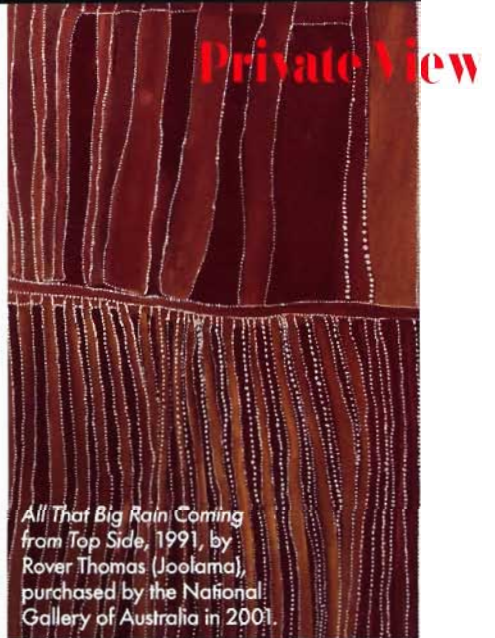


THANK CHRIST I'M NOT ABORIGINAL!!!



The Peckin' Order, 2007, by Richard Bell.



Private View

All That Big Rain Coming from Top Side, 1991, by Rover Thomas (Joolama), purchased by the National Gallery of Australia in 2001.

Desert Storm

In the 1970s teacher Geoffrey Bardon introduced Western art materials to the desert community of Papunya Tula. Works from this “school” were shown and sold by many Australian galleries in the late 1980s and are presently available from an artist-run gallery in Alice Springs. These are not mere daubs. A painting by Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri sold at auction for over Au\$2 million (£1.3 million) in 2007. This is an art market, people, not a souvenir shop.

DIFFERENT STROKES

“Aboriginal art is as diverse as Western art,” according to Jennifer Guerrini-Maraldi. It ranges from rock paintings to video and all the styles in between: see, for example, works by Gordon Bennett (Basquiat?), Sally Gabori (Matisse’s Cut-Outs meet Hirst’s Spin paintings?), Emily Kngwarreye (Pollock?), Freddie Timms (Miró?), Kathleen Kngale (Monet?), or Jonathan Jones (Dan Flavin?). Ian McLean entitled his 2011 book *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art*. Now you know.



Mirdidingkinga Juwarnda, 2011, by Sally, Amanda and Elsie Gabori.

Bluffer's

GUIDE to
ABORIGINAL ART
BY ISABELLA MACPHERSON



Abstraction (Citizen) 2010 by Gordon Bennett

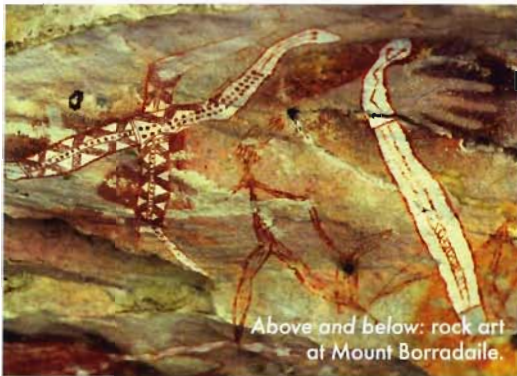
REBEL WITH A CAUSE

We pat ourselves on the back for our art prizes, (Turner anyone?), and controversial artists (“our Tracey”), but one can’t help feeling we could learn a thing or two from artists in Australia (who would not define themselves with the term “Aboriginal”). When Richard Bell won the prestigious Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 2003, his work stated, “Aboriginal Art. It’s a White Thing,” and he turned up at the ceremony in a T-shirt reading: “White Girls Can’t Hump”. In 2011 Bell openly judged the Sir John Sulman prize by tossing a coin, and, asked if he expected to judge any more prizes, Bell said: “I’ve got my darts ready.”

