

Living the heritage, not curating the past:

A study of lirr-garn, agency & art

in the Warmun Community

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Declaration

This is to certify that:

- i. The thesis comprises only my original work toward the PhD
- ii. Due acknowledgement has been made in the document to all other material used
- iii. The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of figures, plates, tables, bibliography and appendices

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Abstract

This thesis is an historical and contemporary examination of the creative, social and cultural world of the Warmun community in Western Australia. It focuses on how the community as a whole, and as individuals, exert agency and maintain their values and priorities when situated within larger, sometimes more powerful, structures and frameworks that differ from their own.

Through the prism of art, the research examines the community's engagement with and value of the Warmun Community Collection, their history of adjustment, the unofficial roles of the Warmun Art Centre and how the Warmun Art Centre supports and enables informal learning. The thesis connects these four themes through a socio-historical analysis of the experiences of *Warrmarn*¹ people, ethnographic and visual descriptions of their actions and a visual examination of the manifestations of their actions—objects of creative practice or, artworks.

In doing so, the thesis reveals several overlapping matters: it tracks the development of a museum in an Aboriginal community; it brings to light the hidden roles of the Warmun Art Centre; it contributes to the developing field of informal learning; it reveals how people express agency in daily life; it unveils the proprietorial relationship people have with objects; and finally, it lays bare the purpose, use and interpretations of objects, which has at times made Warmun residents, and their sites of cultural production, tangential to the objects they make. The research finds that *Warrmarn* people live their heritage rather than curate their past.

¹ In this thesis, 'Warmun' is used in quotes and when the community is referred to as a proper noun whilst the word *Warrmarn* is used when the author is speaking.

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Cautionary note

This thesis contains the names, photographs and artworks of deceased people. Whilst the author has gained permission from family members to use their names and photos, care should be taken when referring to or mentioning these names to other Aboriginal people from the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

Abbreviations

ANKAAA	Association of Northern Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
BOD	Board of Directors
BP	Before Present
BTEC	Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign
CATSI	Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006
CCMC	Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation
CDEP	Community Development Employment Program
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CNA	Commissioner of Native Affairs (Western Australia)
CNW	Commissioner of Native Welfare (Western Australia)
DAAWA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs (Western Australia)
DAAC	Department of Aboriginal Affairs (Commonwealth)
DCWWA	Department of Child Welfare (Western Australia)
DCWC	Department of Child Welfare (Commonwealth)
DCP	Department of Child Protection
DSS	Department of Social Services (Commonwealth)
EKIAP	East Kimberley Impact Assessment Project
GFC	Global Financial Crisis
JP	Justice of the Peace
KLC	Kimberley Land Council
KYA	Thousand Years Ago
MNA	Minister of Native Affairs
MNW	Minister of Native Welfare
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NLA	National Library of Australia
NT	Northern Territory
ORIC	Office of Registrar of Indigenous Corporations
SAM	Stories Art Money (Warmun Art Centre database system)
Sr.	Sister
Fr.	Father

WA	Western Australia
WAC	Warmun Art Centre
WCC	Warmun Community Collection
WANDRRA	Western Australian Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements
WCTCI	Warmun Community Turkey Creek Incorporated

Orthography

Indigenous languages in Australia have a sound system that differs from English. The sounds of Indigenous languages have been rendered using Roman alphabet symbols and over the years linguists have applied different symbol combinations. The spelling and pronunciation system used for Gija has been written differently over the years. In this thesis I have chosen to use the BDG and OO orthography for Gija. In choosing this spelling system I do not mean to undermine or disregard others' spelling systems, or suggest that this is the better way. I choose it because this system is designed so that English speakers will more likely pronounce the Gija words correctly when reading the words phonetically. For example, the pronunciation of 'U' in Gija is the same as in the English like 'U' in 'PUT' and not like the 'U' in 'FUN', 'GUN' and 'PUN'. The pronunciation of 'OO' is the same as in the English 'LOOK'. Table 1 indicates Gija sounds for English speakers. In this spelling system, 'B' is interchangeable with English 'P' sound, as with 'D' is exchangeable with 'T' and 'G' with 'K'. There is ongoing debate in *Warrmarn* about what spelling system to use.

Table 1 Gija sounds and spelling.

a	Like the u in but
aa	Like the a in father
b	Like the b in boat and big , but also like the p in spin
d	Like the d in dog ; sometimes like the t in stun
rd	Like the rd or rt sound when an American English speaker says card or cart , but the tongue curls back a little more
e	Like the er in father
i	Like the i in hit
oo	Like the oo in foot
u	Like the u in put
j	Like the j in jump
g	Like the g in go

l	Like the l in louse
ly	Like the lli in million. It is not like the ly in happily
m	Like the m in motorcar
n	Like the n in nose
ng	Like the ng in bring and singer
nh	There is no sound like this in English. Put the tip of your tongue behind your front teeth and make an n sound
ny	Like the ni in onion; not like the ny in many
r	Like the r in run
rl	Like the rl when an American English speaker says curl or girl
rn	Like the rn when an American English speaker says barn but the tongue curls back a little more
rr	Like the rolled r in Scottish English or sometimes like the tt in butter when said very fast
th	There is no sound like this in English. Put the tip of your tongue behind your top front teeth and make a t sound
w	Like w in water, worm, walk
y	Like y in yes, yawn

Source: Frances Kofod, 2015.

In the thesis I have not altered the spelling from quotes in primary documents, such as painting certificates and painting titles. This explains the different systems throughout the text.

There is no widely accepted standard spelling system for Kimberley Kriol although the Kimberley Language Resource Centre is developing one. The spelling used in this thesis combines Gija and English.

Gija people had been using the word *Warrmarn* for the area now known as Warmun community for centuries. Although Warmun has been spelt differently over past decades,

both spellings refer to the same place. Gija people show a preference for pronouncing the community *Warrmarn* ie. with a rolled ‘r’ (rr) and retroflex ‘n’ (rn). The spelling *Warrmarn* more accurately reflects the sound of the word. Indeed, people refer to the place and the community as Turkey Creek, Warmun and *Warrmarn*. In this thesis ‘Warmun’ is used in quotes and when the community is referred to as a proper noun whilst the word *Warrmarn* is used when the author is speaking.

Finally, Warmun community is predominantly made up of Gija people but there are many people who reside there from outside the Gija language group. Therefore, I do not make reference to the community as entirely Gija because it is not—I refer to it as *Warrmarn* or Warmun. It must be remembered that *Warrmarn* is not a language group in itself.

Glossary

Gija words

Barlinyin — The Country that Springvale cattle station is on.

Beranggul — Tree-living native bee species.

Binyjirminy du Lalanggarrany — A song and dance style about the bat and the crocodile in the *Ngarranggarni*.

Boonbany — Large-leaf cabbage gum, *Corymbia grandifolia*.

Doomboony — Owl.

Doomoorriny — Spiritually dangerous and sacred place.

Daam — Country.

Darrajayin — Long hill on Springvale Station.

Ganggayi — Relationship address form based in the concept of mother's mother. A two-way term ie. A woman calls her daughter's children *ganggayi* and they also call her *ganggayi*.

Gardiya — A person of European descent/white person (also spelt Kartiya/Gadiya/Kadia).

Garrjany — Waterlily.

Gayirriny — Ground sugar-bag, species of native bee. The beehive is located in anthills or in the ground.

Gija — The language group of people in the central east Kimberley (also spelt Kija/Gidja/Kidja/Kitja). Previously known as Lunga (Berndt and Berndt 1979; Kaberry 1939).

Gooloongnoorren — Hill in Chinaman's Garden.

Goonggoon — Oven in the ground. Often the branches of the *Jirrindiny* are burnt and paperbark is placed on top.

Goorlabal — Female rainbow snake from the *Ngarranggarni*.

Goorirr Goorirr — Gija *Joonba*/ceremony that Rover Thomas found (also spelt Kril Kril/Kirl Kirl/Goorir Goorirr/Gurirr Gurirr/Krill Krill).

Gorra-gorran — Place on Bow River Station where there is a channel-billed cuckoo or 'storm bird'.

Jadagen — Wet season rain.

Jaangari — Male skin name.

Jarrambayiny — Goanna.

Jirrindiny — *Grevillea*, *Hakea arborescens*.

Jiwiny — Wattle, *Acacia tumida*, *Acacia acradenia*, *Acacia cowleana* and *Grevillea miniata*.

Joonba — Song and dance style. Often used by many people to refer to any song and dance event (also spelt Junba and commonly referred to as corroboree).

Joomooloony — Boab tree, *Adansonia gregorii*.

Joowoorlinyji — Bow River Station.

Lernjim — Yellow pollen sacs in native beehives.

Lirrgarn — Teach, learn.

Liyan — Good feeling in the guts/stomach.

Loomoogoo — Blue tongue lizard Dreaming/*Ngarranggarni*.

Loonggoong — A directional term meaning coming from below, from the bottom, from underneath.

Mantha — A ceremony to introduce someone to country or food, to conduct a ceremony that allows someone to eat a particular type of food or enter a part of the country safely.

Mawoorroony — Bloodwood tree, *Eucalyptus dichromorphoria*.

Mawoondool — White ochre, white paint.

Mernmerd-galem — Police ('good-at-tying').

Miriwoong — Language group north east of Gija.

Moonga Moonga — A song and dance style sung by men and women, but only women dance it. The singing for *Moonga Moonga* is accompanied by clap sticks or boomerangs clapped together.

Naangari — Female skin name.

Naga — Men's loin cloth.

Ngaji — Relationship name for brother or sister.

Ngarranggarni — Gija word for Dreamtime; part of the present, present and future.

Ngarrgooroon — Name of Country to the east of *Warrmarn*.

Ngoomooloo — Clouds.

Nyawoorroo — Female skin name.

Nyidbarriya — Name of significant rocky place in Purnululu National Park.

Purnululu — National Park south of Warmun community. Also known as the Bungle Bungles.

Roogoon — Crocodile Hole.

Thalngarri — Snappy gum, *Eucalyptus brevifolia*.

Walarriny — White gumtree, *Eucalyptus papuana*.

Wardel — Star.

Warna warnarram jarrag woomberramande — 'To speak and tell stories about the past.'

Warna-warnarram ngarag woomberramande — 'Objects and things made about the past.'
There is no Gija word for 'painting' and people would use the word *ngarag* to indicate 'make things', which includes artefacts, paintings and anything handmade.

Warrambany — Flood.

Winan — Term for the trade system used by Gija people.

Woorreranginy — Frog Hollow Community.

Woonggool — A creek in Warmun community, also the same name as the community store (also spelt Wungkul).

Yarangga — Chinaman's Garden.

Yingarrjiny — Sandpaper fig, *Ficus opposita*.

Yiwirn — Set in rain.

Kimberley Kriol words

Allabat — They, everyone.

Balanga — Belonging to.

Bat — Continuous action marker.

Bin — Past action, like been.

Dig — To leave, to go.

Dijan — This/this one.

Gat — With.

Gotta — With.

Killer — The cattle chosen to be killed for meat.

La — In, at, on, to.

Mefalla — Me and others.

Meself — Myself.

Nalija — Black tea.

Awooj — Shortened form of *Ngawooj*, grandparent on paternal side.

Thadan — That one.

Thadayi — That way/there.

Tubala — The two of them/both of them.

Weself — Ourselves.

Whijay — Which way.

Woolgoomen — Old woman.

Chronology

Protectionist Policy

- 1915-1936 Auber Octavius Neville serves as Chief Protector in the Department of Aborigines
- 1905-1936 *Aborigines Act 1905* (WA)
- 1936 Introduction of the *Native Administration Act* (WA)
- 1944-1971 *Native (Citizenship Rights) Act* (Amended 1950 and 1951)
- 1948-1962 Stanley Guise Middleton is Commissioner of Native Affairs

Assimilationist Policy

- 1954 Commissioner Middleton introduces *Native Welfare Act* (WA) and the Department of Native Affairs is renamed the Department of Native Welfare
- 1963 Amendments made to the *Native Welfare Act*
- 1967 Commonwealth referendum approved two amendments in the Australian constitution that discriminated against Aboriginal people— Sections 51 and 127
- 1968 Federal Pastoral Industry Award amended and equal wages for Aboriginal pastoral workers introduced

Self-Determination

- 1971 Tonkin State Labor government elected in Western Australia and the functions of the Department of Native Welfare now absorbed by the Department of Community Welfare *Native (Citizenship Rights) Act* repealed
- 1972 Federal Labor government elected under Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. Policy of self-determination introduced under new commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs
- 1974 Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs takes responsibility for most aspects of Aboriginal affairs in Western Australia and becomes the main service provider to remote communities

- 1975 Federal Liberal party and National Country party coalition government elected under Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser
- 1977 Turkey Creek community incorporated as the Warmun community
- 1979 Warmun community decides on a Catholic school
- 1989 Functions of Department of Aboriginal Affairs taken over by the Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
- 1998 The Warmun Art Centre is established (then known as *Kelarriny Arts*)
- 2004 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission abolished by Liberal government under Prime Minister John Howard
- 2011 Warmun community floods
- 2012 The first residents return to Warmun after the flood
- 2013 The Warmun Community Collection returns to the community after the flood

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Thesis outline

The opening chapter gives an outline of the context and key sites of the thesis. It provides an overview of the influencing literature and the methodology used. The second chapter begins with a description of the *Warrmarn* 2011 flood and its consequences: the experiences of Warmun community members and the journey of the Warmun Community Collection. In doing so I introduce two crucial tenets of the thesis: the engagement and disengagement with the Warmun Community Collection and how the Warmun community continues to deal with change and negotiate their own agency in day-to-day life. One consequence of the flood for this thesis was that the Collection was missing from the Warmun community for a period of twenty-seven months—precisely when I was conducting fieldwork—so I had to adjust my research path. This chapter thus introduces the change in research path, which I pick up again in Chapters Eight and Nine. In the first six chapters I take a broader view of *Warrmarn* people and examine how creative practices are integrated in everyday life.

Having introduced the Collection and the community, Chapters Three and Four provide the historical background needed to aid the reader's understanding of the people who now reside at *Warrmarn*. Therefore, Chapters Three and Four are history chapters. My focus is primarily on identity politics for which the past becomes a vehicle. In Chapter Three paintings are used as devices to present the personal histories and experiences of east Kimberley people in the first half of the twentieth century. I identify four recurring themes in the use of art to retell history: Differences; Violence and Relations; Gija Knowledge and Country, Place and Adaptation. In Chapter Four I use oral histories and memory to chronologically chart the experiences of people in the second half of the twentieth century. This includes a portrait of individuals' lives on pastoral stations, examples of their agency, how they learnt new ways, how and why they left the pastoral stations and the beginning of Warmun community. In both chapters I argue that these experiences underpin and inform present values and behaviour in *Warrmarn*. At the close of Chapter Four, I argue that the community is still in a process of adjustment, in relation to working out who they are and what they want as they become active agents within dominant discourses of Western society.

In Chapter Five I highlight some historic struggles and the (continuing) process of adjustment experienced by *Warrmarn* people. I do this by first discussing the founding of the Ngalangangpum School, which involves an archival study of primary material in order to

bring to light the actions and motivations of those involved in its formation. The role of the Church and community workers, as interlocutors, comes into view in this chapter. I discuss the Two Way curriculum and the beginning of the use of handmade objects in it. In doing this, I identify how people expressed agency when faced with structures and situations that are sometimes out of their control, or dominated by other frameworks, such as the Catholic church. I introduce the use of creative objects in the Two Way curriculum. I argue that these objects were manifestations of the makers' agency, used as pedagogical aids to explain, describe and affirm Country, *Ngarranggarni*, Catholicism and cultural practices in ways that the teachers preferred. Chapter Five concerns the community's agency in relationships and decision-making, and their lack of emphasis on the attribution and aesthetics of the objects now known as the Warmun Community Collection. I conclude Chapter Five with the assertion that the makers valued the objects for their meaning in-context and their role as pedagogic aids. I highlight how at this point in time, there was an impetus for the articulation of a culturally appropriate educational methodology within a framework of collaboration, negotiation and compromise.

In Chapter Six I take a further step and examine the Warmun Community Collection objects themselves, which were originally used as part of the Two Way curriculum at Ngalangangpum School. This involves an articulation of exactly how they were used and what their content was. Through archival and visual analysis, I identify four themes within the Collection: Catholicism, Country and *Ngarranggarni*, Corroboree and *Ngarranggarni* and Everyday Practices. This further cements the idea that the Warmun Community Collection objects (at the time they were used in the Ngalangangpum School) were valued in context, as pedagogic aids.

In Chapter Seven I continue to recount the history of engagement with the objects after 1998. I identify that they became a Collection in 1998 and that this marks the period when the value and role of the objects began to shift: objects that were primarily used to teach became a Collection—valued in their own right and according to Western criteria and art standards. Chapter Seven finds that the impetus and initiative to conserve and document the items, formalising them as a Collection, came from non-Aboriginal people, although Aboriginal community members were consulted in the process.

Chapters Two, Five, Six and Seven highlight the critical difference between the way that the Warmun community approached and valued the Collection items and the way that non-Aboriginal arts workers approached the Collection. The undercurrent I stress in these four

chapters is that there was a cacophony of noise surrounding the value and role of the Collection from arts workers involved with it, and there was silence, disengagement and inaction from community members toward them. The evidence shows that the community was not resolute, united or sure about which way they wanted to go forward and what role the items would have in the future. I position the Collection as being at a moment of pause, suspension and inaction where by it is going through a value recreation process by the Warmun community. This point of the thesis brings the reader up to 2012, when the majority of Collection items were out of *Warrmarn*. This point marks a change of trajectory in the thesis.

Chapter Eight is the beginning of the examination of the broader role of creative practice. It entails a study of the Warmun Art Centre, considering how it operates, how people use it and what its constraints are and how it articulates within the community. It shows how the Centre responds to and is partly produced by, the agency, desires and concerns of *Warrmarn* residents. Chapter Eight concludes by announcing that the Warmun Art Centre takes on a broader social role in the community and is expected to recognise and fill gaps needed by its members. Like the previous chapters, the undercurrent of Chapter Eight is concerned with how agency is expressed through the actions of the community members.

In Chapter Nine I continue to highlight the expressions of agency at the Warmun Art Centre by examining the occurrence of informal learning and teaching in the space. Whilst art production is its most notable role, in Chapter Nine I show how the member-directed structure of the Art Centre enables local people to take up informal teaching roles and learn in the social environment.

This thesis concludes with an over-view of how *Warrmarn* people continue to maintain, establish and exert agency through the prism of art, in spite of the continuing changing political, social, cultural and economic environment. It presents another way to consider material culture and forms of cultural production.

Chapter 1

Setting the context

Introduction

It's January in the east Kimberley and there hasn't been much rain.

The air is thick and heavy from moisture and tension.

Suffocating, yet freeing.

Grasses are green, clouds are pregnant purple and Boab trees have shiny grey trunks.

The *Boonbany* tree has grown its extra layer of bark

to protect itself from the dry season fires.

Its flowers blossom: time to collect bush honey.

Sweat beads increasingly form on skin.

In the last few days, the figs on the *Yingarrjiny* have turned from green to purple.

One of the few water lilies left in the creek silently sinks to the bottom and disperses its seeds.

Pounded leaves of the *Jiwiny* tossed into the water on the weekend

intended to intoxicate fish

have lost their potency.



Plate 1.1 White dots spell out place. Peggy Patrick, *Roogoon*, (detail), natural ochre and pigment on canvas, 80 x 80cm (WAC430/14).

At the Art Centre, white dots spell out place.

There is an early morning lull.

Soaked and depleted, enlarged *nalija* leaves clog the sink drain.

Flies sit on the rims of enamel cups. Pine frames lean. Ochre sits face to face.

The ash from *Marwoorroony* and *Walarriny* precariously wait in the fire pit

to be mixed with chewing tobacco.

Churchill sits on his porch, swinging his feet,

waiting for the clinic ambulance to take him to Kununurra.

The roller door to the Art Centre studio is hoisted up.

Its rattle can be heard down at Shirley's house.



Plate 1.2 The roller door open. Painting tables. Enamel mugs. Embers smoke.

I turn the urn on. Shuffling feet. A warm hand envelops mine.

Jane sits to cook yellow ochre on the cast iron gas burner.

—He must remember to get branches from the *Thalngarrji* for the smoking ceremony—

Phyllis is called selfish.

Peggy tells me that old people used to call *Warrmarn Goorra-gorran*. Mabel agrees.

'He that rainbird, he makes rain. Has a long tail. One la Bow River.

That *Ngarranggarni*, he singing out.'

Mabel drags her plastic chair over to her painting table and yells 'Board! Somebody!—

until it is fetched. She starts to make grey-blue by mixing her charcoal and ochre.

'Arghhhh, arghhhh!!!' Stones are thrown, dust is spread and dogs scatter,

shoulders crumple, backsides lower.

Mum *Naangari* announces she couldn't get her son to school

so she lay down on the road to scare him.

The jerking sound of the packing tape dispenser fracturing the tape adhesive begins.

Nyaawoorroo's daughter returns from paying off fines in lock up.



Plate 1.3 Packing tape and camera flash.

Jaangari laments the loss of his dog:

'He follow me everywhere. Nobody have love for me like that dog. Nobody working on that
Joonba ground with me, just that dog.'

The intermittent short, percussive click of the camera flash counters the offbeat dull clang of
the towball hitting ochre rocks in the marble mortar.

Shapes are etched in the resulting dust.

Get any fish at Bow River?



Plate 1.4 Shapes etched in the resulting dust.

Gordon walks in with his new red snake-skin boots. Everyone turns.

The expensive Belgian linen is rolled open on the cutting table.

Rusty worries about going to Springvale because we haven't got permission from the station owners. He speaks 'high' Gija to me and laughs at my ignorance.

The *mernmerd-galem* meander over to The Other Side in their boxy troopie.²

Boiling water is poured into the billy can.

Shailyn sits on the computer chair, logs into Facebook.

² Troopie is urban slang for a Toyota LandCruiser Troop Carrier vehicle.

Some children wander in on bicycle and foot, they get told to go to school. DCP is called.

Tommy wants the Art Centre to hold his money.

I drive to Eileen's place to give her paint; she isn't well.

She wants me to bring her wood for damper.

I stop in at the clinic to collect Mabel and Lena's medicine and ask about Churchill.

The lull is over.

It is on these ordinary moments of daily life that this thesis is hung. With a focus on the small moments of the everyday, I examine the actions of individuals to reveal how ordinary things become learnt things and shape individuals and communities. This is based on Kathleen Stewart's notion that 'ordinary moments form the basis of sociality' (2007, 27). In this constellation of experiences and actions, I describe past and present events and minutiae to reveal the daily tussle for expression, learning and agency. Centred around the creative space, this thesis investigates four pathways: the journey of the Warmun Community Collection, the unofficial roles of the Warmun Art Centre, the history of adjustment experienced by *Warrmarn* residents (and how it informs and shapes who they are and what they do today) and the characteristics and attributes of informal learning.

The first two themes—the engagement with and value of the Warmun Community Collection and the unofficial roles of the Warmun Art Centre—developed out of my own experiences as a student of art history and employee in the Aboriginal art industry. My relationship with the Warmun community began when I accepted a position at the Warmun Art Centre for ten months in March 2010. All my initial learning about the community and Gija culture stemmed from art: the Art Centre, art objects, arts practice and the artists. It is where I lived, worked and slept. Those who did not know my name initially referred to me as 'Art Centre.' At the end of 2010 I started this research journey. My original plan was to examine the Warmun Community Collection. I was going to study the objects and investigate how they were used as pedagogic tools; what information was 'contained' in them (Munn 1960; Munn 1966, 1973); report on the 'lives' of the objects as

cultural objects that moved in different fields (Appadurai 1986; Thomas 1991); learn about the lives of the artists (Vasari 1946); document the wider political, historical and social context (Giedion 1967; Willis and Fry 1988/89) and discuss their 'affect' (Biddle 2007) and their aesthetic qualities (Benjamin 2002; Kant 1960; Panofsky 1955; Warburg 1999; Wölfflin 1950). I began this project with two key assumptions about the Warmun Art Centre and the Warmun Community Collection: that they were linked to the active transmission of knowledge and that they were valued by the community in a manner similar to how Western art is valued in Western communities.

My project, however, was altered by an unexpected event: the *Warrambany* of 2011, which turned my plans and assumptions upside down. I was forced to rethink their trajectory because the Collection was absent from the community and I found that art was not the primary tool for knowledge transfer (discussed further in Chapter Eight). When I arrived back in *Warrmarn* in January 2012, ten months after the *Warrambany*, I spoke to senior artist Betty Carrington about the flood and the Warmun Community Collection. I asked her how she felt about the lost and damaged paintings and she raised her arms and remarked, 'Doesn't matter, we'll just make more'. Her words struck me: I wondered what the value of this Collection and artworks was for her and for others in *Warrmarn*. Moreover, in 2012, while the Collection was absent from *Warrmarn*, no one spoke about or referred to the Collection unless I, or others, prompted them. It seemed, quite literally, out of sight, out of mind. I reflected on this and also remembered that in 2010 the Collection had not been talked about either, unless prompted—at that time it was in a locked room inside the Art Centre gallery. I had heard so much about this Collection and how it was a symbol of successful syncretism, a tangible representation of egalitarian ideas, evidence of pedagogic tools and of course important to the community. But my experience and perception of the Collection was different.

This catalysed my move away from studying the Collection objects towards looking more broadly at creative practice, the everyday social world and history. I knew that art played multiple roles for the community and for individuals, such as economic, political and social, but how could I quantify or qualify them? I began to look at how art was used every day. I examined exactly what happened at the Art Centre. I knew what the Art Centre's goals and priorities were on paper, but what actually happened on a day-to-day basis and what did it mean to the people engaged with it? I began to document the normal things that happened at the Art Centre. In doing this I was able to track the changing role of the Warmun Community Collection and the role of the Warmun Art Centre more generally.

As part of this new journey, I looked back at the history of the community—its contact with non-Aboriginal people and adjustment to non-Aboriginal culture—in order to situate individuals and the community. I saw parallels with Manning Nash's research on the industrialisation and changes experienced by a Guatemalan community (Nash 1967) and the Berndt's examination of Yolŋu people's encounter with change (Berndt 1962). Both of these studies explore the affects, issues and changes that arose in Aboriginal communities after the penetration of Western society, which I also discuss. In this process I began to take a broad, socio-historical look at the Warmun community and how people have dealt with and continue to deal with Western values and practices. I was reminded of Robert Tonkinson's work with Mardu people and his research which showed how people were resolute in maintaining difference in relation to dominant white Australian society (2007). I wondered if it was similar in *Warrmarn*.

A recent film made by Warlpiri Media Association *Milpirri: Winds of Change* (South 2014) uses the metaphor for how rain is made to crystallise the process of adjustment experienced by the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory community of Lajamanu:

Like the Milpirri clouds themselves, hot and cold air clash together to produce the rain giving clouds. The opposites of hot and cold do not disappear, they adjust to one another and only then they are able to feed the land. By truly coming together, opening our ears and eyes to one another, not changing one another but adjusting to one another, then we can care for our community, our country and ourselves (South 2014).

Milpirri is a story about 'opposites adjusting to, but not changing, one another' (ibid). This idea is also applicable to the adjustment experienced by east Kimberley people over the last century and a half. Negotiation, compromise and adjustment continues in *Warrmarn* and by studying actions and manifestations of actions (art objects) I conceptualise how individuals are transformed and how they transform their lives amidst various constraints (self and social). I observe the complex, on-going and multifaceted interactions with art and material culture and its effects. Thus, this thesis is a complex, historical and contemporary examination of the creative, social and cultural world of *Warrmarn*. It focuses on how groups and individuals exert agency and maintain values, lifestyles and aims and how they do this when situated within larger sometimes more powerful structures and frameworks that differ from their own. The unbroken thread that runs throughout the thesis is agency. In locating

where agency is expressed, the thesis demonstrates that the production of culture and knowledge is in flux and is dynamic.

This thesis fills several gaps in literature and knowledge: it explores the development of museums and keeping places in Aboriginal communities, the hidden roles of Art Centres, how the role of art has changed over time, knowledge of learning outside of school, how people express agency, the proprietorial relationship people have with objects; and finally the purpose, use and interpretation (and reinterpretations) of objects and their dissonance, which can make Aboriginal people and sites of cultural production tangential to the objects.

The thesis is set amidst the backdrop of the Abbott Federal Liberal government's 'Indigenous Advancement Strategy' (The Australian Government 2014). The strategy began on July 1st 2014 and involved the replacement of more than one hundred and fifty individual programs and activities, with five broad programs that focused on: Jobs, Land and Economy, Children and Schooling, Safety and Wellbeing, Culture and Capability (The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation 2015). The strategy also involved the Federal government offering states and territories a 'one-off' payment to transfer their responsibility for Aboriginal communities to the states and territories. The Western Australian government accepted the \$90 million payment and later announced one hundred and fifty communities would be closed down (Minister for Indigenous Affairs 2015). The strategy has meant many Indigenous services and programs in Warmun community, and other Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley, have not received funding. This situation makes the points raised in this thesis particularly pertinent in understanding one community and how it operates, what its difficulties are and what its needs are. It is studies such as these that enable understanding about what happens 'on the ground' in a community and are vital in showing how one Art Centre fills many gaps in the needs of locals which are not filled by funding bodies, large organisations and institutions.

This thesis contributes to a wider understanding of Aboriginal art in Aboriginal communities. It is about the dynamic trajectory of the activities associated with art production and the ongoing evolving process of engagement with cultural practice that is connected to and articulates with the wider world and its institutional structures.

Warmun community and Gija Daam

Warrmarn is located in the east Kimberley region of Western Australia, approximately 190kms south of the larger town Kununurra and 160kms north of Halls Creek, on the Great

Northern Highway. The community is situated on Gija country and bordered by the language groups Walmajarri, Worla, Malignin and Miriwoong. The main three languages spoken in *Warrmarn* are Kimberley Kriol, Gija and English. The community is nestled around Turkey Creek, one of twelve creeks and rivers that flow into Bow River and onto Australia's largest man-made reservoir, Lake Argyle. The east Kimberley landscape consists of savanna and sandstone hills peppered with spinifex grasses, rocks, shrubs of wattle and fig, bloodwood, eucalypt and Boab trees. It has a sub-tropical climate with two main seasons, the wet season and the dry season; however presently, *Warrmarn* people identify three main seasons and several sub seasons. The production of an exhibition about seasonal changes *Jadagen, Warnkan, Barnden: Changing Climate in Gija Country* (Kofod et al. 2013) saw many discussions in *Warrmarn* about seasons. Those working on the exhibition found it was difficult to get consensus on the amount of seasons (pers. comm. Alana Hunt and Frances Kofod 2015).

Aboriginal people from the east Kimberley region have experienced dispossession from their Country since the first arrival of explorers (more detail in Chapter Three). The arrival of settlers saw the development of a number of pastoral properties throughout the east Kimberley. The first cattlemen arrived in 1882 (Ross and Drakakis-Smith 1983, 328). As the pastoral industry grew, Aboriginal men and women worked on the stations, only to leave after the introduction of award wages in 1968 (more detail in Chapter Four). Many people in the greater east Kimberley region resettled at Turkey Creek after they left the stations. Before European settlement, the Turkey Creek area had been a holiday camp for Aboriginal families during the wet season. Later, it became a ration depot, a travellers' inn, a telegraph station, a post office and police station. In my interviews about the transition from pastoral stations to *Warrmarn* (Chapter Four), I uncover the complexity of this period.

The most recent census records taken in 2010 found that there were two hundred and thirty one Aboriginal people in Warmun community, with the median age of twenty-one years old and one hundred and thirty-five males and ninety-eight females (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011) However, it is acknowledged that these figures are inaccurate.³ *Warrmarn's* population is generally considered to be around four hundred and fifty to five hundred people. The neighbouring communities are *Woorreranginy*, *Roogoon*, *Joorwoorlinyji* and *Yarangga* and people living in them utilise *Warrmarn* as an administrative and resource

³ The 2009 Baseline Community Profile also picked up a major discrepancy between qualitative results and 'on the ground' results (Compass 2009, 9).

hub. The combined population of *Warrmarn* and surrounding outstations is said to be approximately six hundred and fifty to seven hundred people (Compass 2009, 9).

The Warmun Council governs the community. Its funding is derived from Commonwealth and State government grants, Rio Tinto/Argyle Diamond Mine and local service fees. The community elects the Council with the assistance of the Chief Executive Officer. The Council, made up entirely of local Aboriginal members, meets regularly to make policy and other decisions on community affairs. The Council is effectively the local government and provides a wide range of municipal, essential, social and commercial services. It manages a number of community-based service facilities and programs to generate employment and income opportunities, such as *Werra Werra Taam* Women's Centre, *Wungkul* Community Store, *Wanyanyakem Taam* Early Learning & Child Care Centre, an aged care facility, sports facilities, a swimming pool, a recreation centre, the Turkey Creek Roadhouse and Caravan Park and health clinic (Toure 2012, 5). Enterprises independent of the Council are the Ngalangangpum Catholic School, the Mirrilingki Spirituality Centre, the Warmun Health Clinic, the Police and the Warmun Art Centre. The municipal services carried out by the Warmun Council include landscaping and parks, refuse collection, fencing, environmental health, refuse tip maintenance and airstrip maintenance and the essential services provided are electricity, water, sewerage and housing upgrade and maintenance (Toure 2012, 6).

The Warmun Community Collection

The Warmun Community Collection is a body of handmade and hand-decorated objects. Most of the objects were originally used in the Ngalangangpum School since its inception and through the 1980s, as pedagogic aids, and the remaining objects were made in Ngalangangpum classes, gifts to teachers and Sisters, found objects in the community, objects used in ceremony and then used at Ngalangangpum School, and objects that various Art Centre managers, artists, leaders and community workers deemed significant and consequently added to the Collection. At present, the Warmun Community Collection consists of around three hundred and forty objects, however, this number is an estimate as items are continuously being added, especially after the 2011 flood. The Collection awaits the community determining its future direction and forming a steering committee to establish what is a part of the Collection, how people will access the Collection, its future role and future form.

The Warmun Art Centre

The Warmun Art Centre is an Aboriginal owned not-for-profit corporation, governed by the Office of Registrar of Indigenous Corporations. The Warmun Art Centre has been operating in its current form since 1998. The Centre began as a subsidiary of Warmun Community Turkey Creek Incorporated until the 21st of June 2005, when it became separately incorporated as the Warmun Art Aboriginal Corporation under the Commonwealth *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976* (Australian Government Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations n.d.). Steered by its Board of Directors, in 2015 the mission of the Art Centre states:

Warmun Art Centre is a business owned by and for Gija people of Warmun community. Warmun Art Centre makes life better, happier and healthier for all generations of Gija people through sharing Gija culture to create opportunities for income and jobs. Culture is the way Gija people understand and express their language, stories, Dreaming, song, dance, art, kinship, country and ways to look after each other (Warmun Art Centre and Creative Economy 2015, 18).

The strategic plan for the future is to:

Be a business that keeps Gija culture strong to strengthen Gija generations through opportunities to work, learn, earn, teach and train into the future (ibid).

Like other art centres around Australia, Warmun Art Centre provides the space and materials for community members to make art. The Centre markets the artists and their works nationally and internationally to the art market. Sales are divided into a 60/40 split to the artists. *Warrmarn* artists are well known and respected for their use of natural ochre on canvas. Warmun Art Centre sells directly to buyers through its gallery in *Warrmarn* and also freights artworks to galleries and buyers all over the world. Over 60% of art sales are made direct at Warmun Art Centre (Warmun Art Centre and Creative Economy 2015, 12). More than half of these sales are made to collectors and the remaining sales are to tourists and people interested in Aboriginal culture. Just under 40% of art sales are made through a network of galleries throughout Australia and internationally.

Whilst art centres are most commonly known for their role in facilitating artistic careers, they also play other roles, such as educating the broader public about Aboriginal regional and cultural history and values, recording and preserving artworks, facilitating knowledge

sharing between generations, reinforcing cultural practice and teaching Aboriginal people about commercial businesses and governance.

Lirrgarn

In this thesis I use the Gija term for learning and teaching—*lirrgarn*. *Lirrgarn* is the learning embedded in social processes where participants are, to varying degrees, active. *Lirrgarn* also involves reciprocity and exchange in the teaching and learning process. Eileen Bray, leader and linguist in *Warrmarn*, said that: '*lirrgarn* is both ways, teaching and learning' (pers. comm. 2014). The reciprocity encompassed by this single word is fundamentally different to any English word. Where English has two words binary words—teach and learn—*lirrgarn* in fact encompasses both roles. I first heard Rusty Peters use the term *lirrgarn* when he was frustrated at his grandchildren because they were not learning: 'You gotta *lirrgarn*!' he exclaimed to them. On the other hand, I heard Eileen use it when she was urging Rusty to teach his grandchildren: 'You gotta *lirrgarn* them!' I take *lirrgarn* to mean the way in which individuals become equipped to act and be in their social and physical environment. In *Warrmarn*, its use has broadened over time and is used commonly to refer to any transference of information and knowledge, as long as it is the 'right way.'

Literature

Art historical and anthropological

The first anthropologist who conducted work in the Kimberley region was Professor Adolphus Elkin, under the supervision of Professor Radcliffe-Brown for twelve months in 1927-28. A few years later, Phyllis Kaberry conducted fieldwork under Professor Elkin's supervision in 1934 and in 1935-36 in the east Kimberley. Elkin and Kaberry documented rock painting sites (Elkin 1930), social systems, kinship, beliefs, relations (Elkin 1933; Kaberry 1937/1938), languages (Elkin and Capell 1937/1938; Kaberry 1937/1938) hunting expeditions and corroborees (Kaberry 1939). They were the first to connect the concept of Country and *Ngarranggarni* with identity and traditional Law. Phyllis Kaberry identified creative and visual aspects of east Kimberley Aboriginal culture. For example, Kaberry found that in the cicatrisation (scarification) of women, marks were made on their chests, arms, hips and thighs after puberty. Kaberry also found that in hunting, men would smear themselves and their spears with yellow ochre, in marriage-like ceremonies the man and woman would cover themselves in red ochre and in ceremonies women would paint

themselves to look like their animal totems (1939, 77). While Kaberry and Elkin spent a lot of time on the north-west coast of Western Australia, they also travelled along the Ord River and Fitzroy Rivers to learn from Gija people at the Moola Bulla and Violet Valley reserves and the stations Bedford Downs and Alice Downs. Kaberry spent considerable time with east Kimberley Aboriginal women learning rites, customs and law, marriage, birth and general women's business. At the same time, linguist Ernest Worms examined onomatopoeia and the development of Kriol in Kimberley languages (Worms 1937/1938, 1937/1938).

There have been various studies of material culture in the east Kimberley. Of note in particular are Kim Akerman's research on pearl shell trade routes (Akerman and Stanton 1994) and initiation practices in the 1970s and 1980s (Akerman 1979) along with Catherine and Ronald Berndt's research in the Kimberley region, which looked at objects of material culture and relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (Berndt 1977; Berndt and Berndt 1979; Shaw 1980).

Frances Kofod has been living and working in the east Kimberley for approximately twenty-six years and has extensive knowledge of east Kimberley Aboriginal culture, languages and recent history.⁴ In 2013 she completed a four-year project that involved the translation of stories from paintings and their relationship to the landscape and the language used to speak about landscape. In her study and documentation of the Gija language she uses artworks to help Gija speakers explain unique and culturally specific expressions and words, affirming the statement by leaders that 'you can't know your culture if you don't know the language' (Kofod 2003, 1).

Anthropologist Kim Barber worked on land tenure in the region and in 2003 submitted a report on behalf of the Water and Rivers Commission, Western Australia, that presented the cultural, environmental, social and economic values Aboriginal people from the region associated with the Ord River and its flood-plains and wetlands (Barber and Rumley 2003). Like Kofod in her Miriwoong and Gajirrabeng Native title case (Australasian Legal Information Institute 2005), Barber used paintings as symbols of continuity and connection to land for land claims.

⁴ Kofod first came to Kununurra in 1971 and conducted four field trips on behalf of the University of New England. She moved to Kununurra in 1987, spent four years in Darwin from 1996, worked at Warmun Community from 1987-88 and helped the Mirima Council set up Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre in 1989. In doing so, she began researching the Miriwoong language and developed an orthography for it and the neighbouring language Gajirrabeng.

Writing on the east Kimberley art movement commonly begins with the advent of the *Goorirr Goorirr* ceremony. Various people have written about the event, including anthropologists and art historians (Akerman 1989, 2005; Christensen 1993; Kjellgren 1999, 2002; Morvan 2009; Stanton 1989; Sweeney 2009), journalists (Cunningham 2012; Field 2008; Hartley 2000; O'Brien 2002), curators (Crumlin 1984; Eccles 2006; Holmes à Court Gallery 2003, 2005, 2008; Michael 2006; Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney 2007; National Gallery of Australia 1994; Oliver and Starr 2002, 2003; Ryan 1998, 2006; Wright 1999) and Sisters of the Catholic Church (Ahern 1991; Crumlin 1988, 1991, 1998).

Some writers have focused on individual east Kimberley artists. Jennifer Joi Field chronicled the life of artist Queenie McKenzie (2008) based on the anthropological work of Patricia Vinnicombe (1996). Kim Akerman has written about Paddy Jaminji (2005) and most recently Suzanne Spinner completed a doctoral thesis on the life of Rover Thomas; though not a Gija man, he played a significant role in the east Kimberley art movement (2013). There are exhibition catalogues that describe the lives of artists, such as Rover Thomas (Holmes à Court Gallery 2003), Paddy Jaminji (Holmes à Court Gallery 2005), Hector Jandany (Warmun Art Aboriginal Corporation 2004) and Lena Nyadbi (Warmun Art Aboriginal Corporation 2010).

Eric Kjellgren looked specifically at the relationship between art and the *Goorirr Goorirr* corroboree (2002) and the manner in which Aboriginal artists move between 'two worlds'—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal (1999). French curator Arnaud Morvan examined the relationship between performance, landscape and memory in the east Kimberley (2009). Barbara Glowczewski, a French anthropologist who began working in Australia in 1979, focused on identity politics in east Kimberley art (1999). Mayke Kranenburg discussed the display of Warmun art and the different conceptions of value and authenticity for the artists in comparison with the 'outside' art world (2004). She touched on the idea that Warmun artists used painting to communicate local knowledge and cultural identity to a younger generation at the Ngalangangpum School.

Many texts state that the east Kimberley art movement began with the *Goorirr Goorirr* ceremony as if the movement had a single beginning and little had changed since that moment (Cunningham 2012; Davidson 2006; Hartley 2000; Michael 2006; Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney 2007; National Gallery of Australia 1994; Nowra 1998; O'Brien 2002; Oliver and Starr 2002, 2003; Ryan 1998, 2006). In reality, the origins of east Kimberley visual and material culture come from the tradition of making objects for cultural

activity and as part of everyday life for thousands of years (Kaberry 1939). Painting, marking and incising was enacted on bodies, land formations, handmade decorative and ritual objects in performative contexts that were situational, ephemeral and often site-specific. One of the many aims of this thesis is to engage not only with artworks, but also with people: their history and their current circumstances, and to avoid presenting Gija culture or *Warrmarn* as static or unchanging. Although this previous work has proven influential in my own thinking, many of the arts-writers focus on the relationship between east Kimberley Aboriginal people and those outside the east Kimberley. I, on the other hand, examine *Warrmarn* people's actions and their relationship with creative practices within their own social-historical and political context.

Oral history

In using unstructured interviews and archival research for some parts of this thesis, I am indebted to a number of oral history projects conducted in the east Kimberley that have helped shape my understanding of the region's history. Although there are only a few, they are illuminating. Funded by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Bruce Shaw interviewed eighteen east Kimberley Aboriginal people from mid July 1973 to January 1974 and from July to October 1974. Those interviewed spoke about their lives and experiences in regard to work on cattle stations, the introduction of award wages, drinking, citizenship, kinship, displacement from the stations, the relocation to towns and relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to contribute to the oral history of the region (Shaw 1980, 1992).

The East Kimberley Impact Assessment Project (EKIAP) was an extensive study of the social and economic impacts of major resource developments in the east Kimberley—principally the Argyle Diamond Mine and the Ord River irrigation scheme—from 1985-1987. Carried out by the Centre for Resource and Environment Studies at the Australian National University, thirty-four reports sourced archival documents from early explorers and settlers and conducted interviews with Aboriginal people (Altman 1987; Bolger 1987; Clement 1989a, 1989b; Donovan 1986; Ross and Bray 1989; Ross 1989). The data gathered is abundant in detail and insight. Only a handful of Aboriginal people interviewed are still alive today.

After interviewing people about the impact of larger companies and organisations, Warmun community administrator Allan Tegg (who succeeded Michael Dillon as Warmun

community adviser) developed a resource book for Aboriginal organisations and communities about how to negotiate with resource developers (1989).

The Moola Bulla oral history project run by the Kimberley Language Resource Centre from 1987-1989 culminated in a substantial book of memories and experiences from the Moola Bulla pastoral station run by the Western Australian Department of Native Welfare in the east Kimberley (1910-1955). The stories cover *Ngarranggarni*, first contact, work on the stations and daily life. The impetus for the project came from Aboriginal leaders in the east Kimberley who wanted their language and history recorded to ensure it was passed on and because their experiences had been 'influential in moulding the character of the East Kimberley' (Kimberley Language Resource Centre 1996, xi).

Sister Veronica Ryan's book *From Digging Sticks to Writing Sticks* was developed after her time as Ngalangangpum School principal. The book contains many *Ngarranggarni* stories and oral histories from the pastoral period, the transition to Turkey Creek, the establishment of the Warmun community and the establishment of the Ngalangangpum School. At times, the book positions the community as empowered people ensuing a determined future, particularly in their quest for their own community and their own Two Way school. In a similar way, Sr. Margaret Stewart's book *Ngalangangpum Jarrakpu Purruun, Mother and Child: The Women of Warmun* chronicles the lives of leading women in *Warrmarn* and recounts some of their cultural knowledge and values (1999). Both books contain important cultural and historic experiences and knowledge that contributes to the oral archive of the region, but they are not without their biases.

I am also influenced by the analytical work of Richard Davis, whose interviews and subsequent social and historical analysis of the region's history has resulted in an insightful understanding of the paradoxical position Aboriginal people were in during the pastoral period. In his enquiry into the complex interplay of Aboriginal pastoralism and Aboriginal identity in this region (2004, 2005), Davis crystallises the irony in this complex period: Aboriginal people accepted and embraced the pastoral lifestyle although in some cases it removed people from their land and as a consequence, distanced them from their practices and working and human rights. Davis argues that working in the pastoral industry did not diminish their Aboriginal identity but added to it and changed it, making it new and unique (2005, 54). I reached similar conclusions in my oral histories for *Warrmarn*.

Art, value and agency

My analysis of artworks and creative practice has parallels with Nicholas Thomas's study of culturally specific forms of value and objectification (1991, 9). In his study of objects moving between Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies, he focused on the different value systems placed on objects, arguing that static readings of objects of material culture are unproductive and deductive. Like Thomas, part of my analysis is of the objects themselves, but I also discuss their *journey* or 'social lives' as Igor Kopytoff would term it (1986) when they move in different worlds. In doing this, I demonstrate that objects have histories which shape their reception, however I do not place greater importance on the objects through their recontextualisation by the Western art world, thereby subordinating their original context. Therefore, this is less of a study about the reception of art and more about the changing role and value of particular art objects within *Warrmarn*. Part of the development of the role of art is the acknowledgement that it plays different roles in societies and people's lives, at different times. This involves moving it away from stagnant, singular definitions. In this thesis, art is understood from a variety of frames (see Morphy 2001 for further discussion).

I also frame this study based on the view that objects can act as receptacles and representations of act/s, thought/s and belief/s and they can be agentive (d'Azevedo 1973; Dipert 1993; Gell 1998; Osborne and Tanner 2007). They can enable one to *see* an 'ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which is detached itself as art, and to which it alludes' (Althusser 1972, 222). I do not seek to foreground objects and deny the agency of the artists, as Alfred Gell suggests when he makes the point that objects 'do' something to people and thus have their own agency (2007, 200) but I do agree with Gell's resolution that 'human agency is experienced within the material world' and, that 'artifacts [and in this case, artworks/objects] are secondary agents through which primary agents (people) distribute their agency' (1998, 20).

