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The Grammar of Visual Design through the Prism of Australian Aboriginal Paintings

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Abstract: Representation is a process in which the makers of signs, seek to make a representation of some object or entity, whether physical or semiotic, and their interest in the object, at the point of making the representation, is a complexone, arising out of the cultural, social and psychological history of the sign-maker,and focused by the specific context in which the sign is produced. While the Australian Aborigines did not have a written language, they considered that symbolic patterns were significant. Human societies use a variety of modes of representation. Each mode has inherently a different representational potential, a different potential for meaning-making; each mode has a specific social valuation in particular social contexts. But the different modes of representation are not heldseparately, as autonomous domainsin the brain, or as autonomous communicational resources in a culture, nor are theydeployed discretely, either in representation or in communication; rather, they intermeshand interact at all times to result in a cognitive activity. Each mode of representationhas a continuously evolving history, in which its semantic reach can contract or expandor move into different areas as a result of the uses to which it is put. In my paper, I have shown how the eternal and continuous idea of ***Dreamtime*** have been reflected by the Australian Aborigines through their paintings, designs, sand paintings, dot paintings, rock carvings and totemic sketches. Thus visual designand language in Australian Aboriginal culture like all semiotic modes — fulfills twomajor functions. Every semiotic fulfills both an *ideational* function, a function ofrepresenting *the world around and inside us* and an *interpersonal* function, a functionof enacting social interactions as social relations.

Keywords: Dreamtime, paintings, semiotic, visual design, culture.

Extensions of the term 'grammar' often suggest the idea of rules. In books with titles like **The Grammar of Television Production** one learns, for instance, about the rules of continuity; knowing these rules as that what sets the 'professional' apart from the 'amateur'. What I have sought to express is a little different. In our view, most accounts of visual semiotics have concentrated on what linguists would call 'lexis' rather than 'grammar', on the 'vocabulary' – for instance, on the 'denotative' and 'connotative', the 'iconographical' and 'iconological' significance of the individual people, places and things (including abstract 'things') depicted in images. In this chapter, I will concentrate on the way in which these depicted people, places and things are combined into a meaningful whole. Just as grammars of language describe how words combine in clauses, sentences and texts, so also my visual 'grammar' will describe the way in which depicted people, places and things combine in visual 'statements' of greater or lesser complexity and extension.

The *'grammar of visual design'* plays a vital role in the production of meanings, by contemporary image-makers. The study of visual 'image' has emphasized *'denotative', 'connotative'* and *'symbolic'* meanings. The focus has either been on the formal, aesthetic description of images, sometimes on the basis of the psychology of perception, or sometimes on more pragmatic descriptions, for instance the way the composition can be used to attract the viewer's attention to one thing rather than another. The grammar of visual design goes beyond formal rules of correctness. It becomes a means of representing patterns of experience. 'It enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them'.[1]

Certain things can be expressed both visually and verbally. But even when something can be 'said' both visually and verbally, the way in which it will be said isdifferent. For instance, what is expressed in language through the choice between different word classes and semantic structures is, in visual communication, expressed through the choice between different uses of colour or different compositional structures.

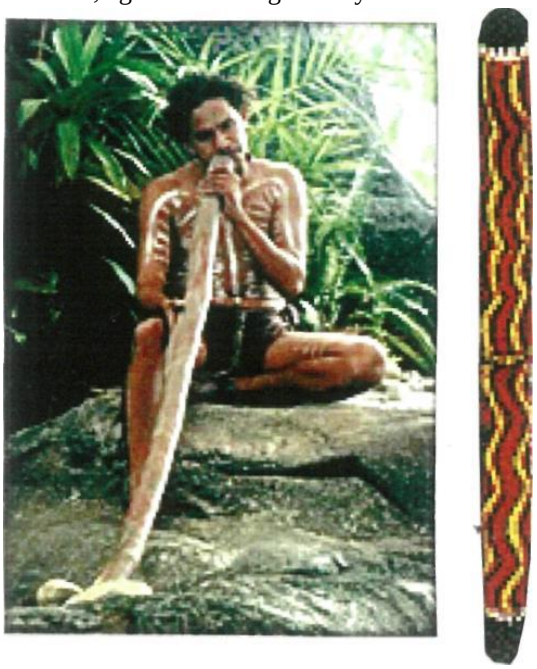
One might ask, in what way is our *'visual grammar'* a grammar? I would say, first of all, that it is a grammar of *'visual design'*, because we need a term that can encompass oil painting as well as magazine layout, the comic strip as well as the scientific diagram. And I would also say that it is a grammar of contemporary visual design and hence an inventory of the elements and rules underlying a culture-specific form of visual communication. This communication system has a history and it has evolved, over the past five centuries or so, alongside writing, as a *'language of visual design'*. This means, that it is not a 'universal' grammar. Visual langauge is not transparent and universally understood, but culturally specific. In many parts of the world, visual communication exists side by side with more traditional forms, for instance the visual arts, in which entirely conventional iconographical elements are integrated into a design following the rules of a local visual semiotic.

In the case of such cultures, the visual continued along with the verbal means of representation. Instances of this abound from the one extreme of the Inca quipu strings (an instance very nearly of yet another mode of

representation, the tactile) to Australian Aboriginal drawings, sand-paintings and carvings. These encode, in a manner not at alldirectly dependent on, or a *translation* of, verbal language, aspects of culture which are deemed to be best represented in visual form. They are, of course, ***connected*** with language or language with them, so that wall-paintings or sand-paintings, for instance, are accompanied by verbal representations of geographical features, journeys, myths and so on. Their paintings are inspired by the ***Dreamtime,*** the age of the creation of their world when Ancestors emerged from within the earth.

There are many different kinds of visual arts in Aboriginal Australia, especially paintings. But the abstract nature of these paintings, fits neither into representational categories of art nor into abstract art, in the sense that we usually mean it. To understand these paintings (i.e. the essence of the works) one has to start from the ways in which Aborigines envision them and in this way gain access to an Aboriginal way of perceiving the world. The Berndts examination of the ground drawings, sand paintings and carvings reveal their ritual and ceremonial function.[2] The purpose of the designs is to pass on knowledge by retelling the stories of the Ancestors; by visually revisiting the topographical sights that the Ancestors saw or created during the Dreamtime. In this way, Aboriginal art is process-oriented rather than being product-oriented and perhaps is more closely associated with Western notions of dance than paintings. And in fact for ritual purposes, the drawings are almost always executed in conjunction with dance and song.

The visual designs are not used as mnemonic devices once they are finished or, indeed, while they are being created. They are instead ritual re-enactment of the Ancestors' Dreamtime travelling which, in Aboriginal mythology, are synonymous with the creation of the world. As the ancestor travelled, he or she created the sites of the earth through song. At the end of the creative period, the ancestors returned underground, and there the Dreaming still exists. Stated very simply, one of the purposes of ritual is to open up the surface of the land and tap the creative power of the still-existent Dreaming. Performers and initiates are clothed in painted designs using ochres and white-stuff and briefly become the *Dreamtime Ancestors,* again bestowing fertility on the land.



Traditionally, Australian Aboriginal designs were painted on bodies or arranged in the sand for ritual purposes; they were destroyed immediately afterwards or were left to the elements. Transposed on to canvas, these ephemeral drawings become permanent. The paintings, as transcriptions of sand paintings, are representations and embodiments of matter. By reducing, or averaging form, the hieroglyphs allow a visual and conceptual understanding of their exterior world.

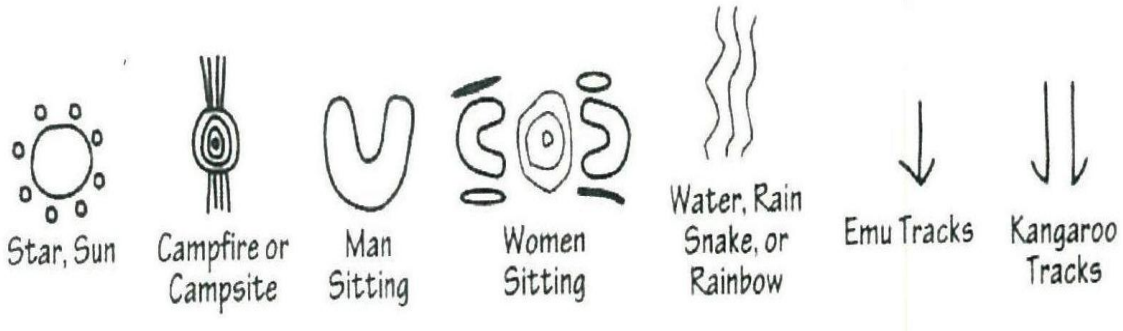
In the original sand paintings the painters could, in an instant and at will, change a hieroglyph, making it neither exclusive nor permanent. The same story could be re-arranged into endless variants of hieroglyphs. There is no sense of words being read simultaneously with an image, for the word and the image are the same. It is as though the entire landscape were made up of a lexicon in which visual words, in their apparently inexhaustible interrelationship, dynamically create and recreate the landscape apprehended by the painters.

The way the Aborigines conceive of a simultaneous visual language, both in word and picture, is closely tied in with their ideas of time and their relationship to the ***Dreamtime.*** Writing in 1947, T.G.H. Strehlow, who grew up among the Aborigines of the Central Desert, says: "Nowhere, is the link between human time and changeless Eternity stronger in religious thought than in Aboriginal Australia".[3] The Dreamtime itself is then an eternal time, which exists simultaneously with earthly time. Aboriginal paintings express this paradoxical relationship between space and time. These paintings almost always depict a journey of some sort, a movement through this eternal time and the circles and lines are progressions along this journey. Aboriginal paintings like ***Emu Dreaming*** are always expressive of the land and the artist's relationship to it, and in part show a bird's eye view of particular landscape. They are not, however, merely physical maps but rather multi-dimensional ones which encompass all time and levels of space and which express the essential being of the land and the Dreaming, both transcendent and immanent. Like the simultaneous concept of Dreamtime and earthly time, these topographical paintings depict a moving narrative that connotates time onto one plane.

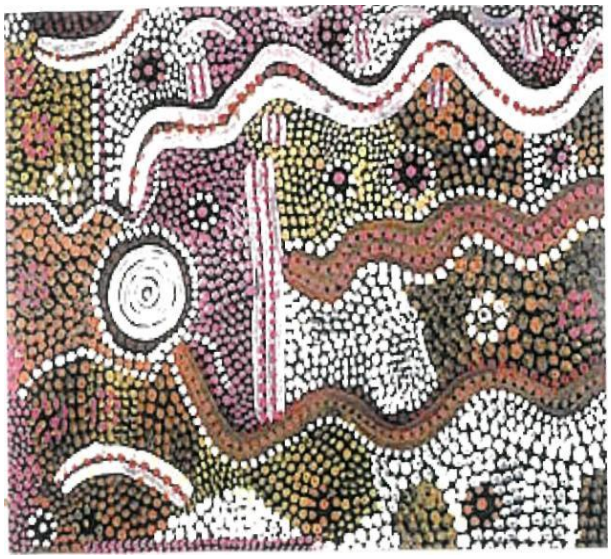
In the Australian Desert paintings, the image do not provide a mere graphic equivalent of spoken words, thereby attaching themselves to the temporality implicit in the ordinary syntax of a sentence. Quite to the contrary, and

importantly, in Aboriginal paintings: time becomes space. There is no conventional sequentially in the stories but rather the accretion of space or place. Since the space or place is only the retelling of a story already known to the painter, the so-called story is an eternal idea in the culture of the painter. The elements or images of the story, therefore, have no reading direction as we understand it. Time and space in Aboriginal thought exist simultaneously while at the same time remain different from each other. Their paintings seem to be both specific and universal, depicting both an instant in time and a series of narratives which cross all time. The large concentric circle fixes the eye in one central place while the radiating lines and tracks pull one outwards beyond the boundaries of the canvas. The result is a sense of simultaneous motion and stability which expresses the Aborigine's multi-dimensional perception of the world.

The visual language is different for each tribe. There are, however, many symbols common to all Australian Aboriginal Desert tribes such as circles, footprints (both human and animal), wavy lines, straight lines, weapons, arcs and many others. Wavy, straight or curved lines can mean fire, smoke, rain, a rainbow, snake, lightning, a cliff,



water or blood, to name a few. A U-shape might show the mark left in the sand by the buttocks and would thus represent a place at which a mythic person sat. These symbols are, of course, variable and contain many different meanings at the same time. Aboriginal thought is always pluralistic; there is never only one meaning or perspective to anything. Darby Jampijinpa Ross's ***Emu Dreaming*** is a painting which contains many of these common symbols. Like typical paintings, ***Emu Dreaming*** is bursting with energy and colour : the symbols which denote characters, locations and activity are painted in black and are set into brilliant relief by several shades of red, blue, green, yellow and white which make up the background of dots. The painting is anchored by a central concentric circle from which eight spirallinglines radiate outwards. Between each spirallingline, lie three long bars flanked by what appears to be, arrow shaped decorative motifs. A smaller concentric circle is placed first below the central one.



The catalogue describes it as follows: the artist represents the mythological travels of large numbers of Emu Ancestors who were travelling north and camped at two soakages, ***Kunurrulypa*** and ***Ngunkurrlmanu.*** The unruly spirals represent emu's intestines ***(jawujawu).*** The long bars represent spears and digging sticks, symbolic of men and women, the arrow-like motifs indicate tracks. The central roundel with radiating spiral lines is a less common design than the network of connecting circles and lines that we see in ***Tingari Dreaming*** at Yaru Yaru or other animal and human Dreamings. These spiralling motifs are often present, however, in ***sweet potato seed*** or ***bush cabbage Dreamings*** in which they would represent routes as well as paths on which these Dreamtime ancestors travelled. While symbols like those found in ***Emu Dreaming*** might have an universal meaning.In individual paintings they will also have a specific meaning, or meanings, in which each design represents a totemic Ancestor. Of course, access to these totemic meanings, and to other more abstract ones, is limited by knowledge and level of initiation and is often known only by the artists themselves. Painter Mundabaree, also known to us as Anne Marie Keating exhibited two of her very significant paintings on totems. She was born with the Mullet (fish) totem and in this picture we see Anne displaying her work on the ***Mullet Dreamtime Art***. Totemism in Aboriginal Australia is always *a mystical connection* between living persons and other existents. Sociologists, however, feel that in respect of marriage, totemic affiliations propose relationships that in general are actually biologically agreeable; for

whereas in nature, white cockatoos mate with white cockatoos, in Australian Aboriginal human society white cockatoos must not marry white cockatoos. Totemism is thus a means of exogamy; this itself being the effect of an instinct tending to prevent harmful unions between close relations. Anne Marie Keating is also famous for another painting called ***The Turtle Hatchlings Dreaming.***

According to their Dreamtime laws, traditionally Mundabaree has *totemic affiliation* with the *Turtle Hatchling.*

Therefore, like every other dimension or aspect of Aboriginal life and customs, *totemism* is also based on Dreamtime beliefs but importantly it is a system "which allowed the people to understand the natural and social universe as an organised whole".[4] In a similar fashion, contemporary indigenous Australian artist Helicopter Tjungurrayi links the present not with mere centuries, but with the Paleolithic past by painting his *totemic affiliation* and the work is titled ***The Goanna totemic Dreamtime.***

Killer whales are very prominent in their culture and this depiction is more of a traditional rendition that also features totems of raven on the body, wolf on the dorsal, and salmon/trout on the tail.

Graphite was used for the red. This painting of totem is more popularly known as ***Kwagul Orca***. Overall, the system is best understood as a means to distinguish groups of people in terms of tribes, clans or families. On a corporate level, therefore, totemism formed individuals into social groups and on a functional level, dictated obligations in regards to teaching, initiation, marriage, ceremonial life and death.

Sun Totem

Aerial perspective is one of the hallmarks of Australian style. This is true particularly for paintings from the desert region where waterholes, depicted as concentric roundels, are mapped along songlines, the chanted oral narratives of origin that accompany outback journeying. An example of this is the large ground painting with the name, ***Honey Ant, Possum*** and ***Water Dreaming.*** Artists Thomas Tjangala Rice, Jack Jakamassa Ross and Sampson Japaljarri Martin had shaped it using the chopped fibers of an Australian native daisy dyed with earth ochre brown - red and yellow colour, white clay and black charcoal. The sacred materials collected from ancestral sites around northwest of Alice Springs, travelled in raw form from Sydney to San Francisco, the site where the exhibition was held. Soon traditional ceremonial painting were being delivered up by Aboriginal artists using new media - on walls and canvases, instead of, on the ground, with acrylics and polymers instead of ochre dyes. On the Legion of Honor's walls, work ranges from traditional and anonymous objects such as ceremonial shields, boomerangs and spears, contemporary and signed ancestral funeral statues, to individualistic abstract stylings of painters including the late Emily Kame Kngwarreye of Utopia in central Australia. Anatjari Tjampitjinpa's ***Tingari Cycleat Tjuwal***

(ancestors singing the world into existence) with its hallucinatory ochre-coloured roundels seem to vibrate even when viewed across the room.

The equally magically sensuous ***Leaves Blown by the wind,*** a work by Gloria Petijarrein black, yellow and brown - gives a sense of leaf litter in various stages of decay equally magically sensuous ***Leaves Blown by the wind,*** a work by Gloria Petijarreequally, magically sensuous ***Leaves Blown by the Wind,*** a work by Gloria Petijarrein black, yellow and brown - gives a sense of leaf litter in various stages of decay fluidly tossed into the blender.

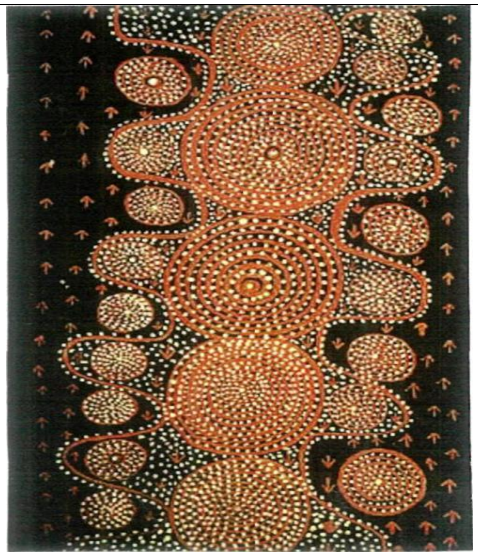
These are paintings grounded in deeply traditional aesthetics and an overarching belief system, yet surprisingly poignant and meaningful even for the cultural outsider.

Nancy Munn's *Walbiri Iconography* is important for further understanding of the present situation. Her study is based on field research conducted at Yuendumu from 1956 to 1958, long before Bardon introduced acrylics and canvas.

A comparison of contemporary paintings with the traditional function of artwork as described by Munn, gives us insights into the evolution of Central Desert painting and shows what has been maintained and what has been modified within a specific local dissent group. Walbiri women's designs are called *yawalyu* and are traditionally painted only on bodies. According to Munn, women often tell sand stories which recount Dreamtime journeys as children watch, but these are not ceremonial. Women's designs are strongly associated with female sexuality, personal health and the growth of children and ***yawalyu*** are regularly painted on children and young girls. Traditionally, it is improper to sing or make ***yawalyu*** designs when alone and womens' acrylic painting continues to be a communal activity at Yuendumu today. Six species of ancestors were emphasized in ***yawalyu***at Yuendumu, says Munn: the species include rain, yawagiberry, managidgi [a black berry], honey art, possum, and charcoal.[5]

Walbiri artist Peggy NangalaJurra's acrylic on canvas on ***Rainbow Dreaming*** depicts a traditional ***yawalyu*** subject, in a non-traditional form. The colourful background is based on a foundation of dark red, dotted with red, yellow, gray, pale green and white. The visual characters are balanced symmetrically in a patternwhich suggests a mirror imaging, both vertically and horizontally. The painting may not have a ceremonial function like traditional ***yawalyu*** designs but Walbiri graphic designs are not used merely in ceremony but also casually in conversation and storytelling. The work is a seemingly abstract painting which, in fact, depicts a whole series of narratives connected to the Dreamtime travels of the **Rain Ancestor** who created people out of small rain clouds ***(milpirri)***. Rainbow designs are usually considered part of the Rain Ancestor. The rain motifs painted on canvas are similar to those painted on the torsos and upper arms of women at ***yawalyu*** ceremonies and tell a Rain Ancestor story much like those recounted by women in the sand.

Rather than depicting the precise physical nature of land, events or beings, *Rainbow Dreaming* expresses the essence of these things found in the Dreaming.



When one realizes this, one begins to feel the painting's extraordinary power, despite the fact that the visual language remains difficult to grasp. We can get sense of what thepainting represents if we approach it as a multi- dimensional expression of the ***Rainbow Dreaming***and all it encompasses. Like the simultaneous stability and motion of ***Emu Dreaming***, the symmetry of ***RainbowDreaming*** seems to suggest both a specific and a universal presence, a balance betweenaparticular time and all time. Though Nangala Jurra uses brightly coloured acrylic paint and canvas to produce a permanent work, in this way departing from tradition, the essence of the Dreaming remains the same and its function continues to be to pass on knowledge.

One of the most outstanding artist at Papunya is Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri, whose work is remarkable not only for its beauty, but also for the complexity of the ideas which it depicts. One painting which stands out is ***Napperby Death Spirit Dreaming,*** which he painted for a portrayal about his own live. The painting tells the story of Leura's life and he includes in it all of his Dreamings. The painting has many traditional motifs. But it departs from other Aboriginal paintings, in that, it expresses a personal journey along with the Dreamtime journey. The narrative tells the story of Leura's own life while the Dreaming track that runs horizontally through the middle is the path of his life. Traditionally, a Dreamtime journey was depicted through visual narrative and the artist was included in the painting through an identification with the totemic ancestor whom he or she depicted. There was no need to represent his or her own earthly experience separately because the artist's essential nature lay in the Dreamtime. This becomes an extraordinary work because it is the first painting in which a Western Desert artist stands aside from his tribal context and comments, quite self-consciously, on his art, his Dreamings and himself. Thus Leura's painting does include a personal journey, but one which is simultaneously mapped into the eternal Dreamtime and his own ancestors.

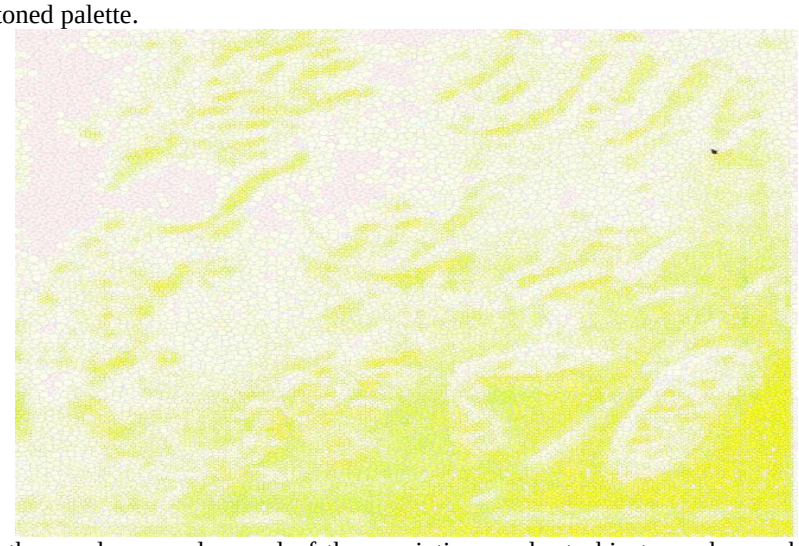
For the painters, the creation of a painting is regarded as an act in itself which conjures the spirit power of a tribe. Indeed, Aborigines believe that the ancestorsand not the individual painter, is the artist of the work. That is, by painting, the Aborigine gains access to that part of himself which is the ancestor. The Berndts say of the Aboriginal artist that, in the case of creating or re-creating an image of a mythic being, he is constructing a vehicle which, under special circumstances, may be possessed by that being.[6] Those circumstances must be reproduced in accordance with traditional, social and stylistic dictates. In all such cases, art is much more than an attempt to set down graphically an artist's personal experiences or his own view of his surroundings or of the passing scene. The impetus for the creation of work remains in their importance in ceremonies, thereby, making the creation of artworks an important step in the preservation of traditional customs which, recognizes the spiritual and communal significance of their art.

To the Aborigines, the material world is secondary to the transcendent. In an Aboriginal context, however, the transcendent and the immanent are not divided in the way they are in Western cosmology. The Dreamtime is always present and Aborigines perceive both the transcendent and the immanent in something simultaneously. The transcendent realm is not a place where they will go after they leave their moral existence but a place to which they have access while they are alive. And the transcendent aspect of something, which exists alongside its immanent presence, is far more important because it bespeaks the thing's eternal essence. In their art, it is the shape, the form of the Dreamings that is important and that should not be altered, not the physical manifestation of this transcendent shape. Thus, to the Australian Aborigines, it does not really matter in what media the Dreaming is expressed if the medium chosen has the eternal shape of the Dreaming in correct perspective.

The plurality of narratives and meanings that can be contained in a single painting is one of the most

interesting aspects of Central Australian Aboriginal painting and reveals much about how Aborigines conceive their world. To the knowledgeable elders, the dots and dashes offer as much narrative possibility as Morse code. And yet they provide more. The women's acrylic painting can be read as maps of ritual **D*reaming sites***, as musical scores from ritual songs, and they can be viewed as representatives which, when fully understood, evoke places, animals, dreams, smells and stories that bond the ***(Walbiri)*** people to their ancestors, to their land and to each other. Even to those unfamiliar with this artistic tradition, it offers a great deal of purely aesthetic appeal. There is a superficial resemblance to modern abstract expressionist, minimalist or even op art. Many of the works make use of dot patterns over coloured lines, creating a shimmering effect.

Dot paintings are the traditional, visual art form of the Aborigines in Western Australia. Dot paintings are named after the patterns created from small dots of paint, which cover the entire surface of the paintings, each created in coloured dots. Contemporary artists use dot paintings not only in their paintings proper but also as a background to many of their works. Traditional dot painters used pigments made from natural materials, giving their paintings an earth-toned palette.

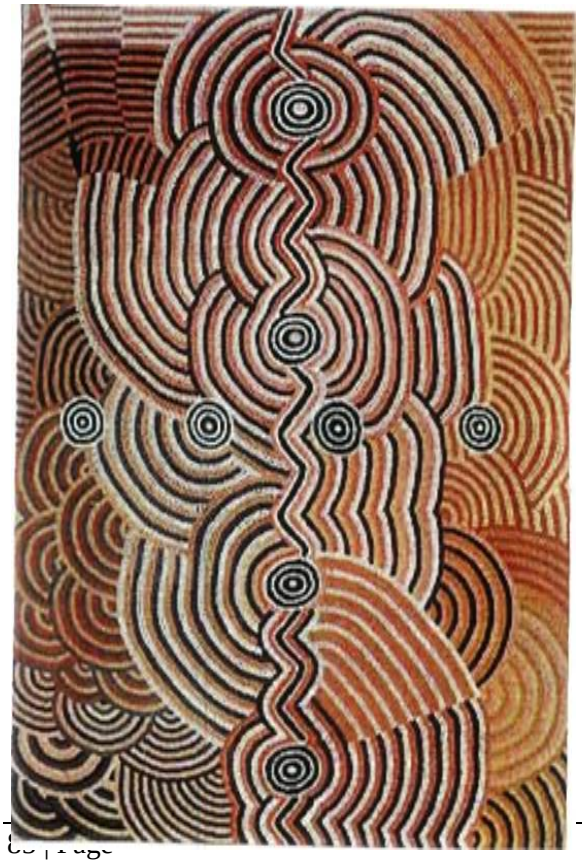


Beyond the purely sensual appeal of these paintings and art objects, each may be appreciated on a deeper level. Abstract works of art and design are to the Aboriginal tradition, depictions of landscapes, forces of nature and traditional stories. The stories connect distant tribes to common social and religious customs and provide an ideological framework for their universe. The Aborigines believe that these creative spiritual forces are still present in the land and people and exert influence over their daily life. Contemporary works are modern dreamings on this traditional theme that has been depicted and re-interpreted by artists for thousand years. A traditional pattern of lines may represent the boundaries of ancestral lands or the path walked by an ancestor. These symbolic stories were originally designed for ceremonial purposes and only created by those initiated into the religious traditions. Often they were created in temporary media, such as sand painting and body painting. In transferring these works to canvas, the artists not only allow us to appreciate their art but also give us a more permanent record of their spiritual traditions.

Dot paintings made by the Aboriginal people of the Central desert are based on their thousand-year-old tradition of sand painting. Therefore, there is no *'right'* way to view the piece: no horizontal, no vertical, no up or down. This art may be hung any way that the viewer wishes, even placed flat, which was the artist's perspective

when it was painted. Aboriginal culture and society is, at the material level anything but static. Aborigines themselves would probably subscribe to this view in the sense that the shape of the expression is eternal though the medium could vary. The Dreamtime may he unvarying but can manifest itself in different ways at different but static. Aborigines themselves would probably subscribe to the view in the sense that the shape of the expression is eternal though the medium could vary. The Dreamtime may be unvarying but can manifest itself in different ways at different points in history. Thus Aboriginal aesthetic art, in its turn, becomes a kind of historical artefact.

A typical painting from Central Australia, contains a suggestion of this dynamic capacity of Aboriginal thought and culture. Pintubi artist Uta UtaJangala's ***Tingari at Lake McDonald*** employs a network of concentric circles and connecting lines to depict a specific localized segment of **the *Tingari Dreaming,*** or a much broader depiction giving a sense of the whole ***Tingari cycle***which binds Pintubi country together.



In the Dreaming, Tingari men are the bestowers of ritual and their mythological travels in the desert include dramatic tales of sexual excess, greed, theft of sacred objects and other deeds that rival the Greek pantheon. The ***Tingari cycle***is a highly secret / sacredmen's ritual and consequently, the particulars of the painting must remain a mystery. The important thing is that these paintings hold great significance for the Pintubi. As they are executed and when an initiated person sees them, the ***Dreamtime Tingari journeys*** are retraced and this strengthens the Pintubi's bond to their country.

On a symbolic level, Turner says of the Pintubi desert art, line gives way to circle, or circles along a line, as a predominant artistic motif.He interprets this characteristic as reflecting an emphasis on linear federative principles of association alongside the traditionally circular incorporative and co-residential forms.[7] The inclusion of both these motifs in a combined network within this type of paintingseems to suggest symbolically a process of change and evolution(both graphically and socially), a merging together of incorporative and federated tendencies.

Beyond the story itself there is a political message in this work as it represents the ancestral lands occupied by the Aborigines and the concern of these artists for preserving their land. Galarrwuy Yunupingu writes, "...when we paint, whether it is on our bodies for ceremony or on bark or canvas for the market, we are just not painting for fun or profit. We are painting as we have always done- to demonstrate our continuing link with our country and the

KANGAROO DREAMING

rights and responsibilities we have to it. Furthermore, we paint to show the rest of the world that we own this country, and that the land owns us. Our painting is a political act."[8] Aborigines have continued to use their art as a political resonator and they have done this both by conforming to and modifying tradition. Yunupingu asks us to remember that Aboriginal paintings are not just beautiful pictures. They are about Aboriginal law, Aboriginal life. They areabout their resistance and refusal to forget the land of their ancestors. The paintingsare about their cultural, social and political survival.

Dion Wason echoes a very similar feeling in two of his significant paintings, first - the ***Kangaroo Dreaming;*** second - the ***Reconciliation***. The first painting speaks for itself. The second is more interesting. Dion explains: the hands are a sign language for ***this is our land,*** and the 'Kangaroos' belong to ***our*** land. The hand has become a symbol for Aboriginal land rights which will lead to a*'reconciliation'* of our cultures.

Reconciliation

The Australian Aboriginals see themselves as the custodians of their country. Their dreaming is not just of the land but also of the song, dance and mythology of the land. The paintings we see on canvas today were originally painted on the sand and only lasted until the wind blew. Canvas is durable and has given the world a chance to learn about the Aboriginal ***Dreaming,*** their way of life and values.

The detailed catalogue descriptions may be interesting, but they reveal only a surface meaning and place the paintings into the realm of representational art without taking into account the more important abstract (in the Aboriginal sense) essence of the ***Dreaming.*** Yes, a concentric circle might represent a specific hill, but more than this it expresses the essential nature of the land and the Aborigine. Thus***Aboriginal art*** has now taken its place in the collections of the great museums and galleries around the world and is widely sought after. Rich and complex beliefs embodied in the Dreaming are expressed in art with many layers of meaning that reflects a unique world-view. Present day enthusiasm for Aboriginal art testifies to their persistent dynamism and vitality, for now and for all time.

Endnotes

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