Out There

Critic Waldemar Januszczak lamented there were no British artists at the art festival dOCUMENTA 2012—nevertheless an Aboriginal artist made the grade (Gordon Bennett). This is nothing new. Aboriginal art adorned the Australian dollar bill in 1966 (David Malangi), Parliament House’s entrance in 1988 (Michael Nelson Jagamara) and represented Australia at the Venice Biennale in 1991 (Rover Thomas).

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE ARTIST/MILANI GALLERY (BELL, BENNETT), © DACS 2012, COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS, MORNINGTON ISLAND ART/ALCANTON GALLERY (GABORI); © THE ARTIST'S ESTATE/WARMUN ART CENTRE (THOMAS)



Above and below: rock art at Mount Borradaile.



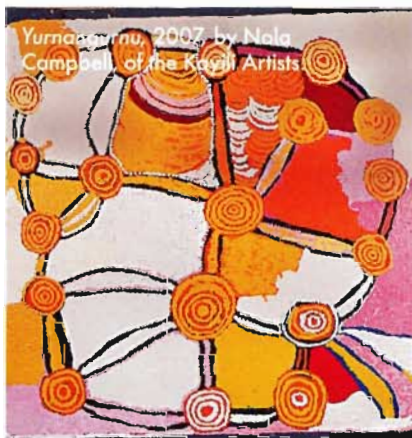
ROCK OF AGES

Aboriginal art derives from one of the world's longest continuously evolving art traditions. Cave paintings such as those at Mount Borradaile, in Arnhem Land (above), are thought to date back 40,000 years. These territorial markers, recording daily life and voicing social views, can find a modern parallel in today's street artists. Who knew Banksy was so derivative? "This rock art out-rocks Andy Goldsworthy or Richard Long," as Rebecca Hossack puts it.

Going, Going...

In November 2011 Bonhams Australia held the first single-artist Aboriginal art sale (Paddy Bedford). It attracted international collectors and generated Au\$1.29 million (£835,000). This May and June artefacts went on sale at Sotheby's and Christie's, in Paris and New York, and Bonhams Australia, selling many times over the asking price. Ernst Beyeler's shield sold for US\$116,500 against an estimate of \$3,000-\$5,000. If it's good enough for Art Basel's co-founder...

Bluffer's GUIDE TO ABORIGINAL ART



Yurnnamunu, 2007, by Nola Campbell of the Kayili Artists



A shield once owned by Ernst Beyeler.



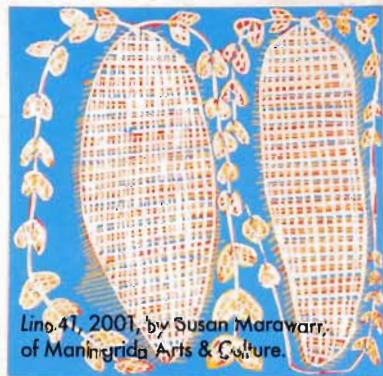
Untitled, 2010, by Jeffrey Zimran Tjangala of Papunya Tula.

CENTRE PIECES

Art centres—artists' collectives owned and operated by the Aboriginal people—can be found all over Australia. There's the most remote, the Kayili Artists on the edge of the Gibson Desert; one of the oldest, Ernabella Arts; and Maningrida Arts & Culture in Arnhem Land, which holds over 20 shows a year. From Papunya Tula to Warmun, from Mornington Island Arts & Crafts to Short St Gallery, Broome, the range is staggering. To navigate, use McCulloch's *Encyclopedia of Australian Art*. Or go walkabout.

Word Painting

There are more than 200 different Aboriginal language groups, each with distinctive and iconographic traditions. We could compare them to the patch of dialects and cultures that makes up Europe. Aboriginal people have no written language. Put simplistically, their Bible, Jane Austen, rites of passage and maps locating water were, and are, recorded in ochre and acrylic. Dot or spin paintings with purpose.

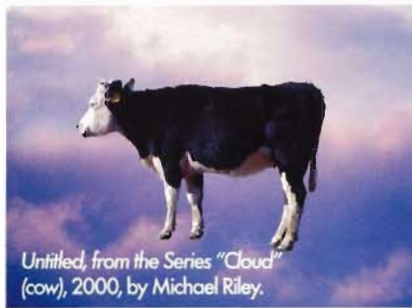


Lino 47, 2001, by Susan Marawarr, of Maningrida Arts & Culture

PHOTOGRAPHS: THE ARTIST'S ESTATE AND GALLERY GABRIELLE PIZZI, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA (RILEY); COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND MILANI GALLERY (AH KEE); © DACS 2012, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST'S ESTATE AND GALLERY GABRIELLE PIZZI, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA (THOMPSON); COURTESY OF THE ARTIST'S ESTATE AND GALLERY GABRIELLE PIZZI, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA (MILAYBUMA)



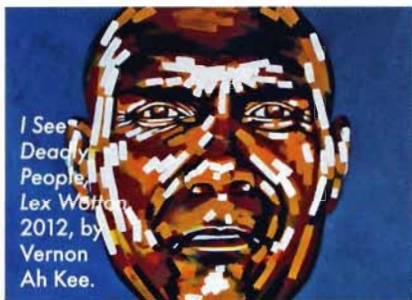
Untitled, 2010, by Matthew West Tjupurrula of Papunya Tula.



Untitled, from the Series "Cloud" (cow), 2000, by Michael Riley.



Untitled—Blossom, 2007, by Christian Thompson.



I See Deadly People, Lex Walton 2012, by Vernon Ah Kee.

DREAM WORLD

Generations of cultural stories, lessons and markers, were and are passed down through songlines. These tell of the Dreaming or Dreamtime, ancestral creation stories that explain the beginning of life, people and different species of animals. The *Rainbow Serpent*, *Seven Sisters* and *Honey Ant* are examples of powerful narratives that inform a rich cultural heritage.

Nothing like seeing it in the flesh and here's where in Europe...
 AAMU, Utrecht. aamu.nl/museum-information
 Arts d'Australie—Stéphane Jacob, Paris. artsdaustralie.com
 JGM Art, London. jgmart.co.uk
 Musée du Quai Branly, Paris. quaiبرانلي.fr
 Rebecca Hossack Art Gallery, London. r-h-g.co.uk

AND FOR THE MEGA-TRIP TO AUSTRALIA...

The 2nd National Indigenous Art Triennial: unDisclosed will be touring Australia in 2013, opening at the Cairns Regional Gallery, Cairns, on February 22, before travelling to the Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia, Adelaide, on May 3, and then the Western Plains Cultural Centre, Dubbo, on August 3. And if you can't wait until then you can always explore the collections at the National Gallery of Australia and the Museum of Contemporary Art, as well as regional galleries such as the Art Gallery of New South Wales and Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art. nga.gov.au; mca.com.au; artgallery.nsw.gov.au; qagoma.qld.gov.au

Cheat Sheet

Australia has a land mass 32 times greater than that of the UK. For the bluffer who hasn't got the time or inclination to cover all that ground in search of the best aboriginal art, the following list will spare you some shoe leather. In Brisbane, the Milani Gallery shows Vernon Ah Kee and Richard Bell; the Fireworks Gallery sells work by the renowned Papunya Tula artists, including Rover Thomas. In Victoria, Salt Contemporary works with the McCulloch family; and Alcaston shows Sally Gabori. Sydney Gallery Barry Keldoulis represents Gordon Bennett and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery works with rising star Destiny Deacon. Meanwhile, in Melbourne, Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi exhibits Michael Riley and one-to-watch Christian Thompson. Now who's the bluffer?
milanigallery.com.au; roslyn9.com.au; salt-art.com.au; fireworksgallery.com.au; gabriellepizzi.com.au; gbk.com.au



Ngalyod the Rainbow Serpent, 1992, by David Milaybuma.

IN A SENTENCE...

The late Australian-born art critic Robert Hughes described contemporary Aboriginal art as "the greatest art movement of our times".