In framing artistic and creative practice as an agentive action, I use action as a framework to determine values and priorities. Value creation in art, as Morphy explains,

is produced or located in objects in the context of social action and through socialisation into regimes of value associated with objects (2005, 21).

In viewing artworks and actions as a manifestation of human action and value, I am able to identify value creation processes and chart how they have changed.

Agency and practice theory

In this thesis I describe words, actions and manifestations of actions. More specifically, I am interested in the ways that people express themselves and position themselves against and with static and bound notions of social totalities. Such a focus is informed by critical social theory that recognised agency in human behaviour and developed out of mid twentieth century structural functionalism. Sherry Ortner's work has largely informed my aim to 'restore the individual to the social process' in order to understand how people 'act in relation to the larger structures that constrain (and enable)' them (Ortner 2005, 33; 2006, 3). Her work grew out of the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977), Anthony Giddens (1979) and Marshall Sahlins (1981), all of whom set out to explain and understand relations and practices between individuals and structures and systems that constrain them (2006, 2). Like Ortner, I do not position participants as being determined or entirely free, but bound to some extent by the conditions that surround them (2005, 32). I use Ortner's refined concept of practice theory to show how individuals' actions transform and reinforce their worlds and the hierarchical structures that surround them, thus exposing the sometimes contradictory, complicated nature of actions and how people engage or disengage with the structures of power around them.

Indeed, I take the position that social wholes (institutions, cultures, social structure, traditions, etc.) are not immutable, and should be considered contextually and historically, just as actions need to be understood 'as components of a larger culture or society' (Rouse 2007, 500). Moreover, whilst these social wholes can seem monolithic and cumbersome, they are in reality constituted by individuals who have their own priorities, feelings, agendas and behaviour. Thus, I do not present my case studies as the individual versus the 'super' structure—whilst it might appear so at first glance—in fact quite the opposite. I reveal the precariousness and dynamism of social life by focusing on the minutia, through actions and material expressions of actions and words. I use history as building blocks to explain and contextualise individuals and the *Warrmarn* community.

Perspectives that place people as victims of their own circumstance, unable to change or empower themselves tend to enforce a binary of the oppressor and the oppressed (discussed by Cummins and Arinze 1996). This position tends to blame the individual 'as the proximate cause of their own failure' (McDermott and Varenne 1995, 334) and does not acknowledge change or other factors, such as economic structures, social codes and historical circumstances which contribute to one's behaviour. Not seeking to deduce the social world

to the binaries of oppressor/oppressed, victim/perpetrator, this thesis highlights the ways in which people reclaim agency and express themselves. James Scott's seminal work *Weapons of the Weak* (1985) has proved highly influential in this quest because it describes how people (re)claim agency in the everyday in forms that are more often than not covert and silent.

Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's study of a community's resistance to hegemonies has also shaped this study (1993). An ethnography of youth subculture in Britain, *Resistance Through Rituals* looks at the actions, behaviours, beliefs and actions of a community. Hall and Jefferson describe exactly how youth resist and counter hegemonic strategies. Of the many examples given, 'doing nothing' (which involves hanging out on the streets, talking, goofing around with no overt purpose or plans), is one method employed by young people to resist social expectations of working, going to school, doing exercise and family commitments. Of note is Paul Willis's study of working class 'lads' in England, *Learning to Labor* (1977). His study not only crystallised the importance of identifying differences in values and practices in communities, but also how individuals resisted the values their school represented in order to gain control over their world. Willis showed that there was a mismatch between what their school informed 'the lads' about their future and what they actually experienced in their social world. *Learning to Labor* and *Resistance Through Rituals* show how people challenge the structures around them.

Informal learning

It was Suzanne Gaskins and Ruth Paradise's simple description of Adi, the Yucatec Maya girl who learns tortilla-making without any deliberate periods of concentration that opened my eyes to informal learning. Adi, who regularly spent time around her mother when she made tortillas, learnt how to do it herself by silent absorption, observation and from her own initiative—'with no evidence of verbal instructions and no encouragement' (2010, 83). For me, this catalysed how learning occurs when it is unstructured and purpose driven or outcome motivated.

Following this, I define informal learning as the learning that occurs socially and in the everyday environment. I define learning within government or institutional structures as 'formal'. Formal learning is usually separate from the context of everyday life and largely dependent on verbal, non-collaborative, direct instruction teaching techniques (Greenfield 1999). This is not to say that verbal, non-collaborative, direct instruction does not occur outside of formal learning environments or that formal learning environments do not

incorporate non-verbal, collaborative processes or is separate from the context of everyday life. Whilst neither learning environments have strict criteria, my point is that informal learning occurs within the social environment, as Inge Kral and Jerry Schwab note:

Policies and programs too often equate 'learning' with 'schooling' but these are fundamentally different things. School is a limited institution, both temporally and socially, but learning is a fundamental feature of human life (Kral and Schwab 2012, 45).

Later in the thesis I present and analyse various sites where learning and transmission occurs in the social environment, in order to highlight the attributes and qualities. I draw from a research field that enquires into the anthropology of learning and incorporates socialisation, history and the individual into the knowledge acquisition process. The field finds its roots in the work of Lev Vygotsky whose pedagogic theories highlighted how individual development is formed from social, cultural and historical contexts (1962, 1978). Vygotsky proposed that the environment determines the development of human thought; hence, learning has a social character and is interdependent with the environment and our own experiences/socialisation. Similarly, Barbara Rogoff has studied several Indigenous and non Indigenous communities and has identified the transference of different cultural and social practices and beliefs (2003, 51).

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's pioneering study of communities of practice also moulded this research project because they identified the learning that occurs in social groups, that was location specific and outcome motivated (1991). Through their case study of midwives, tailors, quartermasters, butchers and non-drinking alcoholics, Lave and Wenger viewed 'the agent, activity and the world as mutually constitutive' arguing that 'learning is enhanced when the links between content and context are acknowledged and supported' (1991, 43). Their study broke new ground in acknowledging how informal learning occurs.

Patricia Greenfield's research on the Tzotzil weavers in Zinacantán region of Mexico details how the weavers transferred their weaving skills to younger generations in the social environment over a thirty-year period (Greenfield 2004; Greenfield and Childs 1980). She identified characteristics of the Zinacantec (informal) learning model and acknowledged the impact contemporary culture and globalism has had on the practice over time.

In my examples I look within the domain of the Warmun Art Centre to find out what is transferred and how it is transferred. I examine the learning that is often unnoticed because

it is embedded in social processes (Bock 2010; Paradise and Rogoff 2009), as John Bock, Suzanne Gaskins and David Lancy note:

The most difficult challenge for studying this kind of learning is that it is often an unmarked, fully integrated, almost invisible, part of everyday interactions. It often occurs when a caregiver or other “teacher” has no specific intention to teach, and sometimes even when the child has no specific intention to learn (2010, 87).

It is this type of learning that is paramount in the transference of social and cultural values, ways of being and practices. This thesis can be read as a contribution to the blossoming field of informal learning.

Methodology

Under the anthropological umbrella, my methods of data collection involved ethnography, unstructured interviews for oral histories and memories, archival research of government, academic and community documents and artwork analysis from art historical and visual anthropological frameworks.

Memory and oral history

The history relayed in Chapters Three and Four are the foundation of this thesis, the base coat of Gesso applied to a stretched canvas.⁵ In these chapters, I use memory to track moments within the changing social, economic, political and cultural landscape of the east Kimberley in the first half of the twentieth century. These moments are not the momentous events commonly relayed in linear, objective history writing; they are instead the moments of disjuncture, cruelty, kindness and adaptation that exist in living memory and are transferred to others today. Whilst some of the memories presented here are contested in terms of their historical accuracy, they are used to help understand personal histories and help compose a holistic understanding of shared consciousness and identity in the *Warrmarn*.

Indeed, the branch of history writing that covers 'the sequence of things, events, persons, [and] processes ... that precede the present' (Morphy and Morphy 1984, 459) is important and valid. However, in this research I retell history through memory in order to explore

⁵ Gesso is the white paint mixture of chalk, gypsum and pigment applied to all canvases as a primer at the Warmun Art Centre.

what is often a neglected part of ethno-history—'the integration of the past within the consciousness of the present' (Morphy and Morphy 1984, 460). My approach is based on Frances and Howard Morphy's idea that the past 'provides a framework for future action' (1984, 459) and Randall Dipert's claim that 'behavior is a consequence of "historical" process' (1993, 41). Following the belief that the past informs one's actions in the present, my analysis means that subjective histories must be acknowledged. This has led me to a processual⁶ analysis of individuals and the creative practices, incorporating history into the present, as explored in *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* (Holland et al. 1998).

I use memory because, like oral histories, it enables the reconstruction and understanding of history through the 'minor' individual. Oral histories present perspectives previously unheard and relatively unknown; they are those from 'below' or from outside dominant history forms and structures. Retelling 'history from below' is inspired by Edward Thompson's work, *The Making of an English Working Class* (1980)—which presents the largely obscured and unknown social worlds of the English working class. Oral histories question power dynamics of mainstream history writing and interrogate canonical histories and the modern colonial experience, to which Australia is a part. They have reversed structural and historical power dynamics and the dominance of the modern colonial experience. A recognition and subsequent understanding of narratives and actions of people from 'below' effectively critiques dominant knowledge forms and their applicability in society. They are also a means of agency for the individual. Bain Attwood has discussed the development of oral histories and how the 'age of testimony' has seen the recording of 'hidden' narratives as evidence of history (2008).

Just as memory and oral histories contest mainstream representations of history, so can art. Anthropologist John Stanton argues that 'the production of art may be viewed as a deliberate act of defiance against the increasingly strong influence of the wider non-Aboriginal society' (1989, 12). Artworks from *Warrmarn* rupture dominant narratives by presenting narratives that have historically been buried. An example of such a rupture are paintings that depict massacres in the east Kimberley, made by various *Warrmarn* artists. The Mistake Creek massacre, for example, is contested by Keith Windschuttle (2001) and Rod Moran contests the Bedford Downs massacre as well as the Mistake Creek massacre

⁶ It is from historical studies, not archaeology, that I form my definition of processual. See Hodder (1986) for a different, archaeological understanding of the term processual.

(2001, 2002, 2002b) (discussed further in Chapter Three). In painting these events, the artists are attesting their existence and challenging those who deny them.

Defiance through art is a powerful way in which people can assert themselves. For example, Yolŋu artist Banduk Marika protested against the Australian Government's Emergency Intervention in the Northern Territory by covering her own artwork with a black shroud at Yirrkala. Usually, for Yolŋu people, the sale of their art and the production of their art for outsiders is seen as a kind of gift to people from outside their community—hence, in covering up the public work, Banduk is retracting her 'gift', making it a political act. Art historian Susan Lowish discussed the protest highlighting the way art can be used to act in the political world (2009).

Returning to oral history: critics argue it is selectivity and subjectivity that make it flawed and problematic; it is nostalgic and lacks factual merit and accuracy (see Post 2009). But there is a difference between using oral history as data for history and using it for anthropology. The distinction is significant because a subjective history helps elucidate the individual and the social circumstances which shape them: why one behaves a certain way and believes in certain things is a result of individual experiences. This is a fundamental premise of the thesis. Greg Dening positions the role of narrative history as being a transformation of the past, but acknowledges that:

It is never the past itself [,] it is always the past in another form, a metaphor of the past. But our histories, those moment-after interpretations, are our present. We live our roles in them, our gender, our institutions, our power and our powerlessness. Our histories are the metonyms of our present (2003, 230).

Indeed, as metonyms, histories are malleable and can vary according to different people. Thus, there are histories that can be accessed relatively independent of the metonyms. Bearing in mind this malleability and the (potentially) disputed nature of oral histories and objects of creative practice, I have woven in some historical documents and government legislation in Chapters Three and Four, in order to build on and situate the experiences of my research participants. This helps gain a greater understanding of the sequence of events and how they affected people. However, it is the words, actions and manifestations of actions that sit at the forefront of this analysis.

Ethnography

Throughout the thesis I use ethnography to understand *Warrmarn* residents. In my ethnographic and visual case studies in Chapters Eight and Nine, I use the activity as a unit of analysis in anecdotal and descriptive fashion, as Barbara Rogoff does in *Apprenticeship in Thinking* (1990). Rogoff focuses on activities that have 'active and dynamic contributions from individuals, their social partners and historical traditions' which make them significant. In her work, as in mine, personal, interpersonal and community processes are interdependent. Rogoff believes these factors should be:

Considered separately without losing track of their inherent interdependence in the whole. Their structure can be described without assuming that the structure of each is independent of that or the others. Foregrounding one plane of focus still involves the participation of the background planes of focus (1993, 141).

I am influenced by Clifford Geertz's description of a Balinese cockfight and seek to illicit a similar, high amount of detail in my descriptions of activities (1975), mindful of Ortner's criticism that much ethnographic description lacks detail (1995). I strive to follow Ortner's call for a robust anthropology of subjectivity that does not refuse 'in-depth thickness' (1995) in order to 'understand subjectivity in its relations to (changing) forms of power, especially the subtle forms of power that saturate everyday life' (2005, 46). Thus, in my ethnographic descriptions, I focus on what is said, what is acted and what is made (objects of creative practice) in order to bring attention to ordinary 'forms of living' in a similar way to Kathleen Stewart in *Ordinary Affects* (2007, 5). In my case studies, I discuss the actions of everyone involved—which includes non-Aboriginal people.

In doing so, I do not engage with the politics of the 'shared' space, the 'intercultural' and 'intercultural spaces'. The actions and activities I examine are not, as Homi Bhabha describes, a 'third space' where two distinct perspectives, or groups, come together (1994, 22) nor do I position them as 'intercultural' in the sense that Francesca Merlan uses in her study of the Northern Territorial town of Katherine (1998). As Frances Morphy and Howard Morphy have argued, such a position can place Aboriginal people in a 'non-agentive category, where they must merge with the mainstream' (2013). Here I am seeking to highlight the opposite: the ways in which Aboriginal people assert their autonomy and priorities.

Visual anthropology

In this thesis I analyse objects through formal visual analysis, content analysis and socio-historical analysis. I use a four-pronged approach set out by Haselberger and reiterated by d'Azevedo many years ago, which involves 'the detailed systematic study of individual art objects, biographical data on the artist, the study of art in the whole structure of the culture and the history of art in particular societies' (d'Azevedo 1973, 6). However I have expanded my analysis to also include an iconographical analysis of the works and a content analysis, which includes some information about the artist and the story they have narrated for the work.

My analysis is shaped by the use of visual anthropology to understand and analyse groups and individuals. I draw from several studies that place importance on the visual aspects of life, which enhances the richness of my ethnographic descriptions. Primarily, Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead's photographic study of the intangible aspects of Balinese culture (1942), was groundbreaking for me as it set me on my path to recognising the value in visual analysis of everyday actions. The work of Jeremy Coote was also influential in showing me how it is possible to develop a definition of a shared aesthetic from his analysis of material culture of Nilotes people from southern Sudan (1992). I use this method in my examination of the Warmun Community Collection and current artwork from *Warrmarn*. Finally, David Guss's examination of the weaving traditions of the Yekuana people argues for a multipronged approach to viewing objects of material culture; one that considers the aesthetics, function, skill and narration (Guss 2006), which I align with, however, unlike Guss, who tends to set a narrow trajectory for community members, in this thesis I present people and their culture as dynamic and changing.

Chapter 2

The *Warrambany* at *Warrmarn*

Introduction

I begin now with the *Warrambany* of 2011 because it occurred at the beginning of my research project and because it played a central role in the shift of my research focus. The *Warrambany* forced me to move away from examining art objects and their 'lives' (influenced by the work of Kopytoff 1986) to looking at the engagement and participation Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people had with the Warmun Community Collection. The *Warrambany* also brought to light the ongoing theme of adjustment and change experienced by *Warrmarn* people which links into the overarching theme of how community members exert agency and negotiated throughout the process of change.

In this chapter I recount the events immediately preceding and following the *Warrambany*, firstly for community members and then for the Warmun Community Collection. I chart the events succeeding the flood to contextualise the impact of the flood for community members, highlighting issues of agency and adjustment. I then track the journey of the damaged Warmun Community Collection after the *Warrambany* and consider the interactions that artists and art workers had with the objects and their makers (and families). The underlying queries I have are: who are the agents in the conservation process and what agency did *Warrmarn* people have in the flood aftermath—in regard to their own lives and the Collection? This brings to the fore a fundamental question this thesis seeks to answer: what is the role and value of the Warmun Community Collection to *Warrmarn* people?

The Warrambany of Warrmarn

Jadagen time in early 2011 had seen more rain than usual. By March it was *yiwirrn* rain and the soil in *Warrmarn* was saturated so much it could not absorb any more water. *Warrmarn* received over 500mm in early March, four times its average rainfall for that time of year (Gooding and Searle 2014, 15). During a normal wet season, Turkey Creek peaks at around

one to three metres above creek bed level but prior to the inundation on 13th of March 2011, it had reached up to four to five metres several times. Maggie Fletcher, then Art Centre manager, was returning to *Warrmarn* on the 11th of March with some artists from an exhibition in Perth. On her journey south down the Great Northern Highway, Bow River could not be crossed. The bridge was under water. They spent the night in the car, waiting for the water to go down. Upon their return to *Warrmarn*, they learnt that the Turkey Creek bridge had also gone under several times whilst they were away. It rained all night on Saturday the 12th.

When Maggie rose on the morning of the 13th, Turkey Creek was wider and higher than she had ever seen. Local policeman Sergeant Don Cooper had shut Turkey Creek Bridge—the only crossing point between the two sides of the community—at 6am. Forty-two people were stranded on The Other Side (see Appendix A for community map), in their homes and at the Art Centre (Gooding and Searle 2014, 17). Maggie and her husband Gary began stacking paintings on trestle tables in the Gallery, in case water rose. Betty Carrington, Sade Carrington, Roberta Daylight and some children walked over to the Art Centre and offered Maggie and Gary help (Plate 2.1). In the Warmun Community Collection room, they put as many objects on the top levels of the shelves. Maggie called me that morning and told me she was worried about the Collection, but all they could do was wait and watch.



Plate 2.1 Sade Carrington and children at the Warmun Art Centre Gallery entrance ramp, 13th March 2011. Photo by Maggie Fletcher.



Plate 2.2 The Warmun Art Centre Gallery front entrance ramp, 1st February 2014.

By 1pm, as the torrent grew in Turkey Creek, Warmun CEO Chris Clare and Senior-Sergeant Rod Burnby evacuated 'Garden Area' and the Walumba Aged Care Facility—they were the closest to the Creek (Gooding and Searle 2014, 17) (See mud map of community in Appendix A). Dallas Purdie described the inundation of water to ABC Kimberley reporter Clancy McDowell:

Turkey Creek was running pretty fast, the water came over that, after it broke its bank, it only took an hour for it to start to going through the community so we only had an hour, some people only had an hour, some people had half an hour, some people had twenty minutes, depends on where your house was. Then the road through the community that runs north south became a river, another creek or river, and it was just flowing fast. There was cars getting washed down the road, it was just yeah, we seen it on TV in Queensland and you think it won't happen to us, we on higher ground, it was just a sight (McDowell 2011).

As Dallas describes, the western tributary of Turkey Creek combined with the run-off water from the black-soil plains to the east of the community and through the hills to the west. The water ripped through all the houses and buildings. The water peaked at 300mm in just 24 hours (pers. comm. Maggie Fletcher, 2015) and Turkey Creek had reached to a height of nine metres (Gooding and Searle 2014, 19). Madigan Thomas recalled that they flooded 'every way':

All that water coming down from hill. From every hill. That big mountain hill, *Killarney* – all that and all this side, la *Warrmarn* side. That big hill all come into the river. All the water come in from, run into that big river la Warmun. That's what happened to us, now flooded everyway. But from that side, Art Centre side, flood running in all that hill. Because he never stop raining. Raining, raining, raining all day—night and day—he never stop. All that water been just coming down, slowly, coming la flood everyway.⁷

In 2012, I asked Nancy Nodea about the flood and she said there was:

No warning or nothing. This rain coming down like now and I was sitting down in that old camp, and I bin watching that *warrambany*, straight down, you know that bough shed, I bin look, 'ay he's over the bank!', that side he is over the bank, yeah and Marcus bin come out. 'Yeah *awooj*, he this side now, la black tree' [said Marcus]. We didn't know he coming that way now [from the hills]. And I bin look, this water coming through, and this lot keep playing, at that water, them

⁷ Interview with Jane Yalunga-Tinmaree and Alana Hunt on the 23rd May, 2011, at the Kununurra *Garrjang* Camp. Courtesy of Warmun Art Centre archives.

young ones and I bin telling them 'hey, slow down, you don't know what dis, he never come up that much before' I bin tell them. Get away, true right, he bin over all the camp (pers. comm. 2012).

People were stranded where they were until at least 8pm on Sunday when the water subsided.⁸ Then people moved to higher ground at the Mirrilingki Spiritual Centre, the Roadhouse and the Art Centre manager's house.

Mabel Juli's painting *Ngumulu* (Plate 2.3) depicts clouds in the centre of the canvas, over the community, with rivers of water descending into it from all directions, suggesting that water came from the clouds as well as the hills that surround the community. Mabel spoke at length about the flooding, documented on the painting certificate:



Plate 2.3 Mabel Juli, *Ngumulu (clouds)*, 2011, natural ochre and pigment on canvas, 80 x 60cm (WAC279/11). Image courtesy of the Warmun Art Centre.

⁸ Maggie recalled people standing in calf-deep water near the Turkey Creek Bridge and sitting in their cars (pers. comm. 2015).

That's all la cloud (*ngumulu*). Yeah, all them clouds, the white one. When that cloud been coming he been starting to make a rain. When he been start clouding, he been start raining. A little, little rain, he been coming like a wet season. He been starting a big rain and he been making the ground soft. That water been coming in, that water became a flood. He been climbing that big water, right up to the house. He been coming inside all la houses. And he was knocking them down. That big water been knocking down all la houses, and he been taking all the dogs too. We feel sorry for the dogs, poor fellas. That *warrambany* been frightening everyone, you know. All the people they been running away. We been frightened—might drown us. We go to Mirrilingki, to a dry place. All them kids, poor fellas, they might get drowned in the water, they been all take 'em to Mirrilingki.

Mabel blamed the flood on *Goorloombal*, the Rainbow Serpent. In two paintings she depicted the flood as a snake (Plate 2.4 & 2.5)



Plate 2.4 Mabel Juli, *Warrambany*, natural ochre and pigment on canvas, 40 x 50cm (WAC124/11). Image courtesy of the Warmun Art Centre.



Plate 2.5 Mabel Juli, *Warrambany at Warrmarn*, natural ochre and pigment on canvas, 100 x 80cm (WAC403/11). Image courtesy of the Warmun Art Centre.

In a third painting, Plate 2.6, Mabel described the *Warrambany* as a snake climbing through the community:



Plate 2.6 Mabel Juli, *Warrambany (The Flood)*, natural ochre and pigments on board, 120 x 45cm (WAC203/11). Image courtesy of the Warmun Art Centre.

This is the flood that rushed down in the river at Warmun. It came from upstream. These (shown at the top and bottom of the painting) are all the little creeks and gullies like a snake. It climbed right up high over all the houses. When it climbed right up high over all the houses, it went everywhere like a snake and knocked down everything inside. It carried all the motorcars down stream. It washed them away. The water made all these creeks and gullies when it went everywhere, as shown here. Here at the bottom is Garden Area. Those there at the top are the places along the east side. And here is the creek that is down there at the road, at the bridge, this one coming down from here (in the middle, at the top). Well from here, down from up there, it came along to us like a snake and came inside (our houses).

We all ran up there then. We spoke to that Janama [Gary Fletcher] who lived at the Art Centre. He didn't come down from the house where he was staying with Maggie. The two of them stayed there right inside in the middle of the water. The water came up that much. It went inside the Art Centre and knocked down the white paint and everything. It carried all the things like this (paintings) downstream too. It chased people from the west side (of the creek) they stayed in a big group at Mirrilingki. It was really frightening.

These are all the little creeks made by the water. The floodwater made them when it came, from up there. It filled up (the creek) and then climbed up into the houses. When I was sitting looking down at the creek it came around behind me. This one, this one came like a snake, and then there were all these little creeks. It kept on raining and raining and raining. The set in rain kept falling and made the ground soft. Then the floodwaters came.

It kept raining. Big rain fell then. The heavy rain came bigger and bigger and the water made those little creek everywhere then. It was really bad, really dangerous flood. It didn't come along to us slowly like before. No, it was different. Maybe it wanted to drown us. You would have looked for us but we would not have been there. It may have washed us all downstream. We all ran away from inside our houses. All the things inside were covered with mud. It was a really "cheeky" fighting kind of flood (Kofod et al. 2013, 38-39).

The Western Australian government put in place measures to deal with the situation. Emergency Services, local Police and members of the community all helped in transporting people out of *Warrmarn*.⁹ As Bow River Bridge was smashed, people were airlifted out of the area. By nightfall on Sunday, most residents were at the Warmun Roadhouse and the Mirrilingki Spiritual Centre. Over the following days the elderly community members were

⁹ The Western Australian Commissioner of Police, Karl O'Callaghan, later awarded twelve people Certificates of Appreciation for assisting in the Emergency (Gooding and Searle 2014, 21; News Limited 2014).

airlifted to Kununurra and the remaining community members were airlifted to Doon Doon Roadhouse, one hundred or so kilometres north of Warmun, and then transported by bus to Kununurra. The waters receded over the next twelve hours. The next morning, those stranded on The Other Side were able to cross Turkey Creek. Maggie remembers that people were 'walking around stunned' and that Betty held up a painting she found against the fence and said, 'oh he looks better, brighter, all clean and washed! Oh well we'll start again' (pers. comm. 2011). By Monday afternoon, the water rose again. I asked Patrick Mung Mung where he was when the flood came through and he told me:

Just there [Other Side]. We got stuck. We bin try ring 'em helicopter. He come right up, all this house. I used to camp here got Maggie. When that water bin drop down we all stop up here. Have a sleep for a while, when water come down we all bin go across Mirrilingki. They fly us this side to Doon Doon and getta bus there. Gotta bus from Doon Doon, chopper from here (pers. comm. 2014).¹⁰

Jane Yalunga described to me how she and her husband were picked up at their home in Garden Area by their friend and taken to Mirrilingki:

JY: We were stuck back la my home. Everyone else bin go only me and Jimbo, we bin send 'Phine, dem boy, Jonathan mob you know off, lucky they bin come back and pick us up, that water bin that far. Lucky they came back for us.

CM: Who?

JY: Mary for son, work la mine. Lucky he bin come back and pick us up.

CM: Where'd he take you?

JY: Mirrilingki.

CM: How long there?

JY: First mob bin go one week and all the way like that all might be one, two, two weeks, I think, we bin stay there and everyone bin just flying out, everybody chopper.

CM: Everyday they flying out?

JY: Yeah every day, in the morning they get up, get the breakfast, and get everything ready, pack their thing and the last one was that big chopper from Broome—eighteen seater (pers. comm. 2014).

¹⁰ For further information on Kimberley Kriol, see Blythe 2005; Kimberley Language Resource Centre 1996.

On the 16th March, Deputy Premier Dr Kim Hames declared *Warrmarn* a natural disaster under the Western Australian Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (WANDRRA) (Gooding and Searle 2014, 35). The *Warrambany* destroyed forty-five of the sixty-five houses, the council offices, the health clinic, the community store, the school and badly damaged the Art Centre. Its force lodged white goods in trees, turned cars upside down and lifted houses from their footings (Plate 2.7) (See Appendix B for the Department of Housing's visual depiction of the flood's path). One house was lifted off its base and destroyed the entire sewage system in the community. The phone and electricity mains were cut. Fortunately the flood claimed no lives, although one woman was bitten by a snake. On the 21st of April, the Western Australian government announced the formation of the Warmun Re-establishment Taskforce to manage and coordinate *Warrmarn's* reconstruction. The Taskforce aimed to re-establish the town, co-ordinate the relevant Government agencies and report regularly to the Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee (Gooding and Searle 2014).



Plate 2.7 A fridge remains in a tree from the flood, August 2012.

Community displacement and relocation

The community was relocated to a temporary housing camp on the outskirts of Kununurra called the *Garrjang* (Ord Stage II) Workers Camp. The *Garrjang* Camp was built to house construction workers working on the Ord East Kimberley Expansion Project. It consisted of demountable houses (dongas), a mess hall and an Office. Warmun residents were provided breakfast, lunch and dinner and the rooms cleaned regularly (Plate 2.8). Those who did not want to go to Kununurra and had other options, stayed elsewhere when the roads were opened—at outstations, camping or at Wyndham and Halls Creek. Shirley Purdie and Gordon Barney remained relatively mobile, travelling in the region between Norton Bore, Turkey Creek and Kununurra, autonomously. Lena Nyadbi went to Bow River community. Phyllis Thomas went to Mud Spring, an outstation on Miriwoong Country. Rusty Peters had a room at the Village, which he shared with his son Owen, but he would often camp at

Frances Kofod's house because he didn't want to go there [to the Workers Camp] (pers. comm. 2012). Several people gained permission to remain in the ravaged community, or did so regardless of the protocols.



Plate 2.8 The *Garrjang* (Ord Stage II) Workers Camp in Kununurra. Photo courtesy of Alana Hunt.

Beth Neate met people as they arrived in Kununurra. A former *Warrmarn* resident, she knew the community well. Her impression was that in the early stages of being in Kununurra, many people were motivated to help with the rebuild and get back to *Warrmarn*. She thought they were worried the community would not be rebuilt because *Warrmarn's* viability as a community was being discussed in the media (ABC News 17 March 2011, 18 March 2011; Guest 2011; News Limited 2011; Rickard 2011) and the Oombulgurri community had been recently shut down.¹¹ Frances Kofod remembers that in the beginning, many people expressed their desire to stay in *Warrmarn* and felt that other options were not considered—such as camping—which took away the opportunity for the community to come to a decision themselves. Eileen Bray told me there was some consultation about where to be relocated:

Well they [the government] were asking us before. What we want. Like some of us wanted to stay behind in Mirrilingki. And they were thinking about health, like

¹¹ Oombulgurri community was said to have no economic base and a high amount of sexual abuse cases. The last residents were relocated before Christmas 2011 (ABC News 23 February 2011, 20 January 2012).

toilet, water and so yeah, we had to leave all our dogs here and some of them went to Frog Hollow. Some to Bow River. But some went wild. It was good in Kununurra but we had to move for health wise, that's all (pers. comm. 2014).

The taskforce employed and coordinated government and NGO organisations to make things 'normal' again for the Village residents. For example, a school bus was organised to take children from the Village to the local St. Josephite school. *Warrmarn* teachers helped in the classes.¹² Community groups organised activities and programs to keep spirits up and keep people occupied. New Warmun Art Centre assistants Alana Hunt and Rosita Holmes, who were due to start work at the Warmun Art Centre in March, stayed in Kununurra and worked at the Village Mess Hall every day with the artists. This enabled painting, cataloguing and sales of artworks to continue (Maggie and Gary were at *Warrmarn* still, re-establishing the Art Centre). Tuesday Art Centre meetings restarted and in many ways, the rhythms of normal life endured.

However, the Village had its problems. Many responsibilities were taken away from individuals because meals were provided for and the dorms were cleaned regularly. There was less of a need to earn money for food or utilities and no need to clean. It is arguable that the circumstances within Kununurra *Garrjang* Village life rendered people somewhat purposeless. Already in a disabling and non-agentive position being off Country, away from their homes, having lost their possessions, not sure about their future and unable to work for the short period they were there (although some people took jobs cleaning in the Village and joined the night patrol), many people took to spending their money on alcohol and marijuana.

Eileen and Gordon said that humbug for money and alcohol was hard to deal with in Kununurra. Even though alcohol was not permitted in the Village and *Warrmarn* people took up the role of acting as security guards for the Village, some people still drank. Beth recalled that:

One person in particular was telling me that she was going to start drinking again, because she had nothing to do all day, she was feeling really worried about her house [in *Warrmarn*] and they were giving her money and all their meals were paid for. She said 'I am an alcoholic person, I am in a town with alcohol and your giving me money so of course I will drink' and she did. And that's what happened

¹² Eighty Warmarn students attended the Kununurra School (Gooding and Searle 2014, 33).

over the weeks. The people that stayed sober in the [*Warrmarn*] community didn't stay sober in the evacuation centre (pers. comm. 2014).

Eileen told me that Kununurra was:

Good, but we were a bit worried about our young people you know. Close to town. Walk around, get grog. Get into fights and things like that. Get worried about them. No *lirrgarn* there (pers. comm. 2014).

Opinions about the Kununurra *Garrjang* Village differed. Patrick, Betty and Mabel told me that they thought the Village was good. But Gordon said he only went to Kununurra to sort out his money business otherwise he stayed with his wife at their outstation:

I didn't like it much. Nah well, town, they humbug for money. I went to get everything—Basic card, key card, that's all (pers. comm. 2014).

I asked Jane what the Village was like and she responded:

Yeah we bin right, but too small them room, like we bin have to, like all the partner have to one room, all them boys and all the kids, one each room. Lot of rooms.

The location of the Kununurra *Garrjang* Village added to some people's dislike of the situation. Nancy Nodea told me she was not welcomed by Traditional Owners when she arrived in Kununurra:

CM: What was that village like in Kununurra?

NN: Alright.

CM: You get a welcome from that Miriwoong mob?

NN: Nothing. They didn't. We asked them but nothing and when they come here, strangers, we welcome them straight away. For walkabout and all that. We go down the river. Even when we take them picnic, we welcome them (pers. comm. 2012).

However, Rusty and Eileen said they received a welcome from Miriwoong leaders, which made them feel okay about being there (also documented by the Western Australian Department of Housing (Gooding and Searle 2014)). Maggie Fletcher believed that people did not feel comfortable on Miriwoong Country. She recalled people asked her 'Where are we?' as a rhetorical question—not a confusion of the location—but a subtle statement that implied 'this is not our country; we shouldn't be here' (ABC Open 2011). Beth also recalled people were uncomfortable staying so close to the National Park, because it had significant Miriwoong sites on it. Both Alana and Beth remember constantly being asked when they would go home, and how much longer would they be there (pers. comm. 2014).

Planning for a new *Warrmarn* began immediately. The Re-establishment Taskforce conducted a flood study to identify the risk areas in the community and make sure the rebuild occurred away from flood-prone areas. This meant that the five camps originally designed in the late 1970s, based on family groups, had to be reconfigured. According to the Department of Housing, a representative created working groups in order to identify and resolve the issues of living arrangements (Gooding and Searle 2014, 45). Community members met with the Kimberley Land Council over three months to identify significant areas and sites in the community that needed to be protected during the clean-up and restoration process. Redesigning housing also began during this process. Regular meetings between community members, the taskforce and Community Council were held to establish where houses would be built.¹³

The Warmun Community Collection after the Warrambany

At the time of the *Warrambany*, the Community Collection was in a locked room inside the painting storeroom, inside the Art Centre Gallery. The archives of photos and analogue tapes, also a part of the Collection, were in a room adjacent to the painting storeroom. Water filled the storerooms and items on the lower shelves were saturated. Those items placed above the water level sustained damage from humidity and mould growth in the days after the flood (Plates 2.9, 2.10 and 2.11).

¹³ Fifty-six houses had to be demolished and twenty surviving homes were refurbished. Community service infrastructure buildings also had to be rebuilt and refurbished, such as the Administration Office, the health clinic, the age and disability care, the school, the early learning centre, the sport and recreation centre, the community resource centre (the Telecentre), the women's centre and playgroup and community enterprises, such as the Wungkul store.



Plate 2.9 Paintings stacked high on shelves in the Collection room after the flood. Photo courtesy of Maggie Fletcher.



Plate 2.10 Archival boxes containing the VHS tapes, recordings and photos were fully immersed in water. Photo courtesy of Maggie Fletcher.



Plate 2.11 Mould grew rapidly on items in the days following the flood. Photo courtesy of Maggie Fletcher.

The Art Centre Gallery sustained no damage to its structure or footings, but the internal Gyprock walls and insulation were saturated up to 1.35 metres; the carpet flooring tiles were inundated with mud; the Plywood flooring was drenched; the air conditioner condensers underneath the building were immersed in water; electrical wiring and power points were immersed in water; one of the three rainwater tanks was swept away and the Gallery computers, printers, telephones and televisions were all immersed in water. The four glass louvre window panels (3m x 3m) at each of the four corners of the building and the entrance areas were dislodged and damaged (Plate 2.12).



Plate 2.12 The Gallery after the flood, 15th March 2011. Photo courtesy of Maggie Fletcher.

Some seven hundred and thirty paintings—about 90% of the Art Centre's commercial stock—were lost (Laurie 2011; McDowell 2011). Works were found kilometres down the creek in the following weeks. The Art Centre Studio, approximately 0.65 metres higher than the Gallery and ten metres away, did not suffer the same degree of damage as the Gallery.¹⁴ Water in the Studio damaged the air-conditioning condensers, some tools and equipment, art materials and a relatively small number of paintings and painting frames and canvases.

As community members were transported to Kununurra, Maggie Fletcher began to worry about the stability of the Collection objects, having worked in museums before. She thought that they needed to be looked after and sought assistance from Christina Davidson, who had written a National Significance Assessment on the collection (see Chapter Seven) and was the CEO of the Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA). Together with Chris Durkin (ANKAAA worker), they organised a 'rescue project' for the Collection. The first stage of the response was to dispatch the objects to

¹⁴ Its walls are iron clad, lined with water resistant composite flooring material with a concrete slab floor.

Kununurra for assessment. Christina wrote a letter to the people of *Warrmarn* on behalf of ANKAAA, entitled 'Looking after the old art work from Warmun and how we can work together to make them safe' (see Appendix C). It read:

What we want to do is send in experts to the community to look after the work while it is moved to a safe place with the right building the right air-conditioning and people who know how to fix it properly.

Fixing the art works might take a few months but the art centre won't have to pay for it. ANKAAA is talking to people about giving money to help ... We want to say again that we understand these old art works belong to Gija and always will.

Maggie contacted Cathy Cummins, manager of the Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, for further assistance. They contacted Robyn Sloggett, Director of the University of Melbourne's Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, for disaster recovery advice. It was decided the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation would assess the objects. Five days after the flood on the 16th March 2011, Robyn wrote a letter to the Warmun Art Centre and the *Warrmarn* artists outlining the plan for the 'protection and treatment of the Warmun Art Collection' (See Appendix D).

On the 15th and 16th of March, Maggie, Gary and various helpers sorted through the works and packed them into helicopters provided by Rio Tinto (Plate 2.13). Anything in reasonable condition stayed in the community and was moved to either Mirrilingki, the old Gija Centre or into the Art Centre Manager's house. The remaining items were transported by helicopter to Kununurra on the 17th and 18th March 2011. They were taken to the Argyle Diamond Mine head office for the assessment.



Plate 2.13 Rio Tinto staff and Gary Fletcher move artworks into the helicopter to take to Kununurra. Photo courtesy of Maggie Fletcher.

In Kununurra, two Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation staff (Senior Conservator Marcelle Scott and PhD candidate Lyndon Ormond-Parker) undertook an initial assessment and registry and packed the items with the support of Cathy Cummins (Waringarri Arts Centre), two ANKAAA staff members and Warmun Art Centre staff Alana Hunt and Rosita Holmes. They sorted through the items and designated what needed immediate conservation treatment and what did not.

In this process, a registry was created. Maggie recollected that in this registry were items that were not part of the Warmun Community Collection, such as Hector Jandany's estate of paintings—also stored in the back gallery room—and some significant items from the school, brought over by Principal Leanne Hodge. Subsequently, this meant that the 2011 catalogue had more items than were known to be in the Collection. Of the three hundred and forty-nine objects in their spreadsheet, one hundred and fifty-one went to Argyle Diamond offices and one hundred and eighty-seven went to the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation. The items for the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation were relocated via Toll Road Transport with the help of the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory and ArtBack N.T. (Conservation 2011; Durkin 2011).

Once the items were in Kununurra, Sr. Theresa organised a visit to the Argyle Office to view the works with custodians Eileen Bray and Patrick Mung Mung as well as Betty Carrington, Rusty Peters and Gabriel Nodea, who were all in Kununurra at the time (Durkin 2011, 8). In meetings held to decide the future of the Collection at the Village, Maggie remembers that artists were adamant that the Collection had to come back to *Warrmarn* once treatment was finished (pers. comm. 2011). On the 12th of April 2011, custodians and artists articulated this priority in a letter to the CCMC (Appendix E). On the 18th May 2011, whilst the community was in Kununurra, I visited Jude Fraser, Conservation Services Senior Manager at the CCMC and took photos of the Collection to send back to the community, via the Art Centre, to update them on the status of the treatment (Plate 2.14).



Plate 2.14 Warmun Community Collection items at CCMC, May 18th, 2011.

At this time, community members were preparing to move back to *Warrmarn*. A confounding factor in the speed of the rebuild was that *Warrmarn* residents had to be out of the Kununurra *Garrjang* Village by June, as Ord River workers had to return to the Village. A two hundred room Warmun Temporary Village was built in *Warrmarn* to replace the Kununurra *Garrjang* Village (Gooding and Searle 2014, 37), as not all of the houses had

been built. The Warmun Temporary Village consisted of sixty-seven three bed self-contained units, a full commercial kitchen, two laundries, a first aid station and an ablutions block (Plate 2.15). Like the Kununurra *Garrjang* village, meals were provided (managed by subcontractors, overseen by Department of Child Protection) and the Government offered opportunities for employment and training in catering and village operations (Gooding and Searle 2014). Labour was outsourced for its re-establishment. People began to return to *Warrmarn* from the 5th of July (Gooding and Searle 2014, 47, 51).¹⁵



Plate 2.15 The Warmun Temporary Village 2011. Photo courtesy of Alana Hunt.

In fifteen months a total of seventy-six houses were replaced, comprising of fifty-six new and twenty refurbished as well as two large dormitories of singles accommodation, one for young women and another for working men (Gooding and Searle 2014, 81). Some people were upset about their new houses. Jane spoke to me about her unhappiness regarding the location of her new house as she was moved to a camp with people she would not normally live with; who (by skin law) she couldn't associate with.

Some people were unhappy with the houses themselves. Bessie Daylight asked to borrow an Art Centre camera to take photos of the exposed fence edges and fittings in the house which

¹⁵ The official welcome back ceremony occurred on the 12th July 2011 (Gooding and Searle 2014, 53).

she thought were dangerous. She also took photos of the yards of dirt and gravel that turned the houses into dust bowls (Plate 2.16) and sent a letter of complaint to the Kimberley Land Council. Shirley Purdie, Lena Nyadbi and Nancy Nodea exclaimed to me together that they were not happy about the tall fences that wrapped around the houses. The tall fences stopped cross-breeze and prevented the houses from cooling down in the heat. The fences also prevented people walking short distances between houses; instead people had to walk on the roads, which were longer routes.



Plate 2.16 New housing at *Warrmarn*, 1st August 2012.

In October 2011, when people had been back in *Warrmarn* for three or so months, community members Patrick Mung Mung, Nancy Nodea, Eileen Bray and Mabel Juli visited the Collection at the CCMC to discuss the objects, their stories and conservation options with Art Centre Manager Maggie Fletcher (Plates 2.17 & 2.18). A fundraising dinner was held during this trip and a press release made about the situation (Appendix F).



Plate 2.17 L-R: Cate Massola, Eileen Bray, Nancy Nodea, Mabel Juli and Patrick Mung Mung outside the CCMC, 18th October 2011. Photo courtesy of Maggie Fletcher.



Plate 2.18 L-R: Mabel Juli, Maggie Fletcher, Eileen Bray and Nancy Nodea discuss paintings and conservation at the CCMC, 19th October 2011.

Interactions with the Collection, its role and its value in 2012

In the visit to the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation in October 2011, the Warmun Art Centre and the CCMC staff and students organised press and publicity about the Collection in order to receive funding and donations for the treatment of the artworks. In seeking to generate financial support for its conservation, certain aspects of the Collection were over-emphasised in public documents and promotion. For example, an article published by the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (Inc) stated that 'The Warmun Community Collection remains of utmost importance to the local Warmun community and Gija People and is of international significance' (Sloggett et al. 2001, 16). I contend, based on my observations over my fieldwork period in 2012, that people from outside of *Warrmarn* placed greater importance on the objects than did the local Warmun community members. There are two reasons for this belief: first, art workers pressed for the significance of the objects publically; and secondly, *Warrmarn* people were not invested in the objects' conservation and future as much as arts workers. I believe this is because *Warrmarn* people valued the objects for their use *in context*, as pedagogic aids, rather than being valued according to any aesthetic, spiritual, social, historic or religious criteria or role. This does not mean that they were not important or valid to the makers and the families; it just means that they were valued differently.

In reporting of the *Warrmarn* flood, many articles focused on the art, rather than people's experiences of it. Titles such as 'Warmun's treasures rise from the dead' (Cormack 2011), 'Warmun art rescue' (Durkin 2011), 'Warmun art gallery hung out to dry' (Laurie 2011), 'The great Warmun art rescue' (ABC Radio National 2013), 'Warmun floods devastate a community and its art' (McDowell 2011), 'Flood paintings are history in the making' (ABC Open 2011), 'Artists' exhibition will recount flood disaster' (Kalmar 2011) and 'Promise of the rainbow serpent' (Rothwell 2011) used emotive language to convey the importance of the artworks. This was also the case for the return of the Collection (ABC Radio National 2013; ABC Kimberley 2013; Mills and Smale 2012; Radio National 2013). There were fewer articles about *Warrmarn* people and their community. Mainstream news generally covered the cost of the rebuild (ABC News 17 March 2011, 18 March 2011, 21 September 2012; Guest 2011; News Limited 2011) and it was ABC Open, the regional news, that documented flood stories from people first hand (ABC Kimberley).

I noted in my field diary several occasions when *Warrmarn* people seemed somewhat disinterested in the Collection as a whole and in the conservation process. For example,

once people returned to *Warrmarn* (and were either living in their new homes or in the Warmun Village) the interactions between the artists and the CCMC in the restoration process was minimal. During 2012, CCMC volunteers and students working on the objects communicated with the Art Centre about how to treat the objects; such as what dirt to remove and what to keep. The total number of emails from the CCMC to the Warmun Art Centre about the treatment consisted of no more than a dozen, which is not many, considering that the Centre had one hundred and eighty-seven objects. The process of determining the level and type of treatment involved the art centre staff discussing the damaged objects at weekly Tuesday meetings. In these meetings, I witnessed dispassionate and impartial answers about what to treat and how.

There was also a lack of engagement with the Collection from people at the Art Centre. In July 2012, the CCMC invited *Warrmarn* people to visit their Melbourne campus and talk about the Collection. I noted in my field dairy when the proposal was tabled at the Art Centre:

CCMC wanted two elders to do a lecture to Uni students about Gija way, art and country. They will get paid.¹⁶

However no one volunteered. This was relayed to the CCMC. Later that month, it was decided that the Art Centre manager and an Art Centre worker would travel to the CCMC. Back at the Art Centre during their absence, a few people expressed their concerns that there was no Aboriginal man on the trip to accompany the female Art Centre worker and that she was not entitled to speak for the works. I recorded in my field notes that:

Rusty said that he believes a Gija fella should have gone with the Art Centre manager. Mabel replied to him and said 'don't make waves' and Marlene said: 'bring it up at the meeting next week'.¹⁷

The CCMC wanted *Warrmarn* people to become engaged with the Community Collection for their promotion of the restoration, but there was reluctance at the Art Centre. In September, the CCMC proposed to the Art Centre that some artists could speak about the importance of the Collection on a video, for a CCMC presentation to be held at the

¹⁶ Cate Massola, field notes, 26/07/2012.

¹⁷ Cate Massola, field notes, 12/06/2012.

University of Melbourne in October.¹⁸ After some weeks of talking about it, no one committed to doing it. In the end, the Art Centre manager convinced a younger artist to speak about the Collection and the footage was sent down. This concerned some older people, as he was not a custodian for the items. On the other hand, some were relieved that they didn't have to do it themselves.

In addition, in my field diary I noted one trip to Kununurra to view the works. On the 12th September, three senior men and a male non-Aboriginal Art Centre worker drove to Kununurra to view the works at the Argyle office to make sure that they were safe for public viewing, as concerns were raised about their secret/sacred content. The trip coincided with running errands in Kununurra.

The CCMC enquired further about engagement. On the 29th May, a *Joonba* was tabled by the CCMC to coincide with the end of the year completion of the Collection restoration. It took months of discussion to establish who would go and what the dates would be. People became frustrated because there were too many date changes and only a small number of people could travel due to money constraints. By the end of October, the artists decided there would be no *Joonba* trip to the CCMC that year.

Finally, during my 2012 research I was never asked about the Collection, about how the treatment was progressing or when was it coming back. It was only discussed when I enquired about it. In these cases, where I sought to gauge people's opinion and value of the Collection, I often felt that I was probing and being annoying by asking them about it. Responses were short. Shirley Purdie said to me: 'those paintings I put them in the school. They for the school. They stay here' (pers. comm 2012). Another day I continued our conversation:

CM: What should happen to the Collection now?

SP: Yeah well because this lot now, well they big now and old people bin teach em allabat, you know still, all this mob now, Gabi, Mark and my son Dean.

CM: What about using those objects again?

SP: Well I don't know, what this lot, old people saying? If they... might be asking Patrick, old man Rusty. Yeah. Because that lot he bin teacher again, la school. Old man. Yeah well, that good you know (pers. comm. 2012).

¹⁸ The lecture was entitled 'The Science of conserving Gija Art' and occurred on the 25/10/2012.

Shirley was uncertain about the role of the Collection—she wanted to see what the other older people wanted. Perhaps she didn't feel like she had the right to have an opinion about the items and this may explain her lack of responsibility or ownership over the items. Yet Betty Carrington had a firmer opinion in 2014:

CM: That Collection, what do you think about that?

BC: Well, what sort of story they got?

CM: Not all of them have stories, because those people finished [deceased].

BC: Good to keep em and family can copy em. Keep em alive. This is the place for everybody, this Turkey Creek. Bedford Downs, sometimes come Springvale, Alice Downs, Bow River, Lissadell, Mabel downs, Texas used to meet up here (pers. comm. 2012).¹⁹

Later I spoke with Patrick Mung Mung and Betty Carrington:

CM: You know that Collection, what you wanna do with them? And that Mary your dad made?²⁰

PMM: Well he [*Mary of Warrmarn*] stay in the school, thadayi. 'Cos he bin make em. And I can't change it, because he said to leave it there [his father George Mung Mung].

CM: Do you think those artworks in the Collection would help *lirrgarn*?

PMM: Yeah they help. They helping. From our old people, they *lirrrgarn* us. And that *lirrgarn* through by that. All *lirrgarn* through by that. But our young people, not too good in the head. They need to be talking. Tell em what this and that.

BC: We need to help from, some of the man, we all need to work together, talk to young one, you know help one another. All the man together and talk to some of them (pers. comm. 2014).²¹

In 2012 Rusty Peters spoke to me about his works in the Collection and said:

I did them for the kids, not for sale. Jane and Lorraine used to watch, learn. They know how to paint. They learnt those stories (pers. comm. 2012).²²

¹⁹ Cate Massola, field notes, 06/02/2014.

²⁰ The *Mary of Warrmarn* or the *Pregnant Mary* is a sculpture carved by Patrick Mung Mung's father, George and is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

²¹ Cate Massola, field notes, 06/02/2014.

²² Cate Massola, field notes, 01/07/2012.

The return of the Collection

In July 2013 the Collection returned to *Warrmarn*. On Friday 14th July, the Art Centre organised a Welcome ceremony for the objects (Appendix G), which included food, *mantha* and speeches. Three *Joonbas* were performed: the *Goorirr Goorirr*, *Moonga Moonga* and the *Binyjirminy du Lalanggarrany* (Crane and Kimberley 2013 pers. comm., Rusty Peters and Alana Hunt, 2014). At this time, the items were moved to the new storage space in the new Cultural and Media Centre building at the Warmun Art Centre.

When I visited *Warrmarn* early in 2014, interest and conversation about the Collection was meagre. Since returning from the CCMC, the items had been put in the Culture Centre (also known as the Culture and Media Programs Studio) (Plate 2.19). The Media Lab was located in an adjacent room. Two Aboriginal Art Centre staff were working on cross-checking items with the CCMC catalogue²³ however people were not coming into the room to look at the works, ask questions, help organise or read about them. Young people came in to the space to use the media lab and older people came up to tell stories for media projects conducted by the media lab. The Art Centre staff organised projects and activities based around the Collection, such as a film made with ABC Open about the coolamons in the Collection (ABC Open 2014).

²³ The Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation presented back to the community a report of the completed works, with 'before treatment' and 'after treatment' photographs of the works. File Maker Pro catalogues of the items were also returned to the Warmun Art Centre.



Plate 2.19 The Warmun Art Centre media lab that stores the Community Collection, 10th February 2014.

In 2014, the Art Centre worked with the CCMC to create a museum space in the Art Centre gallery, where the works were on public display (Plate 2.20). The official opening was on the 30th July 2014. In 2015, the Art Centre organised an exhibition with the Berndt Museum of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia. The exhibition, entitled *Warmun Then and Now*, runs from the 30th of June until the 12th of December 2015 and displays the Berndt museum collection of *Warrmarn* art works alongside artwork made recently by the descendants of the works in their collection (The University of Western Australia: Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery 2015). It aims to recreate art centre life within the museum space. In spite of these activities, engagement with the Collection in *Warrmarn* was still low.

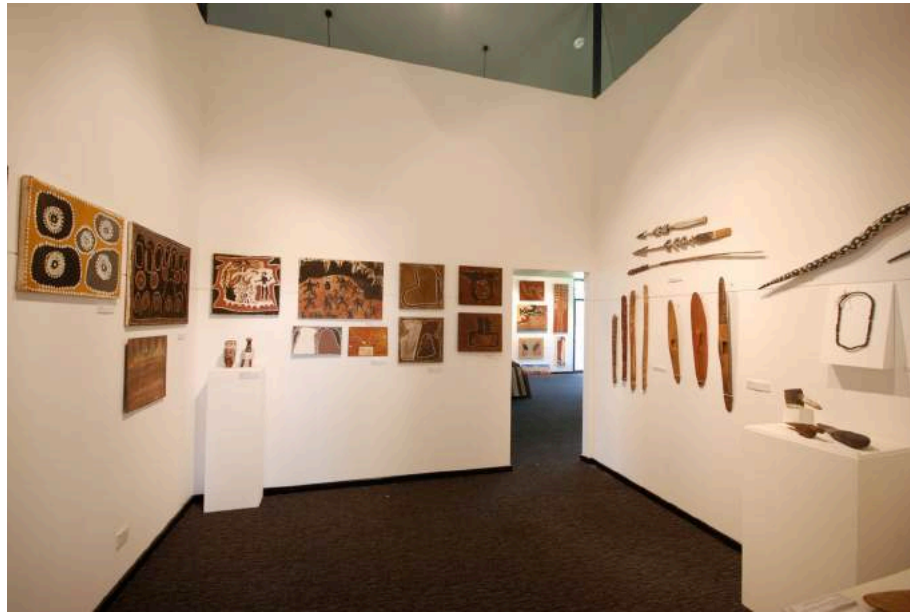


Plate 2.20 Warmun Art Centre museum space for the Community Collection, February 26th, 2015.

Conclusions

The first section of this chapter looked at the impact of the flood on the community. Within 24 hours of the flood, the *Warrmarn* CEO, the local police and local government quickly agreed that the community was not viable and organised for its evacuation. Most people were evacuated to Kununurra and housed at the *Garrjang* Village. Those who had other options, stayed elsewhere. The *Garrjang* accommodation was reasonable for some but others disliked the formation of the housing as it didn't fit with preferred living arrangements and others were uncomfortable being on Miriwoong Country. Providing food and other services at *Garrjang*, in an effort to normalise life for people, meant that responsibility for daily needs such as feeding your family and getting children to school was relinquished. These circumstances, coupled with the pressures of easier access to alcohol, drugs and money, meant that many people were bored and the use of alcohol and drugs became more prevalent. Some families struggled with this lifestyle. From March till July 2011 the community was away from *Warrmarn*. Although the Warmun Community Council and community members were consulted in the evacuation, relocation and rebuild process, tenets of paternalism permeated in subtle ways, such as the disavowal of choice and the

subtraction of daily responsibilities. Indeed, dealing with the *Warrambany* was very complex for the Re-Establishment Task Force and appeasing everyone would have been difficult.

The second half of this chapter introduced the Warmun Community Collection after the flood. The original imperative to save the Collection came from the Art Centre manager, as she felt she was acting on behalf of the community (pers. comm. 2015). Saving the Collection would have been a priority and the natural thing to do from the Art Centre manager's perspective—both because of her perception of its intrinsic value as Indigenous heritage, but also because she would have seen it as part of the value creation process that helped with the marketing of *Warrmarn* art. Perhaps she also saw the importance of the Collection in the wider world and as a means of getting *Warrmarn* back to normal—and the *Warrmarn* artists wanted to get back there, and so agreed with the aims. Thus, they built relationships with the world outside in the conservation process and went along with the project—but without enthusiasm. This revealed a critical difference between the way the community approached the Collection and the way non-Aboriginal agents approached the Collection at this time.

Clearly there was much support from outsiders to rescue the Collection and conserve it. Many articles were written in newspapers and online about the objects and not the people. The rescue process seemed linked to the external imagination and values of people outside *Warrmarn*. Interest from media and arts workers did not match the value and role of the Collection for *Warrmarn* community members. *Warrmarn* people were less inclined to speak for the Collection publicly and in day-to-day activities. Although those involved were positively motivated, there was minimal input by leaders and the community as a whole at this time; understandably, they were more concerned with dealing with the trauma of the flood, the loss of their homes, their dislocation and relocation. In their inaction it was clear that the objects were not a priority at this time; however, this did not mean that they did not value the objects then, now or in the future. I wondered what the Collection's value and role was now and would be in the future to community members and what its role was in the past. What was this Collection to the community? Where did it develop from, how was it used, what did it mean to people in the past and what does it mean today? I sought to answer these questions in order to understand people's value of it today. I also began to query the role of art more broadly: what did *Warrmarn* people value and prioritise and how did they attain it in the day-to-day? In the following chapters I track the history of not only the Collection, but also of this community.

Chapter 3

Warna warnarram ngarag woomberramande

Objects made about—what they used to do and say—long ago

Introduction

In this chapter, significant and quotidian events, practices and experiences are told through paintings from the period between first contact with non-Aboriginal people and the early twentieth century.²⁴ I interlace historical dates and documents of explorers and early settlers to the region to contextualise the period. In the succeeding chapter, I use oral histories, interwoven with government policies and statistics from the Western Australian Aborigines Department and Chief Protector of Aborigines, to further explicate the period between the early twentieth to the establishment of the Warmun community in 1978. In choosing this method of history telling I am presenting the past on the participants' terms to 'restore the actors' subjectivity' (Ortner 2006, 3).

After a brief overview of anthropological and archaeological research and historical writing on early encounters between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to situate the history, I use objects from art and creative practice to understand subjective histories. I do this for two reasons. First, it is a platform often used by people in *Warrmarn* to engage with others and deal with (sometimes traumatic) events of the past, exemplified by the *Joonba Marnem, Marnem dililib benuwarrnji Marnem* (Neminuwarlin Performance Group 2002).²⁵ Another example is the exhibition *Blood on the Spinifex* (Oliver and Starr 2002) which used paintings to expose the experiences of violence in the frontier and pastoral period. Secondly, art enables people to present their past on their terms, which Healy has already shown is prevalent in the Warmun community (2005, 170).

²⁴ This is the period from around 1887 (and was under the Western Australian Aborigines Protectionist Act) until the end of the Protectionist Policy, which was until 1962 (see Chronology).

²⁵ A performance about the Bedford Downs massacre that involved the murder of Gija and Worla people by non-Aboriginal stockmen in the early years of the twentieth century on east Kimberley cattle station.

Paintings from the Warmun Art Centre usually use the landscape as a space for discourse. They show how place is filled in peoples memory both through connections to the *Ngarranggarni*, to the history of colonisation and to the events of everyday life. They are not often abstract,²⁶ but more generally figurative and symbolic. The landscape is imbricated with history; it is the location for memories and events, subtly hinted at by footprints, caves and shapes. Sometimes motifs clearly depict sites and people and other times they subtly link to the personal, the historical, the social and the cultural. Paintings can be referential insofar as their stories and their meanings are hung on motifs, symbols, colours, abstractions, dots, lines and contours. This can make accurate translation difficult. Therefore, I also incorporate the story associated with the painting, or the oral history I have recorded, to draw out further meaning in the works discussed.

There are four themes I use to structure this chapter. They are the reoccurring themes I identified when listening, looking and learning about these histories. The themes focus on historic relations with non-Aboriginal people, Aboriginal differences from non-Aboriginal people, how Aboriginal people adapted to changing circumstances and the importance of culture and preserving it. I have called the themes: Difference, Violence and Massacres, Gija knowledge and Country, Place and Adaptation.

A brief introduction to historical writing on early encounters

The Kimberley region of Western Australia is said to be one of the first areas occupied by Aboriginal people, some 30—70 KYA, when they travelled over from Guinea onto the Sahul shelf of northern Australia (O'Connor 1999, 1). However this is disputed by some archaeologists who place the arrival to the region from multiple origins, indicating ongoing migration and not from a single event or location. Balme (2000) dates first occupation to the Kimberley as 30—40 KYA from radio carbon dating of bone, charcoal, ochre, stone artefacts and shells at a Gooniyandi cave site in the central Kimberley. In the east Kimberley region, archaeological evidence from a Miriwoong rock shelter in the Ord River valley dates human activity at c. 18,000 BP, but the site is now under the waters of Lake Argyle which makes further research impossible (Dortch 1972, 1977, 1996). Further evidence of human activity and cultural change has been taken from rock shelters around the Keep River Region, about

²⁶ Abstract in the sense that the shapes, forms and colours are independent from symbols and references in the world.

240kms from *Warrmarn*, northeast of Kununurra, dated to the late Holocene period, some 12,000 to 11,500 BP (Ward 2004).

Early European exploration of Western Australia is dated back to the arrival of the Dutch explorer Dirk Hartog in 1616, who landed on a small island just off the mid coast of Western Australia. More expeditions were made by sea throughout the seventeenth century (Berndt and Berndt 1979, 262; Ryan 1993, 125). Perth, Western Australia, was founded as a settlement in 1829 (Ryan 1993, 125) but it was almost a century after the first colony was founded in Botany Bay, New South Wales, that Europeans explored the east Kimberley extensively overland, making it one of the last expanses of Country to be settled.

Alexander Forrest is generally acknowledged as the first European to venture into the heart of the east Kimberley into *Ngarinyin* Country (Jebb 2002, 27) on his fourth and most inland intensive expedition (Bolton 1953; Durack ; Bolton 1958; Clement 1989a, 27; Forrest 1996/1880). In 1875 the Survey Department of Western Australian government sent him to the northwest part of the state (Port Darwin and Beagle Bay) with five non-Aboriginal men, two Aboriginal men and twenty-six horses (Bolton 1953, 11; Forrest 1996/1880, 3). Forrest 'discovered' the Ord River on August 2nd 1879 (Forrest 1996/1880, 27). Michael Durack and the Emanuel family are noted as the first cattlemen to arrive in the east Kimberley and establish themselves with their families in 1882 (Clement 1989a, 34; Coombs 1989). A few years later, in 1884, Forrest established the Ord River Station, then known as Plympton St Mary (Bolton 1953, 29; Buchanan 1984, 96; Ross 1989, 25). In 1885 Michael Durack and Tom Kilfoyle set up Lissadell Station, fifty-five kilometres north of today's Warmun community (Berndt and Berndt 1979, 263; Ryan 1993, 125). Michael's brother Patrick began Argyle Downs Station, which neighbours Lissadell Station from the northeast (Bolton 1953; Owen 2003, 106).

A number of explorers traversed the region over the next few years, including: Nathaniel Buchanan, Osmond and Panton, the MacDonalDs, Patrick Ahern with Will Fargo, and Philip Saunders with Adam Johns (Bolton 1953; Clement 1989a, 33). Subsequent pastoral properties were established throughout the Ord Valley in the 1890s: Texas Downs (1897), Mabel Downs (around 1897), Frog Hollow (in around 1900), Alice Downs (1901), Mistake Creek (1904), Bedford Downs (1906), Bungle Bungles (1907), Greenvale (about 1910) and Han Spring (1915) (Ross and Drakakis-Smith 1983; Ryan 1993, 126). Many stations were established throughout the Kimberley over the next twenty years. Vast tracts of Country

were taken over by pastoralists and Aboriginal people became situated in new circumstances where their occupation of the land had to be negotiated.

Early contact and difference

Madigan Thomas painted several first contact paintings for the Warmun Art Centre. I will examine one made in 2004 (WAC753/04) and the other in 1999 (WAC301/99). Both paintings depict her family's first encounter with European people. In *Old Wagon Road* (Plate 3.1) Madigan characterises the whitefellas as stockmen, with wide brimmed hats and scarves around their necks on dray and cart. The black figures on the hill are her family painted up with *mawoondool*—traditional markings made for ceremony. They sit on top of the hill—some hiding, one person in full view. She explained the subject to me one afternoon at her house. Madigan told me about *Jijitji*—the hill she perched on as a child to watch *gardiya* travel through her Country. Her family thought that non-Aboriginal people were spirits because of their pale skin.



Plate 3.1 Madigan Thomas, 2004, *Old Wagon Road*, natural ochre and pigments on canvas, 80 x 60cm (WAC 753/04). Image courtesy of the Warmun Art Centre.

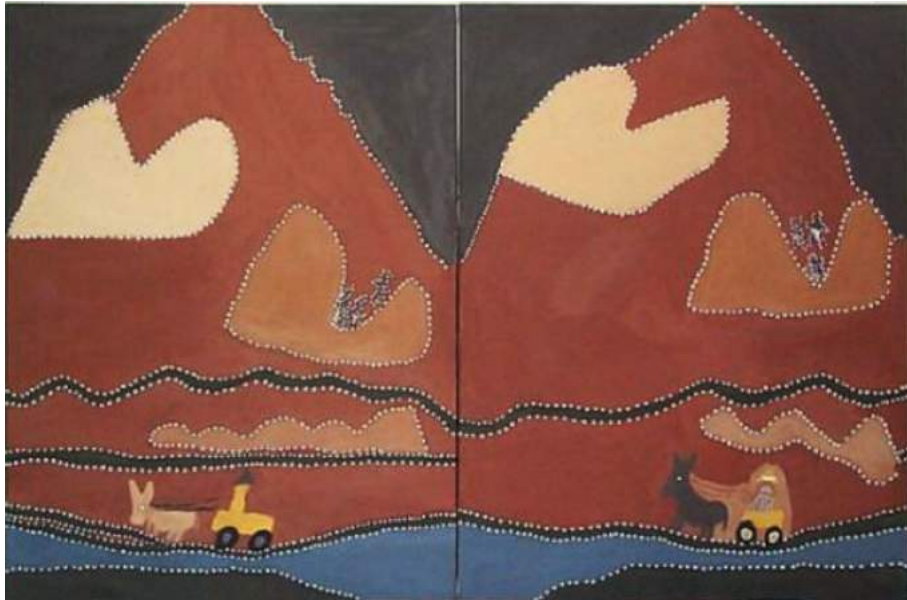


Plate 3.2 Madigan Thomas, 1999, *Old Wagon Road*, natural earth pigments on canvas, diptych, 80 x 120cm (WAC301/99). Image courtesy of the Warmun Art Centre.

In the earlier painting, *Old Wagon Road* (Plate 3.2), the Europeans are depicted with hats and the Aboriginal people are painted up with dots and *nagas*, like Plate 3.1. A Warmun Art Centre worker has transcribed the story as:

In the early days there was an old wagon road, called the Kimberley Road that went through to Halls Creek. The country in this painting is between Norton Bore and Violet Valley (south of Warmun). This is Madigan's country. One day some Gija men, who had never seen *gardiya* (whitefellas) before, came down the hill from *Doomoorriny*, a sacred place (the two cream hills), and saw two wagons going past on the road below. They were very frightened, for they had never seen people with that colour skin before. They feared that these strange people might kill them, so they hid behind the hills. The wagons pulled up for the night down by the creek. Most of the Gija people went back to their camp, but two men wanted to have a closer look at the *gardiya*. They crept down to the *gardiya*'s camp and saw one man reading a book. They looked at his pale hands and wondered if he might be some sort of *goorlabal* (rainbow snake) (Source: Warmun Art Centre).

Whilst these paintings are about an historic event, they are also an articulation of difference. Madigan's family thought non-Aboriginal people were some sort of *goorlabal*. Today, Madigan's daughter Shirley Purdie also told me that the old people thought *gardiya* were inhuman. When I spoke with Shirley, Lena Nyadbi, Nancy Nodea and Mabel Juli about these paintings by Shirley's mum, Shirley told me she also painted this event and everyone agreed that the old people thought *gardiya* were related to the *Ngarranggarni*:

SP: I bin do em a lot of paintings when blackfella bin come down, they reckon he bin rainbow, bin come out of the [points to the sky] hahahaha. That's why they bin come down and kill em. They bin reckon rainbow *gardiya*. Thadayi camp now, Norton Bore coming up. They bin killem one fella and nother bin run away. Look like they bin buried there la Norton Bore la camp, you know?

LN: *Gardiya* never know what kind of blackfella and blackfella never know what kind of *gardiya*!

NN: Somefella think *goorlabal* (pers. comm. 2014).

Similarly, in interviews conducted over twenty years ago, as part of the East Kimberley Impact Assessment Project, Frank Budbaria said his relatives also interpreted wagon tracks as a big water snake:

They used to see em coming along, and they reckon 'that's the big water snake coming along the road'. They used to go across with a spear, wait in the road. They used to kill em [the white people]. One white bloke shoot em one, another

bloke spear em white man, all that used to be before, all over this country in the hills (Ross 1989, 27).

Frank also mentioned that *gardiya* were killed because they thought they were a big water snake. Betty Carrington and Patrick Mung Mung's recalled to me that their families thought gunfire was lightning:

BC: Long time, *gardiya* bin come here. Early days, you know, killing all the people. When they heard em bang, they reckon might be lightening. They bin get that coolamon, try and cover themselves. Bang.

PMM: shoot them.

BC: shootem.

PMM: And they want to block the thing, but that thing go right through the whats-his-name.

They wanted to block the bullet but it went right through the whats-his-name.

BC: Lightening, ohh! They singing out, woah! They singing out, trying to stop the rain, they shoot la him (pers. comm. 2014).

These cases show that some Aboriginal people explained *gardiya* according to their specific Gija world-view, which linked their value system with natural events and phenomena. The articulation of these stories through paintings is an important part of maintaining and demonstrating difference, perhaps all the more pertinent for older people alive today because they see younger people as experiencing less 'difference' than they did, having grown up in a world in which *gardiya* were ever present.

Violence and massacres

In the initial period of contact between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people many encounters involved violence and many Aboriginal people experienced sickness and death, from introduced diseases,²⁷ sexual exploitation and as a consequence of the introduction of alcohol and opium (Berndt and Berndt 1979, 263; Shaw 1992, 18-19). The ability to

²⁷ This includes smallpox, typhoid, measles, venereal disease, leprosy, influenza and chickenpox.

practise culture became harder as access to Country was restricted with the advent of pastoral leases. The land was changing; cattle were spoiling waterholes, fences were built and roads made. On a cultural level, there was a breakdown of traditional hierarchies as leaders in families lost their authority. Attitudes towards Aboriginal people, from non-Aboriginal people, also contributed to the difficulty of the time. Europeans were heavily influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution and Spencer's notion of 'survival of the fittest.'

Primary and secondary sources note that general attitudes of Europeans toward Aboriginal people were negative. Alexander Forrest, whilst perceived as having a 'moderate and humane attitude toward the aborigines' compared to other Europeans (Bolton 1958, 18), called Aboriginal people 'miserable' (Forrest 1996/1880, 24). Nathaniel Buchanan, another explorer, noted in his journal, 'It is a pity that the dark race is doomed to extinction' (1984, 32). According to James Batteye, Aboriginal people were 'cunning and thieving' and 'thefts were incessant, murders increasingly frequent and the settlers lived in continual fear of an outbreak, a fear that was enhanced by their knowledge of the treacherous and cunning nature of the aborigines' (1978, 120-121). The Berndt's noted that many non-Aboriginal people thought Aboriginal people were 'less advanced' (Berndt and Berndt 1979, 264). Others noted that Aboriginal people were 'the least intelligent of all human beings' (McDonald 2001, 56) and 'the most miserablest people in the world' (Dampier's observations in Battye 1978, 39). The Chief Protector of Aborigines from 1915-1940, AO Neville, expected Aboriginal people to die out:

They are not, for the most part, getting enough food, and they are, in fact, being decimated by their own tribal practices. In my opinion, no matter what we do, they will die out (Commonwealth of Australia 1937, 16).

Relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people were often rife with violence, misunderstandings and miscommunication. In Gordon Buchanan's documentation of Nathaniel's life, Nathaniel noted a variety of responses from Aboriginal people upon encounters with *gardiya*. Nathaniel described how Aboriginal people were 'dreadfully frightened' and 'terror depriv[ed] them of speech' (1984, 25, 27) and that some shouted and made noise while others disappeared quickly or ran away (1984, 25, 12, 27, 30). Then there were those who did not run, or seem frightened (1984, 26) and even fought the explorers. Clement has noted that Philip Saunders recorded being challenged by Aboriginal people (1989a, 33). In some cases, Aboriginal people expressed and fought for their independence and autonomy. Clement suggests that it cannot be assumed that

communication about the whitefellas arrival between different Aboriginal family and language groups occurred (1989a, 35), which may explain the variety of responses from Aboriginal people.

These events and experiences are often expressed through paintings. Betty Carrington's painting *Mistake Creek Massacre* (Plate 3.3) is an event that continues to be relayed to younger generations and outsiders today. Her painting is of a wet season *Joomooloony*, full of green leaves. Harold Thomas' Aboriginal flag (1971) frames the *Joomooloony* sideways, as the background. The *Joomooloony* is distorted; one branch grows crookedly along the ground. A smaller branch shoots out to the right of the trunk with a crown of leaves upon it. Positioned neatly just above the horizontal branch is a small red square, painted with four dots in each corner. The visual motifs are simple and strong. At a cursory glance, it seems to be a painting about Kimberley Aboriginal culture—the motif of the Boab could represent the Kimberley or Western Australia, as it is the renowned tree of the region, and the Aboriginal flag, perhaps a symbol for Aboriginal people.



Plate 3.3 Betty Carrington, *Mistake Creek Massacre*, natural ochre and pigment on canvas, 60 x 60cm (WAC395/09). Image courtesy of the Warmun Art Centre.

I recorded Betty's version of the Mistake Creek Massacre on the 6th February 2014. It is the same story that is told for this painting:²⁸

CM: Do you feel like telling me that story now, that one about Mistake Creek?

BC: Yeah but I bin keep him secret. We didn't want to call that manager name.²⁹ But not his fault, that blackfella fault. Nother blackfella from Territory. Mmm. He bin tell a lie. [...] Ya well my mother, and nother lady, they used to stay here when that, old Rhatigan mob, Rhatigan camp. They bin have that house down there. Properly get house. And they bin grow my mother up. From Mabel Downs. Old Mrs Rhatigan. Grow em up my mum. They like a family to us. Yeah. And they reckon, my mother reckon, you know people bin here, my mother reckon, black people, some bush ranger, this, Mick Rhatigan, that old man, he didn't have that house there now, just all the car, mum reckon. He was a linesman, working, linesman, and they had cow, one with a bell. Yeah and that cow bin wander off. You know, la bush. Mistake Creek Station, that here on the back road, old windmill there, old station used to be there mum told me, showed me. Lot of working people there. And man from Territory he bin chasing after one married woman. He a black man from Territory.

And they bin walkabout you know, weekend, just like we hunting. They bin go get lot of porcupine, goanna, kangaroo, they bin go that Boab now, cook em up, *goonggoon* la ground and they bin waiting till he get cooked and they all sitting down la shade. And this Aboriginal man that moved from here, looking for that cow, he bin see all that *goonggoon* hole, you know, oh he bin get up, tell all the Mick Rhatigan, 'some blackfella bin kill your cow.' He bin telling lie. 'Oh we go out and have a look.' And both of them bin have a gun. They bin go, the black man name old hand Joe, some thing like that, old hand Joe, he from Northern Territory. They went out there, that Aboriginal man bin start shooting, shooting, well old Mick couldn't help him. Shoot em you know, never ask, 'what you mob gotta cook... thing.' They bin shoot em and one got away, he run this way, come down here.

There was a policeman, not Bill Bunn but... olden time policeman....olden time. I don't know, policeman, you know that police station was there now. Well, grandfather for Eileen Bray, old Sandy, he bin catch em up two men. That old man bin come tell the police, the policeman and two Aboriginal police boy. They went out and they bin go and too late, when everything bin started, flames bin started, getting people burning, and then policemen bin tell them, one of them boy, 'you open that hole for what they got cooking there'. Well that one police boy bin open that hole and only kangaroo and thing. Well policeman bin tell this two boy, 'chase em.' He wanted to run away, for wagon, used to be they reckon olden time, oh yeah the wagon, but he bin chase em and shot him down. But he get up and bring em back and chuck em in that fire. They bin finish and policeman bin

²⁸ This is Betty's story and there are other versions of this story.

²⁹ Betty did not want to say the manager's name because at the time of our interview as an elder had just passed away who carried the same name. It is customary to not say a recently deceased person's name.

take the boy reckon he walk him this way, to Halls Creek. My mum reckon he bin crying for him, police bin take em away. But he won the court. [...] When we went to mistake creek, and they bin show us, and we bin dig em that ground, you know, dig em out, all greasy (pers. comm. 2014).

In the east Kimberley there are different versions of the event, but it is Betty's memory and experience of the event that is the focus here.³⁰ Betty attests that the deaths at Mistake Creek were 'blackfellas fault'—it was the Aboriginal man from Northern Territory who killed the husband of the woman. In *Mistake Creek Massacre* the location of the massacre is demarcated with a square shaped fence at the site today. In another rendition of the story Betty is noted as saying that she does this painting 'for the future, for the young ones' (WAC188/12), indicating that she wants to teach younger people a lesson about lying, cheating and cruelty and to not always blame *gardiya*. In Betty's painting, the Boab tree masks the story beneath it. Perhaps the painting obscures the event and its message because it is a way for her to tell the story without explicitly revisiting it. Neurological research speculates that art may provide a bridge between implicit and explicit memory (Malchiodi 2003).

Interestingly, Betty doesn't paint other stories of cruelty or death. Her other topics and subject matter include the hills of *Darrajayin*, *Purnululu's* sandstone domes, *Ngarranggarni* stories of *Ngarrgooroon* sites such as *Nyidbarriya* and *Garlumboony* and the *Warrmarn* gymkhana where Aboriginal people enjoyed rodeos and drank alcohol. However, Betty speaks of other stories, those she does not paint. I asked Betty about the history for *Warrmarn* and she told me about her pregnant grandmother being whipped by a Bloodwood tree:

My mum bin grow here, he [her mother] bin born here. And he [her mother] bin telling my big brother and sister, and they used to tell me too. My grandmother came from thadayi. He [her grandmother] was startin' to carrying em for my mum

³⁰ The incident at Mistake Creek occurred in April 1915 and was documented in newspapers such as *The Advertiser* and *The Argus* at the time (The Aboriginal Murders: A Notorious Black Shot Dead 1915; Alleged Massacre of Blacks: Charred Bodies Found 1915; Murderous Natives: Victims Shot and Burned 1915). Researchers have documented oral histories of the event (Clement 1989a, 1989b; Coombs 1989; Oliver and Starr 2002; Ross and Bray 1989). The debate that surrounds the event focuses on the role Mick Rhatagan played and whether the massacre was a reprisal attack by *gardiya* against Aboriginal people and therefore racist, or if it was a jealous Aboriginal man turning on other Aboriginal people (Clement n.d.; Daley 2013; Deane 2002; Moran 2002; Windschuttle 2001). Sir William Deane, then Governor General, visited the site and contributed to the ongoing debate about it (Deane 2002).

[was pregnant with her mother] when that cheeky *gardiya* bin grab em and tie em up la that bloodwood tree la school. Give em a hiding (pers. comm. 2014).

Betty also told me a story about people being poisoned around Turkey Creek:

Well, little tree there, and that's another place where they bin take em, Aboriginals, all around from here, go and cut the wood, load em up wagon, bring em back here, stack em up. One *gardiya* was there cooking one big pot, curry and rice, they bin working gotta wood, bring em back, load em, he made some damper for them, tea and they bin, well they bin real hungry too when we work, we get hungry. One time he bin put poison already. Stir em up. Keep them. All the *gardiya* jus bin watching. Might be policeman too. Lot of cruel policeman was here. Yeah and my mum and his granny they can see them jumping all around when they poison. And he reckon while they jumping around, falling down, they shootem there, chuck em on, and mum reckons one old man bin run up this way, they never bin come down here, jumping and eat em up, eat em up, quick and he reckon they bin vomit em out whole lot. He bin chase.

They bin take em up down there, behind that rubbish dump. Take em up there the wood, chuck em la dead bodies take em down there, big black smoke.

CM: Where was this?

BC: Here. Just right there. Behind they bin burn em up there. And this way Texas way, I knew all another blackfella bury em that, half of them when they used to run away, they used to come look after. Rock everywhere, taken em ground gotta stick or something, just kill em off, put all the rock. Lot of rock bin here too, all bottom camp, but they bin grade em when they were start making the house I think. When we used to play around we used to see that. Yeah. My time, but I still remember (pers. comm. 2014).

Betty went on to tell me a story about a cruel policeman:

And we had growing up that Keith Dawson. He used to walking around naked. Walking around naked. That's the cruelest man. You know when Bill Bunn and Mrs used to go for holiday, he used to crueelling people. Go out, one day, pick em up husband and wife, chain him up. Yeah. He went to Bow River, getta a husband and wife, they was working here before, tie him up, bring em back, that naked bloke now. He get up the horse, he riding like [shows how he rides], get up a horse, just grab that woman and rooting. Husband there, one side, chained up, looking out. That was really cruel. Bring him here, tie em up, give em a good hiding. Belt em. That two tree bin there now. That Keith Dawson. Bad man (pers. comm. 2014).

Betty chooses to paint the Mistake Creek Massacre and not other stories, such as the violence experienced by her parents from station owners. Painting can be a powerful or subtle way to bring up fraught issues, but cannot be used to explain everything. Betty's experiences are the building blocks for who she is today. For example, she spoke to me about her fear of leaving *Warrmarn*. In conversation with her husband Patrick, she said:

PMM: We used to be scared la *gardiya*, but not now.

BC: I still, I'm really scared. I think about leaving ... I think about ... We frighten, coz they might come there and I don't like sleeping right on top, they might, when we motel you know, they could burn em up. I'm still scared. Really scared.

PMM: They got security all round city, they can watch what place, they wont get up.

BC: Scared to go to city (pers. comm. 2014).

Although Patrick is less scared today, Betty is still scared to go into the city and stay in high-rise hotels and buildings. Perhaps this contributes to why she doesn't paint stories about cruel *gardiya*: her fear cannot be erased.

Gordon Barney and Mary Thomas paint the site of the Chinaman's Garden Massacre. Like Betty, they do not paint the event, but the location. In Gordon's *Massacre at Kooloongnoorri* (Plate 3.4), the black shape on the right of the painting is the hole that a man used to escape out of in the hill *Gooloongnoorren*. The hill is on the southern side of the Panton River, which is depicted in grey blue paint. Land formations are perceptible but the story for this place is unclear at first glance.



Plate 3.4 Gordon Barney, 2001, *Massacre at Kooloongnoorri*, natural ochre and pigment on canvas, 100 x 80cm (WAC039/01). Image courtesy of the Warmun Art Centre.

Gordon told me the story for this painting in 2014:³¹

That one bin, yeah, he's my grandfather. They used to be I don't know what from, they bin get them people, big mob, they bin dragging them people gotta chain you know. Going with a chain all the way. Big chain yeah. Take em some. They bin killing them la Queensland Creek, one place Queensland Creek, before we had Chinaman's Garden. Go from there couldn't, they reckon couldn't get to Halls Creek prison. Them bloke bin tied up under the tree. Wait wait wait. That man bin start look la hill. He bin look, 'one cave there. I'll try that cave'

Some other mob, man, they gotta feed. And this mob bin waiting for bullet, they make em sit down. Sit down like that and shoot em. It was... He bin take that, he bin fall with another man, mate, grabbed the blood that quick, put em la his nose and half his eye. Real real strong. They been poking him with the thing you know. Trying to make him move like that. Nahh he couldn't take that pain. Take that pain really. After when they bin, they bin start go out for firewood, make big fire.

That old man bin under the big mob, they bin on top of him, kids and all, small kids, that size, that size, that size, banging em la tree. You see the blood and the

³¹ This story is also documented by Ryan (2001, 61) and the No-Name Station cultural exchange project (2010).

chain marks. He bin start move the man, move em out. He bin get out and look, all the man long way, he bin sing out. Nobody la camp. All gone getting la wood. He sing out, 'I'm not dead. Get me up in the hill.' All the man bin running, he bin waiting in la creek. Running chasing all the horse, grabbing, for the saddle and he bin start galloping, go la side of the hill and the horse bin galloping, he bin start going inside. Going inside, right on la top. He bin looking down. They bin light a fire, that fire never bin go in. He bin come back. He bin blow em out, he bin open that little bit of window on top the hill, he bin move that little rock, blow wind, wait wait and they bin shooting, make fire shooting, he singing out, 'Woah! Woah' 'ah we got em'. He bin see la top, nother high hill bin up there, there la top. Go in from three. Big cave. Oh he right up la top. They bin get away, go back to camp, he bin feel that charcoal, too hot, go back inside, he bin chuck all the rock, that rock bin like that underneath, the top, he bin get burned here. He bin go round again, jump through, go outside, he bin go out to look, keep going. Going over the hill, come right around, Springvale, come back this way. He bin die here they reckon. He's here somewhere. near La cemetery. Somewhere la flat. No good.

In his story, Gordon describes how Aboriginal people were dragged in chains over great distances and killed at Queensland Creek. He recounts how a group was forced to stop at Chinaman's Garden to be killed. At this stop, one man pretended to be dead and escaped by running into a nearby cave. This story is well known in *Warrmarn* and several artists have painted it for sale and exhibition.³²

Mary Thomas also paints this story for the Warmun Art Centre (Plate 3.5). Her painting is also a depiction of the site of the massacre, but differs from Gordon's work in one significant way: she has painted the footprints of the man who escaped, and the Boab trees that children were bashed against. The maroon circle in the bottom right corner of the work, containing white shapes, is the place where the bodies of the children lay. Hers is a depiction of the remains of the event, not just the site.

³² For example, Rusty Peters painted *Chinaman's Garden Massacre* 2000, ochres on linen, 150 x 180cm. Purchased by Art Gallery of New South Wales and exhibited at the Ian Potter Museum of Art at the University of Melbourne between December 2002 and March 2003.



Plate 3.5 Mary Thomas, *Chinaman's Garden Massacre*, natural ochre and pigment on canvas, 70x45cm (WAC301/10). Image courtesy of the Warmun Art Centre.

One day Mary handed me the painting at the Art Centre and said 'dijan for my grandfather, at Chinaman's Garden....That massacre, ya know?' Scrawled on a piece of paper, shoved between the canvas and the frame, the story of the massacre was there for me to type into the Art Centre database system. Mary wrote:

This painting tells you the story of the massacre site in Chinamen Garden. The site is between two gum trees. The footprints belong to my old grandfather who escaped from being killed he ran across the Pantom River to the west bank and climbed the hill to a cave. In the cave he climbed up a flue (hole in the ceiling leading up and out of the cave) while in there the white men shot into the hole, then thinking they had hit him, lit a fire to really kill him, but he had already escaped and lived to tell the story (Source: Warmun Art Centre).

Just like the site at Mistake Creek, a wire fence demarcates the area where the bodies were burned.

The practice of painting can be therapeutic in reconciling grief from past events. Art practice allows one to engage with memories, in ways that are not explicitly revisiting, but in fact healing. Johnson (Johnson) and Lev-Wiesel (1998) argue it can provide a certain amount of distance and control, and thus a sense of containment for people. Bonnie

Meekum found art therapy useful in uncovering unconscious feelings for people: 'It can provide a non-verbal medium for clients to 'speak' about abuse' (1999:259). These histories, or 'moment after interpretations' are still reality for people.

Gija knowledge and practices

I now turn to the third theme, Gija knowledge and practices, continuing my focus on the work of Madigan Thomas. Often older people in *Warrmarn* transmit past ways of living, practices and beliefs through paintings that relate to the pre-contact or early contact period. Paintings are able to depict places that are harder to access today as well as practices that are discontinued. In her painting *Barangen Winan* (Plate 3.6), Madigan depicted the Country where the trade of food and objects occurred between different families and language groups in the region. The *winan* trade system was an important part of everyday life. Anthropologist Kim Akerman has researched early trade routes of the *winan* system, particularly with pearl shell in the Kimberley (Akerman 1980, 1992, 1993; Akerman and Stanton 1994).

In this painting, Madigan has portrayed the Country like a patchwork quilt. The different colours and ochre textures demarcate different sections of Country, compartmentalising geographic and cultural areas. Her story for the painting is as follows:

This side la Bedford Downs, hill country. This one all the old people bin coming up from there rubbing this one [the black section] they bin rubbing this one, Dreamtime, so they can get more tucker ya know. You know what that tucker? That Sugar Leaf, la leaf they bill em in la billy can, they used to tie em up, tie em up, gotta yam strap ya know? Use em for yam. And they keep that for another place ya know. People used to use em like that. And they bin go back here now, travel down this hill [bottom brown area]. They bin know, that other lot bin know they bin coming, they bin all meet up there for all that winan. That's there. They bin rubbing Dreamtime rock so they can eat and welcome the others to go through there. People used to come meet em there and give em sugar bag and sugar leaf in a coolamon (Source: Warmun Art Centre).



Plate 3.6 Madigan Thomas, *Barangen Winan*, natural ochre and pigment on canvas, 60 x 60cm, (WAC 674/10). Image courtesy of the Warmun Art Centre.

In another painting, *Winan* (Plate 3.7), Madigan painted tomahawks, spears, woomeras and boomerangs, next to an Aboriginal man painted up in ochre. She spoke about the Gija man who is pictured:

That man he is the boss bloke. He carries the message sticks, for *winan*. Send some east, west. Down there is rock, tomahawk, wax out of spinifex, smash em up to make em. Message sticks, spears, woomera, boomerang (Source: Warmun Art Centre).

This man would send the message stick to neighboring groups of people to instigate communication. It is interesting that Madigan chose to depict the man standing on one leg—the classic stereotype for an Aboriginal person. Patrick McConvell has noted that the Aboriginal children in the Kimberley have also adopted this stance, ironically reinforcing the stereotype (Lennon et al. 2001).



Plate 3.7 Madigan Thomas, *Winan*, natural ochre and pigment on canvas, 80 x 60cm (WAC284/10).
Image courtesy of the Warmun Art Centre.

In a similar documentary manner, Madigan painted traditional medicines and bush foods found in her Country, south west of *Warrmarn* in *Beranggul* (Plate 3.8). This painting is about the specific type of honey made by Australian native stingless bees. Madigan does not literally depict the sugarbag or the bees, but rather the location, and in narrating the story for the Art Centre certificate she links the Country with the practice of collecting *Beranggul*:

You know that yellow one, from the tree - *Beranggul*, where they used to cut him, ya know, tucker. *Lernjim*, we call him, that yellow egg for sugarbag. He a bit brighter than *Gayirriny*. We used to cut him for ceremony time. For young people, no flour or sugar, put him, this tucker for young man you know [...] For Aboriginal people that's all. No flour, sugar. Not then (Source: Warmun Art Centre).

In Madigan's absence now, the paintings and recordings remain as a conduit for learning and understanding about her past and a *Warrmarn* or Gija collective past. They are her tutorials of her history and contribute to her family's identity and the social identity of *Warrmarn*.

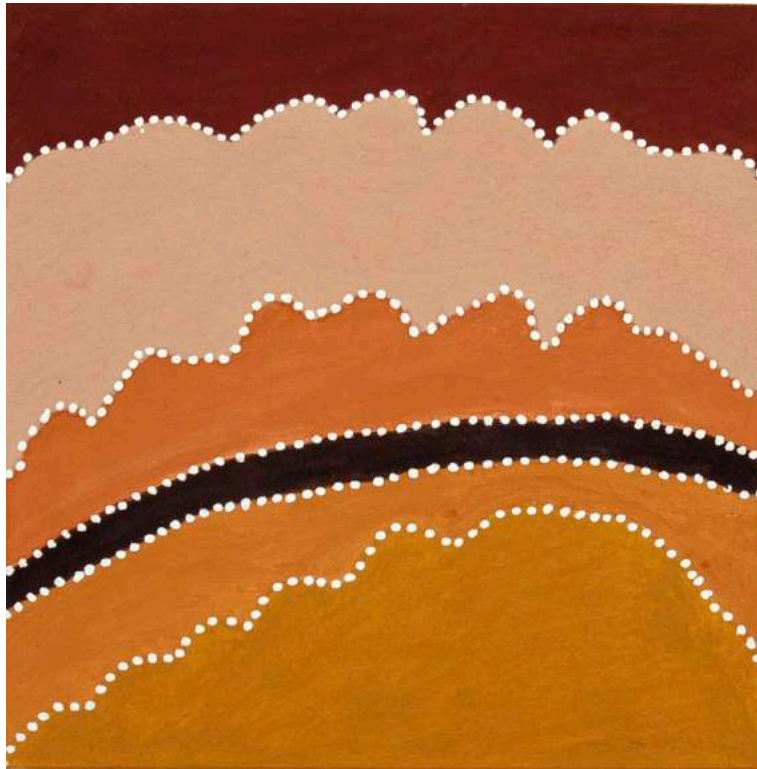


Plate 3.8 Madigan Thomas, 2010, *Beranggul*, natural ochre and pigment on canvas, 60 x 60cm, (WAC614/10). Image courtesy of the Warmun Art Centre.

Country and adaptation

Like most of the older generations in *Warrmarn*, Churchill Cann has walked and ridden the Country he paints. His considered and sometimes incidental brush strokes, mark out formations and patterns of the Country. He paints with delicate grades of ochre, soft washes and deep pigments. His paintings begin with a light wash of ochre, like watercolour. Shuffling around the canvas, rotating the board, he works out what he is painting and where to begin. He picks up a small rock and sketches the main lines of what is to come: hills, rocks, sites, tracks and rivers. These marks bring forth memories of his early life, of *Ngarranggarni*, of droving and topographical features. The canvas is a recreation of the land itself and a journey through it. Time and space intersect on his boards. Churchill depicts burial grounds, holiday camps, paths dingoes have walked and the entwined *Ngarranggarni* stories. The contours delineate with sometimes perceptible, sometimes ambiguous qualities and expose his choice about what to reveal, and how to reveal it. They are at once 'metaphysical maps' of Country (Morphy 1998, 103) and also 'relatively truthful, with

regard to the orientation, shape and the size of the features'—a description Kim Akerman coined for the work of Paddy Jaminji and Rover Thomas (1989, 166). Elevation and topographical relationships are quite accurately depicted rather than abstracted. In *Kingfisher Dreaming* (Plate 3.9), deep hues of reds and browns mark out the Country from the aerial perspective.



Plate 3.9 Churchill Cann, *Kingfisher*, natural ochre and pigment on canvas, 120 x 120cm (WAC 61/12).
Image courtesy of the Warmun Art Centre.

The marks left on the canvas by the passage of his brush contribute to a larger narrative, one that includes beliefs systems and individual experiences. He overlays the knowledge and experience gained from his youth with what he learnt working on it as an adult. Many station workers today look back on this period sentimentally (discussed further in Chapter Four). It is remembered as a time when people could live on the land, learn new and useful skills and be recognised as having practical, intimate knowledge of the land. The ABC open series *I am an Artist I come from the Bush* presents a nostalgic look at station life with Freddie Timms, Rammev Ramsey, Mabel Juli, Patrick Mung Mung and Shirley Purdie (ABC Open

2014). This combination of factors contributes to a generally positive recollection of station life, in spite of some difficulties. It was these experiences that fashioned unique identities for Kimberley Aboriginal people, as Davis found:

Nobody could doubt the extent to which pastoralism has etched itself deeply within the society and culture of the region, from the 'cowboy culture' of rodeos and attendant dress styles to the claim by Aboriginal cowboys that pastoralism has only ever been possible because Aboriginal peoples have shared knowledge with white pastoralists about how to live and move in the Kimberley and have historically provided much of the labour on cattle stations (2005, 53-54).

When access to land was restricted or denied by cattle stations owners and government in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, being on Country without permission became an act of trespassing and of rebellion. Churchill's works shows how paintings are an alternate way to revisit Country and to pass on knowledge about it. In her research, Jacqueline Healy contends that because of the restricted access, *Warrmarn* people had to teach younger generations about their Country through art (2002, 180). When access was and is denied or difficult, the meaning of a place continues in memories and paintings. A painting or an object can act as a symbol of place. The use of ochre itself is also important for some people. Churchill was known for collecting ochre whilst droving, as a way to keep and hold Country (pers. comm. 2012). Through his paintings, his narrative exists, in spite of attempts to curb or control it. Thus, his knowledge continues under new conditions and in new circumstances. Churchill is able to *be* and move through Country in his mind's eye, through painting and story.

Conclusions

Painting Country is common for artists at the Warmun Art Centre (and other Aboriginal artists living in regional communities around Australia). The landscape becomes the forum for discourse derived from and connected with memory. Paintings can show how places remain in people's memory both through connections to the *Ngarranggarni*, to the history of colonisation and to the events of everyday life. These elements can be represented by continuing design forms reproduced in ceremonies and cultural practices, through metaphysical maps, and others, such as ordinary events, are consciously unrepresented. Rusty Peters' painting *Warndiwal* (Plate 9.20), which I discuss in Chapter Nine, is a further example of the interconnection of landscape, the everyday and *Ngarranggarni*. In the place-based ontology of Indigenous Australians, these are all interconnected in context.

Paintings are also a way of expressing one's memory without contestation, they restore subjectivity to history and contribute to a thorough understanding of individuals in their social world. *Warrmarn* people also use artwork to depict places that are harder to access and practices that have discontinued, so that they may endure. Finally, painting (and the arts in general) can be used to deal with experiences that may be difficult for people to articulate, as Jennifer Harris has explored her thesis (2011). Underlying this is the fundamental notion that paintings are acts of empowerment and agency to varying degrees, for the individual.

In terms of understanding artworks from *Warrmarn*, it is not possible to fully comprehend the meaning and value of a work based on its symbols. Whilst such icons can assist conjecture in understanding, such strategies of identification rely too heavily on the viewer's perceptions and can bypass the artists' intention, subjective experience and the process of making. The story behind Betty's Mistake Creek Massacre painting, why she paints it and what the process of painting means to her, is unimaginable to those who are not familiar with her work, her life or east Kimberley history and art. Understanding works holistically occurs when oral histories are read (or heard) in tandem with paintings and when the artists' life and history is taken into consideration. The paintings I have discussed the memories of past lives interwoven with current life, whereby 'their subjectivity is the basis of 'agency', [and] a necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon' (Ortner 2005, 34). They are 'performances' (Denning 2003) and their meaning and messages can be inherited by succeeding generations. However, whilst paintings are used as conduits and containers for information, they are not the only means by which information is shared. Oral histories, as I explain in the following chapter, are also significant platforms to transfer, share, learn, empower and teach.

Chapter 4

Warna warnarram jarrag woomberramande

Speaking about—what they used to do and say—long ago

Introduction

In this chapter I use memory to chart the experiences of the older generations at *Warrmarn* who grew up, lived and worked on pastoral stations and then transitioned to *Warrmarn*. Like the previous chapter, these histories are a 'necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act in the world' (Ortner 2005, 34) and explain how people have compromised, adapted, struggled to and achieved some kind of autonomy or choice in their lives when situated within the changing environment and the discriminatory structures implemented by the Federal and state government. Unlike the previous chapter which uses artworks as a device to understand history, this chapter uses oral histories combined with government policies, documents and statistics from the Western Australian Aborigines Department and Chief Protector of Aborigines to contextualise the period. Artworks are not part of the analysis because there are few that directly relate to and explain personal experiences in the pastoral period.

I have separated this chapter into the chronological themes enunciated by my participants: the early station period (the beginning of the twentieth century), learning new ways, maintaining and expressing agency, leaving the stations and the transition to Turkey Creek (soon to become the Warmun community).

Living and working on the stations

In the early decades of the twentieth century east Kimberley Aboriginal people were at the mercy of many non-Aboriginal people in government, in the police force and those running and working on pastoral properties. Whilst this period is often depicted by researchers, settlers and pastoralists alike as a time of widespread 'lawlessness' where settlers and pastoralists acted autonomously (Battye 1978; Biskup 1973; Bolger 1987; Buchanan 1984;

Shaw 1980; Smith, Elder, and Co 1842), Chris Owen has argued that the law *sanctioned* violent actions and reprisals (2003). The Federal and Western Australian governments decreed power and control over Aboriginal people under the *Native Administration Act 1905-1936* (1905, 1911). The Act allowed the Minister to remove or keep an Aboriginal person within a particular reserve or district, at the Minister's discretion, it prevented Aboriginal people from entering prescribed areas without permits and, permits had to be issued if an Aboriginal adult wanted employment. The Act stated that it was the duty of the Aborigines Department to 'distribute relief, provide medical attendance, regulate reserves and exercise supervision over all matters affecting the interests and welfare of aborigines' (1905, Section 6, 3). The Act also decreed that the Chief Protector was the legal guardian all Aboriginal and half-caste children under sixteen years of age (1905, Section 8, 5).

As pastoral properties and the industry expanded in the early twentieth century, relations between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people were at times strained, confusing, presumptive and violent (Natives were Killed and Burned at East Kimberley 1927; Death Sentence 1900; Alleged Murder of Natives 1927). Aboriginal people used different strategies to survive. Some were violent toward the police and pastoralists, defending themselves, their lives, family and Country, some endeavored to live and work together affably and some subordinated themselves in order to survive. Directly and indirectly, the 1905-1936 Act was a major factor in the break down in continuity to Country and the emotional and social thread of Aboriginal society.

The 1905 Royal Commission on the Condition on the Natives found that cattle-killing was the most common offence committed by Aboriginal people, counting for 90% of crime (Roth 1905, 13). It consequently recommended that reserves be established for Aboriginal people to live in; for humanitarian and practical reasons (Roth 1905, 28).³³ Peter Biskup found that some pastoralists also lobbied the government to provide sites where Aboriginal people could be given freshly slaughtered meat to stop them spearing pastoralists' cattle' (Biskup 1973, 100-101). As a result, the Western Australian government set up Moola Bulla, a reserve for Aboriginal people in the east Kimberley, in 1910. Moola Bulla was a place where Aboriginal people were allowed to live, abide by their own social practices and codes and they were away from station cattle (Biskup 1973; Bolton 1953, 1958, 1981; Ross and Bray 1989).

³³ 'Your Commissioner pleads again that large areas be resumed in the northern unsettled districts for the sole benefit of the natives' (Roth 1905, 28).

At this point in time, east Kimberley Aboriginal people were held over a barrel: they could either live on reserves such as Moola Bulla, work on cattle stations, or attempt to live in the bush. However, living in the bush was not an easy choice because of the decreasing amount of land available and the ongoing violence with pastoralists and police (Roth 1905). Jack Britten (a now-deceased Gija man) told Helen Ross that his grandparents were warned they would be killed if they remained in the bush (1989, 29). Not all Aboriginal people wanted to move to the newly established towns so the only way to continue living as they had been was to be covert in the bush or attempt to build amicable relationships with pastoralists. Those who did not go to the reserves, or attempt to live in the bush, moved to the stations. It was their 'acceptance of being an unpaid but supported workforce that enabled them to share the right of occupation of the land' (Coombs 1994, 100). It seems however all options were compromises.

On the stations people were given food, shelter and clothes. Rusty Peters grew up on Springvale Station and worked as a stockman moving cattle, welding fences and tending stockyards. When his father was killed in a tragic riding accident at Rose's Yard (on Springvale Station), the family moved to Mabel Downs and he became a horse breaker. He spoke to me about his parent's generation and his own experiences:

Old fellas bin grow up, they bin have station all around the bush you know. Every way station. And they bin grow up, sometimes, the old people same time, young people, getting a job you know, some bloke, might be stranger lookin' for job, ask for job, what sort of job, might be fencing, new fence, new yard, make a big bullock paddock you know..... them old people, making fence, holding paddock, horse paddock, bullock paddock, every place la branding, main place make a yard, stock yard, for branding. Every year, cold break, come back from holiday, mustering, branding droving gotta Wyndham, selling bullock and come back and branding, selling horse, 'nother couple of months. Oh good day (pers. comm. 2014).

Patrick Mung Mung, of the same generation as Rusty, spoke to me about his process of learning on the stations as a young man:

Well I bin start learning. I used to work around the station, you know, washing up dishes [...] Learn us, how to work, that's the way we bin get learned through the hiding. Then I bin start riding horse, horse tailer. I went to muster, learn about muster, they used to tell me now, 'now you gotta get up early' round them horse, tail them horse, things like that. I bin learn all the way, through by hiding, all the way.....doesn't matter what job we do. I used to learn now, right through, till get

about fourteen [years old] they bin teach me how to break a horse now, start my father, used to learn me right to break horse, and I used to see how dad worked you know, with a horse. Used to break a horse now, might be about 10-20 horse, then we, I, used to ride station all the way long till I might be about fifteen sixteen, I bin start learning how to ride a horse, learning how to ride with jump up. When I bin learn that, I went out bush, mustering. I bin join the mustering now, on horseback too, good life. Shorthorn.

Get up everyday, every morning, never stop. You still work you know. Sunrise, sundown, sunrise, sundown. Never stop. Next time I bin start learning how to boundary riding fence you know With old Hector mob. Boundary riding fence you know, look after cattle. Time come from bullock. Mustering mob used to come a muster now. Bullock for meatworks. We take em out, count em now. Might be seven hundred, then we move. Start watchin', watchin' you know, watchin' bullock. Night one. Watch em one day, that Kilfoyle, whatthe name, from there to Lissadel, 700 to drove, drover used to take on from there. I bin still going back to mustering camp then. Old people used to dove them, way we go round, might be about eight hundred again. Every month you know, might be from April, May, June, July, right up August, finish droving, so we used to come back we used to mustering, branding you know. Do branding now, September, we used to close them. Come for holiday (pers. comm. 2014).

On the stations, Aboriginal people were appreciated for their knowledge of the land. This generated good feelings for individuals. Acquiring new station skills added to their personal satisfaction. These two factors gave many a sense of worth and may explain why this past is recounted sentimentally. Rusty Peters said that the Aboriginal workers ran the stock camp he was on, and he enjoyed the work:

Well we had a good time, before, all the station now, everywhere. They bin know, blackfella bin run that stock camp. That head boy, head stockman, well he run that stockcamp, he know. He the boss for us. Yeah we had a good time stock camp, good time bush holiday, knock off, no work, oh we like work, us mob. But old people stop. Different way this time, old people gotta work, young people gotta sleep (pers. comm. 2014).

Patrick Mung Mung also said he enjoyed the work and the process of learning how to ride a horse, tail a horse, boundary ride and muster, even though it was hard:

That was a very hard job, but when I learn it, it was like nothing. I bin know things. I thought it was hard, because I was growing, but when I got used to it, I knew everything. Every time we come back home, never stop work. We bin like that work (pers. comm. 2014).

Churchill Cann was born and grew up on Texas Downs Station, north east of *Warrmarn*. He worked as a stockman for most of his life on Texas. He travelled extensively throughout the Kimberley, working on many different cattle stations between *Warrmarn* and Broome. He also told me he enjoyed the work and the life on the stations:

Good fun, yeah, but hard job, but good fun. Good fun. Good life la horses and bullock. Had a lotta fun (pers. comm. 2014).

Mabel Juli, Rusty Peters' sister, was born at Moola Bulla and grew up with Rusty on Springvale station. When she was young she worked around the homestead setting the table, sweeping rooms, digging holes for trees to be planted, painting the house, looking after cattle and filling up the water trough (ABC Kimberley 2011). As a young woman she moved to Bedford Downs Station and Bow River Station to work with her husband (Stewart 1999, xx). She spoke strongly about her dislike for the Springvale Station manager, Jimmy McAdam:³⁴

Old McAdam, that's the old manager for us. He was made up for my auntie, old McAdam. He was jealous for my auntie that's why he didn't like all the boy coming down, Springvale. He used to chase them. Go down to the camp with the horses and chase them with a whip. Break all the spears and woomera. And he used to tell them to go. He was a bad *gardiya* we bin have em. He didn't like Aboriginal people (ABC Kimberley 2011).

Mabel also spoke about another boss from Springvale Station, Tom Quilty:

Oh yeah. New manager come from Timber Creek. Old fella, his name was Tom Quilty. He was a bad man again, that old Tom Quilty. But he was right to all the working people. He didn't like all the boy when they come late. He wanted there early for work. One old man was late you know, and that old man belt him there, belt him with a bone, that leg part bone you know, get that bone and belt em with that, bang em la head, everywhere.

Ahh my dad seen that that old Tom Quilty belting all the boy and he said 'well what's this old *gardiya* doing la all the boys?' and my dad used come and chase Old Quilty now, belt him Quilty. My dad used to get on the horse and get his whip, gallop back, make him run away, and his son bin come to help and my dad bin

³⁴ Jimmy McAdam bought Springvale in 1932 from E. Bridge and Sons (North West News 1932). Quilty and Sons then acquired Springvale in 1948. The Quilty's already owned the neighbouring station Bedford Downs.

belt em both of them, father and son. Old Quilty bin come little bit good now, because my dad bin belt em (ABC Kimberley 2011).

But relations between station managers and their Aboriginal male and female workers varied. Rusty thought of Jimmy McAdam as a good mate because Jimmy slept alongside them and joined them in hunting:

From Queensland... he was a good mate for us. He didn't camp at uncle place. He camped with us, youngfellas, go hunting (pers. comm. 2014).

Rusty said that Jimmy let them get Killer themselves, as long as it was away from the homestead:

Oh yeah, old manager McAdam he used to tell the old people 'don't come la station for beef, go and kill em in la bush'. He a good manager that McAdam. Old McAdam, I don't know about other place, he was real good you know, he say 'don't come back here for beef. Gotta bullock there la bush, you can kill him anyway gotta spear, got lotta dogs there, don't come back.' That old manager. He a good old manager. But no pay. At holiday camp he used to take la soak, people without car (pers. comm. 2014).

On the other hand, Mabel didn't like Jimmy because of he was jealous when other men were around her auntie (ABC Kimberley 2011).

In recalling the past, many people acknowledge that in the station period, *gardiya* were cruel. Eileen Bray disclosed to me that:

Gardiya used to be real cruel, even out la station they reckon when they used to work for *gardiya*. Long time. You don't be on time for work—whip. Get you outta bed. Early days *gardiya* used to be cruel they reckon.

These experiences continue to inform how people relate today. Eileen went on to say:

These days we lucky now. When we have things we go together to say sorry. White people say sorry to Aboriginal people, for the wrongs. [...] For myself and Rammel, [her first husband] we taught our kids, even them bigger ones, tell them you mob lucky these days, if you had to catch up mob olden days, that'd just kick you outta bed for work. Real cruel *gardiya* before.

Eileen talked about letting her children know about what it used to be like living and working on the stations.

It seems that Rusty, Patrick and Churchill see the early pastoral period as positive because they had *more* choice about lifestyle than they do today. This was no doubt because they were living and working on Country and they were able to practice *Joonba*. It may also be because other factors, such as access to alcohol, was limited (discussed later in this chapter). This past is somewhat romanticised now, perhaps because the youth of today have different experiences. Their relationship to Country differs from the older generations. They are born in town and have limited opportunities to visit Country, let alone live on it. Knowing Country and living on it is very important to the generation who grew up working on the stations. This may be why many older people view the station period as positive in light of these circumstances and it certainly contributes to why older people relay these histories to younger generations.

Learning new ways and maintaining values and practices

On the stations Aboriginal people learnt station skills and Western values and practices. Non-Aboriginal people also learnt aspects of Aboriginal culture. *Warrmarn* people spoke to me about their adaption to *gardiya* ways, such as learning about sugar, tobacco, flour, clothing and money. Before equal wage legislation, Western currency for Aboriginal people was rations, book up and/or pocket money. Learning about Western currency came with access to cash, which didn't begin until equal pay, unemployment benefits and later with painting money.

In 1944 the *Unemployment and Sickness Benefits Act No. 10* allowed Aboriginal people to qualify for unemployment benefits if the Director General deemed them of sufficient 'character, intelligence and development' (Australian Government ComLaw n.d., Section 19) but this did not include those who were deemed 'nomadic', 'primitive' or whose child was dependent 'upon the Commonwealth or state for support' (Commonwealth of Australia Numbered Acts n.d., Section 18, 24). It was not until after the election of the Labor Government in 1972 that it was declared that 'all Aborigines should be paid award wages when in employment and should otherwise be eligible for the full range of social security payments, including unemployment benefits' (Kral 2007, 89; Sanders 1986, 285).

When I spoke with Rusty about this period in his history, he spoke of his adaptation to the Western economy of money but did not speak about unemployment benefits and the transition to equal wages. He said life was easier without money:

RP: Oh easy then, we didn't worry about money. We didn't worry about this, just work that's all, but good, make em healthy, us mob, them old people stopped station, us mob working la fence, making yard, fix up all the yard, that's all the young fellas. Old people stay and go home, light job you know, station.

CM: So it was good to be on your country at the station?

RP: Oh yeah.

CM: And now?

RP: This mob, they like money. Oh me too, I like money [laughs]. Different, all changed. Long time it hard way.

CM: Do you reckon its harder then or now?

RP: Nah not too hard. Everyone own money now, getting spoilt, true. All want the money. But before, we didn't worry la money. All the work, for good family, stock camp. Finish mustering, going cut wood, station. Knock off, go on holiday. All the year, every year, come back. Some bloke might get married, never come back (pers. comm. 2014).

People were adapting and learning about Western ways of living and they were also trying to maintain cultural practices and beliefs. Some scholars have argued that station life had a negative impact on ceremonial activity and religious practices. Kenneth Maddock supposes that living on the stations meant there was less time for traditional activity (1977, 24) and Veronica Ryan found that on a few stations traditional practices ceased (see Dottie's story: 'We never went out for Law' Ryan 2001, 199). Eric Kolig also said it was hard to continue practices because Aboriginal people had to adapt to Western imposed conditions of labor, which divided hours into work and play—where traditionally this separation was never clear-cut (1981, 51-64).

However, many people I spoke with said cultural practices occurred on the stations, more so in fact than in the community today. Patrick Mung Mung told me that unlike today, at Texas Downs Station he lived happily and practiced *Joonba*:

CM: What was it like [on the station]?

PMM: Happy. Every day happy but it was hard. We used to have cattle in the yard. Go back to camp, when we finish, paint up. For *Joonba*. Dancing about all night, knock off, go back sleep, boogey, get up in the morning early for work, all the way like that (pers. comm. 2014).

Shirley Drill told me that practicing law and culture is the same today as it was when she was working on the stations. She remarked: 'We practiced Law at holiday time, just as we do today—nothing different' (pers. comm. 2014). She also said they kept up language on the stations. In these accounts, station life supported cultural practices.

Indeed, the pastoral period was complex. Ann McGrath argued that the period from 1910-1940 was a 'golden age' for Aboriginal people who were working and living on cattle stations in the Northern Territory and the Kimberley (1987, x). In her book *Born in the Cattle* she presents positive experiences and relational power dynamics that demonstrate Aboriginal potency. She argues that the non-Aboriginal managers had to 'earn their authority over Aborigines by proving their abilities as horsemen' (1987, 97). She goes on to argue that Aboriginal people adopted European practices in order to continue their own specific cultural practices—recalling Elkin's idea of 'intelligent parasitism' (1987, 6). McGrath found that Aboriginal people gave European bosses and managers a hard time and proposed that Aboriginal culture was not destroyed by white contact (1987, 96) and Aboriginal people's acceptance of the cattle station lifestyle was not 'a product of their humiliation, or a cultural sell out' but that Aboriginal people used the stations for their own purposes, such as maintaining links to the land.

On the other hand, the Berndts' *End of an Era* (Berndt and Berndt 1986) researched some forty years earlier, focused on the negative conditions for Aboriginal people living and working on the Vestey stations. They did not position Aboriginal people as having relative power and agency, but rather described how Aboriginal people were subject to the dominating power of station managers and pastoral life. Hokari Minoru (a student of McGrath's) argued—drawing on historian Tim Rowse—that: 'McGrath provided a flexible, open-ended notion of 'culture' which contrasted with the Berndts' relatively bound concept of culture that could not accept stock work' (Minoru 2002, 22; Rowse 1987). However, the Berndt's focus was on station life and Minoru failed to take into account factors that were methodologically significant in his comparison: the Berndt's' research was a specific account at the time, in the particular place, whereas McGrath's oral history was memory in the present of times past and may well have emphasised the positive.

This was a complex time where people experienced a variety of things, both positive and negative. Davis summarises the complexity well: Aboriginal people regarded themselves in seemingly contradictory ways—'as distinct from non-Aboriginal people in social and cultural connections, at the same time as sharing common work histories, practices and identities as non-Aboriginal stockmen' (2005, 49-50). The ability to express choice and maintain lifestyles was in constant negotiation. Today in *Warrmarn* people look back on the station life positively because it enabled them to live on Country and be valued as participants in the cattle industry. However, the necessity to engage in the Western world was unavoidable and so they had to compromise in some aspects of their lives.

Agency and autonomy

How did Aboriginal people exert agency in this period? Whilst Western culture, economy and religion was pervasive, some Aboriginal people resisted in covert and subtle ways. Betty Carrington told me about her adaptation to Western clothes when her mother made her 'proper' clothes from rags and curtains. She went on to say that some people wore their *naga* all the time, as a commitment to culture and identity:

Kangaroo, no clothes, *naga* and paperbark blanket. They bin get that one, one *oogalman*, grandmother for big Joe, they bin give him drink, he bin have clothes on, but he bin still have that kangaroo hide, yeah, they bin looking at, when he bin small. They live and die with that thing (pers. comm. 2014).

Another way of being in control and having agency was to be mobile. H.C. Coombs identifies mobility as an important part of one's sense of autonomy (1994) as does Yasmine Musharbash in her recent work with Warlpiri people (2008). Moving from station to station and camp to camp was common in this period. Phyllis Thomas, Churchill Cann, Patrick Mung Mung, Dougie McCale, Rammel Peters and Gordon Barney all spoke about moving around when they wanted. Gordon recalled:

From Alice Downs, I bin come back to Mabel Downs, worked there while, the manager from Old Brunswick. From Alice Downs I bin come work Mabel Downs, after old John Davies bin pick me up I bin go to Lissadell. Work from Alice Downs, Lissadell, Mabel Downs, Lissadell, from Lissadell to Texas, Texas Station. I bin come back to Lissadell again. Keep swappin la every station. From Texas one year, four years la Mabel Downs, five years. From Moola Bulla to Springvale. From Springvale I bin come back again. I went to Lissadell, from Lissadell back to Argyle round the Territory. I worked there for while la Territory. La Argyle, old Argyle station we bin shifting cattle before that dam gonna be built up. That old

station bin get drowned. Under water. I bin go back to Halls Creek, stay there for a while, holiday, come back work there for a while at Lissadell. Last worker here at Lissadell (pers. comm. 2014).

Gordon explained that he left stations because he didn't like the manager. One time he also left because he wanted to see Slim Dusty play live (and he didn't like the Station he was working on):

This mob bin tell us, 'nother mob: 'you can't see Slim Dusty in the show'—when they playing show, that Slim Dusty—'ah you mob can't see, we gotta work.' Rightto. We bin take all dem clothes for washing down the creek, we told one bloke, we go down the creek, 'righto you mob can go, come back before.. before supper', 'yeah we bin come back. We bin *dig*, we bin know where to go, go to Halls Creek now, Moola Bulla station and my cousin brother, *gardiya* one, 'where you going?' 'Ah we going holiday!' 'You can take it in town?' 'Righto'. He reckon mefella holiday but me fella dig. Go la town, ride la horse, some people bin stole it, some fellas bin run away from Moola Bulla, yeah. Old Max look around, nothing. Couldn't find us, I bin here Turkey Creek. Old Mabel Downs, Texas work, we do the same again, run away. I bin tell that fella: 'nah nah nah we don't want to run away'. But yeah we run away. I bin do the same, washing clothes and keep going. Manager bin tell me 'you gotta come back again. You just go for holiday.' But I bin go for good. I didn't like it. Too hard that job. Yeah.

Gordon, like others, had limited options for living and working—it was either try and live in the bush, on the stations or at a reserve. Moving around was one way he was able to be relatively autonomous. Phyllis Thomas moved around as well—I asked her why she left Turner Station and she responded:

PT: Get away from Country, go look around 'nother Country.

CM: Did they ask you to leave?

PT: Nothing, I bin just get away myself. I hadda get away.

CM: Why?

PT: Yeah, but... you know I bin get sick of it. Working about (pers. comm. 2014).

Shirley Drill said that she left Springvale station because her father wanted to change jobs: 'My father didn't want to stay, change job. Mum wanted to go to Turner' (pers. comm

2014) and so they left. Rusty moved around also, but he stayed on the stations with the same owners.

During this period Aboriginal people were both active agents and victims of the cattle station period (Anthony 2004; Berndt 1977; Jebb 2002; McGrath 1987; Minoru 2002; Rowley 1972; Stevens 1974). I learnt from those involved that some people were able to maintain values and practices on Country, whilst others were unable to. Some remember the good aspects of station life and others only remember negative ones. Some individuals integrated various aspects of Western culture and practices into their daily life whilst others rejected many Western ways. Responses and ways people dealt with the Western way of life ranged from compromise to acceptance. Nonetheless, the encroachment of Western values, and the economic, cultural and political system was unavoidable.

Leaving the stations

In the early 1960s east Kimberley Aboriginal people were still living and working on stations. Moola Bulla had been shut down as a reserve in 1955 and was transferred to a private cattle station (Kimberley Language Resource Centre 1996). Some old people were living at the ration depot at Turkey Creek, accessing resources. In the mid 1960s the cattle industry underwent major changes. In 1965 amendments to the Federal Pastoral Industry Award were outlined by the Federal Court and became operative from 1st December 1968 (Bolton 1981, 194; Commissioner of Native Welfare. 1969; Rowley 1971, 345). The changes involved the introduction of award wages under the Federal Pastoral Industry Award. However, the changes to the Award did not take effect in the Kimberley until 1969 and into the 1970s, even though they had begun in the Northern Territory. The reason for this was twofold: Western Australian Aboriginal people needed a *Certificate of Citizenship* in order to be accorded wages under the Native Citizenship Rights Act (Jebb 2002; Kral 2012, 142) and very few people had the certificate. Western Australia was under its own state policy of the *Native Welfare Act of Western Australia*, despite the fact that the Pastoral Industry Award was Federal. Secondly, even for those who had a *Certificate of Citizenship*, cash wages did not effectively take place until around April 1969 because the first few months of that year was the wet season, and therefore holiday time for Aboriginal workers (Skyring 2012).

When the legislation passed, many pastoralists couldn't manage the sudden financial burden of paying their entire work force, including the older Aboriginal people, and so Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers were expelled from their jobs and homes. Thalia Anthony (2013), Alex Kerr (1975) and Fiona Skyring (2012) discuss in detail the onset of equal wage legislation in the region, including compounding factors such as motorised mustering methods and changing government policy. Anthony argues that equal wages was just one contributing factor in a range of events that saw their removal from the stations (2013). Kerr notes that the introduction of equal wages meant diminished employment opportunities for Aboriginal people and also contributed to a downward spiral for many Aboriginal people trying to live in two worlds (1975, 25-26). Skyring argues that economic and social factors contributed to the forced removal of workers from east Kimberley stations and that, in fact, it was the very low labour cost of the Aboriginal workforce that enabled stations to maintain economic viability. She regarded the industry as a feudal system based on slavery and not a 'normal' modern economy, but a false economy (2012). Skyring also notes that the 300% rent increase of Kimberley pastoral properties, which became effective on the 1st July 1969 (2012, 160), also contributed. Skyring argued that poverty and welfare dependence did not start once equal wage legislation set in but it was created through the history of dispossession from the land and the low value placed on labour across several generations. Anthony Redmond takes this further by discussing the complexities of relationships between people in the pastoral industry (2005).

The introduction of the Federal Pastoral Industry Award is often depicted as disastrous for Aboriginal workers and families (Bunbury 2002; Skyring 2012). Warmun community identifies the period after the introduction of Award wages as the second stage of dispossession for east Kimberley Aboriginal people (Bolger 1987; Warmun Community Council 2009). Interestingly, Bill Bunbury depicts pastoralists as uninvolved bystanders in the transition from rations to cash but Fiona Skyring asserts that from 1944 onwards, pastoralists actively fought in the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission against the introduction of wages (Skyring 2012, 166-167).

The people I spoke with in my fieldwork periods did not discuss such matters. This was both challenging and perplexing. When I enquired about the introduction of the Award and its affect on station work, I received an array of answers. Some said they chose to leave the stations themselves, others spoke unemotionally about leaving and reminded me that 'whitefellas had to leave too'. Gordon, Patrick and Churchill said they chose to leave Texas because of the way the cattle were being treated:

CM: How come you moved here? [to *Warrmarn*]

CC: They bin shooting all the cattle. He never sick. They was liar. They want breed em Brahman, bullock. Too many breeding they bin shoot em. I can't take this. Seeing all the cattle. He shootem for nothing. We bin tell em. Me, Dougie and Patrick. We the last mob to pull out. We not working. Killing all the cattle (pers. comm. 2014).

Churchill was talking about the Western Australian government's campaign against the Brucellosis and Tuberculosis disease,³⁵ which he did not know about. On the other hand, Eileen Bray, Betty Carrington, Mabel Juli and Rusty Peters saw the transition to Turkey Creek as somewhat logical because everyone was moving there and it had water, shelter and resources. After the Award, more people were placed on welfare payments because there was limited work available and they did not have appropriate skills for the employment available.

Welfare became the reliable source of income after the station period and like station life, there are multiple views and positions about the introduction and effects of welfare payments. Some believe it discouraged young people from getting a job, whereas for others it made life easier to navigate in the Western world. Many institutions and some Aboriginal people opposed welfare because it encouraged 'idleness' (Coombs 1994, 162). Optimistically, Eric Kolig saw it as an opportunity for people, especially elders, to have 'all the time in the world' to organise cultural activities, produce sacred objects, look after religious affairs and 'practice and propagate' (1981, 62). For Kolig, being on welfare and maintaining traditional practices was an example of Aboriginal agency and recognition of equal rights. Kolig noted that people were proud and happy to get on welfare. It was in this period of beholden income that locals began to paint and make objects for a developing art market. Art was a way to gain income that was independent from the government, Western bureaucracy and from the stations.

³⁵ The eradication campaign gained urgency in the 1960s and in 1966 the Commonwealth adopted a recommendation of the Australian Agricultural Council that action needed to be taken as soon as possible. The operation commenced in 1970 and was jointly funded by the Commonwealth and State governments along with the industry. Bobbie Buchanan argues that the BTEC program was responsible for many changes in station and stock management practice (2002).

The 1970s and the beginning of Warmun Community

When the effects of the Federal Pastoral Industry Award wages trickled down to station workers, many people from Bedford Downs, Violet Valley, Lissadell, Texas Downs, Mabel Downs and other stations began to camp at Turkey Creek in humpies. Whilst some people attempted to return to their Country, gates were locked, access was denied and many people moved into the bigger towns because it was easier to manage and access welfare money and other resources. People moved to larger towns such as Halls Creek, Wyndham, Derby, Broome, Fitzroy Crossing and Kununurra because they could not live in the bush and had become accustomed to aspects of Western lifestyle (the economy, food, clothing and alcohol). It was perhaps not a choice, but a decision that came from the necessity to change and adapt. Hector Jandany said that his family was pushed to live in *Warrmarn*:

They were pushing us, I know for sure. I didn't get here myself, to *Warrmarn*, welfare did that. Pushing black people around in this country, in *Warrmarn* [...] we didn't want houses, us blackfellas. We got enough houses in the big place. Bush. English people, Gija people, what you gotta do? You can't get away, no way (Art Gallery of New South Wales 2004).

I spoke with Rammel Peters, Rusty's brother, about Turkey Creek before it was established as Warmun community and why he moved there. Rammel came in from the stations because he wanted a place of his own and had nowhere else to go:

CM: Why did you come here, to Turkey Creek?

RP: Well, we had nobody to look after us. Mum came away, my dad passed away, my little brother passed away. Younger than me. And then, Rusty and sister came away again. I was on my own at the station. Well I said no-one there to look after me, I had only a few mate, cousin brother and thing, well I, I made up my own mind, well, I'm going, all the young fella what we bin grow there, we belonga that thing, we bin all take off, they bin all follow me.....

All them little little kids were there, I was a bit older. Anyway, we knew where to go, bush track, bush road, get out to main road, and cut a little bit,

CM: When did you come here, to Turkey Creek?

RP: We was, we were working at station there. We didn't know where to go. We had to come stop here. [...] We came and live here and *gardiya* said, 'don't camp this side', we stayed all that side, *gardiya* bin let us stay this side, [...] We stayed here, we had no owner. But they was here, but no one didn't ask who for this area

now. So that old doctor³⁶, old lady, not too old, anyway, we used to come check up, and then I came too for check up, everyone was check up. And then I came along I came with that old man, two brothers, and anyway and he was the first here, before me, all them people that was in the leprosarium in Derby, they was in the front line, I was just knocking around, watching, and then I went in she bin ask that old man now. 'Where you from Bob?' She bin say, 'I from here'. 'Really?' 'Yeah. I bin born here.' I was there watching. 'This is your land,' that old doctor said to Bob. 'This is your home.' My old cousin brother, old Hector Jandany said 'oh ok then.' And then we starting off, we moved in over this side [Top Camp]. We had a lot of room. But that side we were all cramped up lots of mattress (pers. comm. 2104).

Kim Akerman has argued during this transitional period, 1972—1978, there was increased cultural activity in the Kimberley region. He termed it a 'cultural renaissance' (1979). Akerman attributed this renaissance to increased migration, a decentralisation from main settlements and greater Aboriginal control over homelands and outstations. Akerman argues this dynamic process came from the strength and adaptability of Aboriginal culture (1979, 241) and developed as Aboriginal people recognised that there had been, to varying degrees, a 'disintegration of traditional socio-economic life.' He also asserts that the positive integration of non-Aboriginal people in the area helped the resurgence of Law, as the newcomers respected and supported Aboriginal culture, practices and knowledge (1979, 238). Indeed, this was the period that saw the development of the *Goorirr Goorirr*, strengthening Akerman's case for cultural renaissance (Akerman 1989, 1989; Christensen 1993; Newstead 2014; Spinner 2013; Sweeney 2009; Stanton 1989).

Beneath this picture of cultural renaissance, the social fabric of Aboriginal families was in upheaval. Alcohol restrictions were lifted in 1971 and this had profoundly negative affects on families. The Great Northern Highway, which links the east Kimberley communities and towns, was opened and enabled people easier access to towns. Today multiple people cite the introduction of equal wages and access to alcohol as the downfall of their families. Mabel Juli spoke about her experience of moving from Springvale Station to the town of Kununurra and how she started drinking:

How did I come to drink? My mother and father never showed me alcohol out there at Springvale. My mother, she kept me out there all the time when I was a little girl. Then after I came here to Turkey Creek, I went to the leprosarium when I got sick. Well one girl there was telling me to drink. Well this old man, father for my two girls. He was teaching me to drink when we went up to

³⁶ I have not been able to identify this doctor.

Kununurra, Well, I was in Kununurra I was drinking all the time and didn't like it (Ryan 2001, 248).

Every person I spoke with in 2014 older than 50 years old said things became worse when they had access to alcohol. Many adults acknowledge their alcohol abuse in this period, their subsequent memory loss and its impact on learning. They also said that their parents and family didn't pass on cultural knowledge to them because they were too drunk. Their reasons for drinking included unemployment, lack of access to Country and not knowing how to say no. These factors stem from having little or no independence, knowledge and power during a time of great change.

From 1975, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (WA) and Department of Child Welfare (WA) were assisting people to establish a community at Turkey Creek by building facilities. Ted Beard, a DAAWA officer in Wyndham, assisted the community with their applications for incorporation in the period 1976-1977. Jessie Burrridge came from Kununurra (where she worked at the WA Department of Community Welfare and then with the WA Health Department) and assisted *Warrmarn* residents in applying for social security, in particular the aged and invalid pensions (pers. comm. Tom Stephens, 2015).

In 1977, a seven hundred hectare area around Turkey Creek was incorporated as the Warmun Aboriginal Community (Bolger 1987, 31) under the *Western Australian Associations Incorporations Act*. For the first three years, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs funded essential community services like running water and vehicles and ablution facilities. The community employed the Moongoong Darwung Aboriginal Association Incorporated in Kununurra to provide bookkeeping services and give advice (Dillon 1979, 1-2). Tom Stephens commenced work at *Warrmarn* in late 1977 as the first community advisor through Moongoong Darwung.

Some sources say the community began from an act of self-determination from the locals. The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart depict the establishment of the community as an act of determination from the elders (Ahern 1991; Ryan 2001; Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart 2004; Vinnicombe 1996). Perhaps seeking to inflate the agency of the community members and extoll self-determination, the Ngalangangpum website states:

Some Kija people who had previously lived at Violet Valley, decided to do something. Armed with a strong political consciousness born of dispossession and

poverty, they asked for government assistance and established the Warmun community at Turkey Creek (Ngalangangpum School n.d.).

Allan Tegg argues that Warmun Community formed not from a positive move made by east Kimberley people but as a result of a history of dispossession. He asserts that because there are no traditional owners of Turkey Creek, the commitment to Turkey Creek is not strong (Bolger 1987, 30-31; Sturmer et al. 1984; Tegg 1989). It is true that the people who first came to *Warrmarn* were from areas outside of *Warrmarn*, and there was less of a commitment to the area in the immediate vicinity of Turkey Creek. However, I have found that there is a sense of ownership over *Warrmarn*, in spite of the different family groups living together. Rammel Peters for example, spoke very strongly about his commitment to the community and the traditional owner Bob Nyalcas. He shared with me his fight for land rights and his journey with Paul Seaman to Perth and Melbourne for the Aboriginal Land Inquiry (Seaman 1984), which was at a time when discrimination was rife in the area. For example, at the 1977 state election a 44 gallon drum of alcohol was taken to the Turkey Creek roadhouse on election day and given out for free so that Aboriginal people didn't vote (Jones 1981, Postscript, 35). There has been, and continues to be, competition and rivalry between family groups about who the Country belongs to. Indeed, this is changing as years pass and children are born in towns and younger generations spend their entire lives living in *Warrmarn*, not out on Country. This is not particular to *Warrmarn*, it occurs across Australia. The old people who now reside at *Warrmarn* are the product of a history of dispossession and cultural and social upheaval. Their children and grandchildren learn about this past through words and paintings, but they have experienced a different set of circumstances. Most probably the community was formed via a combination of Aboriginal people speaking up and government attempting to offer a solution to the problems it had created in the previous decades.

Inheritance

Aboriginal people in the east Kimberley have either directly or indirectly dealt with major changes in their social, political, cultural and environmental circumstances over the last one hundred and thirty years. In this chapter I have detailed experiences and views of the pastoral period from the 1940s until the Award wage legislation in 1969. Working and

living on pastoral stations was not always the preferred choice but rather a compromise for Aboriginal people. People were not simply active agents or passive victims of the cattle industry, there were areas of grey. Realistically, Aboriginal people could not escape the changes that were occurring around them and had to adapt to new cultural practices at the same time as continuing their existing ones. And indeed, older people at *Warrmarn* have said they were able to continue cultural practices on the stations. At times, people defied the authority of station owners and government by voicing their dislike, wearing the *naga* or by being mobile. In other situations people compromised and accepted Western practices in order to be on Country and with family. With hindsight, the station workers who are alive today view this part of their lives as good, but hard. It was a complex period that has in many ways contributed to positive identity development for Aboriginal people in the region, in spite of the difficulties and trauma.

After the Pastoral Award, east Kimberley Aboriginal people had to adjust to major changes in their social lives like the generations before them. Welfare payments and alcohol caused seismic geographical, emotional and social shifts in daily life. The transition to Turkey Creek and the development of the Warmun community was a process that required much time and effort from new residents. The experiences and stories I have related in the previous pages are evidence of the memories that remain in peoples' minds and the legacy left for younger generations. Such legacies, both positive and negative, are the residue of east Kimberley post-contact history, which permeates today; it is why people proudly wear cowboy clothing and why people paint.

Some fear and anger remains entrenched in people's mind's today toward *gardiya* as a group, though not necessarily as individuals. The labels of 'good *gardiya*' and 'bad *gardiya*' continue to exist (first noted by Ross and Bray 1989). I heard one Gija woman scold her grandchild and threaten him with: 'you better [do this], or I'll get *gardiya* to get you!' Such experiences affect one's ability to be autonomous and independent as well as their perceptions of themselves and their community. The experiences also create anxiety about the loss of culture and inhibit future actions. Rusty explained to me one day how young people today have learnt not to like 'whiteman':

Long time, they didn't know whiteman. *Gardiya* they didn't like blackfella, shootin' them, killing em that's my old people. They didn't know. White man, nothing. Before. All round this side, might be Melbourne, Sydney, Queensland, middle of the Country, go around, killing the people, everywhere here. They didn't like blackfella. Blackfella here before the white. But lately now, they come to know whiteman. Whiteman, lotta kind people, bad people, they didn't like us mob,

shootem. This fellas grow em up. Now they bin come to know white people, white people bin real kind, they bin learn to work all those old people, they bin come to know whiteman. Whiteman bin like a blackfella too, they bin good worker, now today we keep going now.

Today we all friend. But before, blackfella didn't like whitefella, whitefella didn't like blackfella. They didn't like them they bin come to know them, they didn't like blackman. Now today they like same today, they don't like whiteman. Still going. They might have that idea, young people (pers. comm. 2014).

Rusty recognises youths' inheritance of subjugation, anger and loss. The difficult nature of this history foregrounds the following chapters and places today's world in context.

The pastoral period and the establishment of Warmun community were significant in shaping *Warrmarn* identity. Davis astutely notes that in the pastoral period, many Aboriginal people were raising the question of 'how should be live?', which became a defining issue of the region and the period (2005, 53). I wish to extend this idea of Davis' and add that people were not only wrestling with this question, but also a myriad of others, including: 'who are we?' 'what do we want to do?' 'what do we want?' in their changing social, cultural and political environment. Change was upon them and people trying to define who they were, what they wanted and how they dealt with the impacts of Western culture. In the following chapters I continue this social analysis by discussing the actions of *Warrmarn* residents today, as they manage the terrain of value (re)creation through creative practices and everyday life through the establishment of a school in the community, the Warmun Community Collection and the Warmun Art Centre.

Chapter 5

The Ngalangangpum School

Introduction

In the previous two chapters I discussed the subjective experiences and memories of people who now reside in *Warrmarn*. I examined the changing east Kimberley environment by looking at how individuals related to and lived with non-Aboriginal people, understood different world views and practices, adapted to the social and cultural conditions of pastoral work, left the pastoral stations and established the Warmun community. This chapter continues the themes of adaptation and agency through a case study of the Ngalangangpum School in Warmun community.

I begin with an outline of the establishment of the Ngalangangpum School based on archival documents and oral testimony, to reveal how the Warmun community decided on a Catholic School and how this process was, at times, out of their control. I discuss how community members pushed for a curriculum that had a Two Way system that emphasised equally aspects of local Aboriginal culture with skills for life in a Western context. I look at what was taught, how it was taught and if it indeed placed equal importance on teaching Western knowledge and Gija culture and practices. Whilst I reveal that equality in curriculum content was not achieved, I discover how individuals employed strategies to ensure their values and needs were met.

The founding of Ngalangangpum School

In April 1978, almost a year after the community had been incorporated, children from Turkey Creek were attending schools away from their families, in Wyndham, Halls Creek and Kununurra.³⁷ To combat the travelling distance, some Aboriginal families chose to live closer to the bigger towns with schools, in small communities such as *Gooda Gooda/Nine*

³⁷ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, *Bob Nyalcas letter to District Inspector, 27/03/78*.

Mile. Eileen Bray remembered that at that time *Warrmarn* was like a 'ghost town' and Sr. Clare Ahern recalled that *Warrmarn* was a 'lonely place' because there were no children running around. Although the emptiness was apparent, the catalyst for establishing a school in *Warrmarn* came from a tragic car accident near the *Gooda Gooda* camp. It was a 'mongrel day', Rammel Peters told me:

A little girl, Rammey, his daughter now, him and old Mona, anyway that little girl, they bin a silly mob, camping the other side of the road. Anyway, I was there watching, cleaning up, or making breakfast, and then that fella was travelling, Jimmy Smith his name, he was flying, look, Toyota, waving, you know, and that little girl started running the road, and she thought she miss that car, she made a big mistake, and then yeah, I seen that little girl standing up that side and when I was doing something, might be put some wood on the fire, and I look, the girl was missing. The girl was in front of the bullbar. Poor little girl you know. Poor little girl. She bin carried from right here to might be that house over there. By the bullbar.

After that, I stopped those kids, I told old boss, old Bob Nycalas, I told him 'well mate, that our brother, we not go back, gotta go back to Turkey Creek.' When we came back here, we sat down straight away and I said, well this old Jobst, that old Bishop, anyway, we bin ask Kriener, we did ask that old man. Anyway bishop came, 'yeah, alright we do you a school'.

I was speaking up from there. I was helping that old man now, I had a bit of understanding and bit of brains you know. Alright he said, I give you school. There was no problem. They grade that road, grade this place, and I said to them, leave that tree there, the big bloody tree, we didn't know that those old people buried there. Anyway, they bin grade em and we took the dormitory from old Beagle Bay, girl dormitory, anyway we were right (pers. comm. 2014).

As Rammel explained, the tragedy ultimately led to the formation of a school at *Warrmarn*. From the beginning, Rammel said they wanted a Catholic school and they approached Bishop Jobst, the Catholic Diocese of Broome. It seemed the community knew what they wanted and were determined to be in control of their school. On the other hand, in an interview in 1991, Hector Jandany said that it was *his* decision for a Catholic school:

I told the government I want the school then I got this bough shed made up. And I got two sisters, Sister Claire [Ahern] and Sister Theresa [Morellini]. I gottem from Kununurra and they was working for me here (Hilton and Thomas 1991).

According to Hector, he got the nuns to work for him. Paddy Springvale expressed similar sentiments in early Community Council meetings. In July 1978 he said:

Maybe they [the Catholic school system] can come here—but only if they are working for us. We'll have to be a strong mob and get them to do it the way we want to do it. All our lives we have been run by *Kadia*; now we want to get a chance to run things our way—with *Kadia* level together working for us. We don't want *Kadia* standing over us.³⁸

In her book, *From Digging Sticks to Writing Sticks*, Sr. Veronica Ryan said that Jumpany (Bob Nyalcas) wanted 'the two Sisters to run the school' (2001, 254) and researcher Mayke Kranenburg relayed it was the 'politically strong Gija people who decided on the school' (Kranenburg 2004, 11). The Catholic Church also presented the establishment of the school as being the will of the community members (Ahern and Morellini 1980; Ahern 1991; Hilton and Thomas 1991; Kimberley Catholic Education Language Team 1992; Ryan 2001). The Ngalangangpum website states:

In answer to a direct request from the Warmun Community, whose members wanted to be in more control of the education of their children. The community decided upon a Two Way school based on the Catholic belief (Ngalangangpum School n.d.).

These quotes and actions suggest that the decision for a Catholic School came from a determined people, who had a sense of ownership over the community and their future.

Upon closer inspection, however, the establishment of the school was more fraught. Sr. Veronica Ryan noted there were some people who opposed a Catholic school (2001, 266). The archives of community worker Michael Dillon reveal some disputes and events in the decision-making process (Dillon 1979).³⁹ The disputes noted by Dillon were mainly between non-Aboriginal people but letters and community meetings reveal that some Warmun Councillors and community members felt pressured by the Church. