under threat. A series of dramatic photographs by Askin Morrison highlights the dichotomous relationship between nature and the demands of a mineral and resource hungry economy.

Tracks at Rebecca Hossack continues until August 1st 2015.

For full details, click [here](#).

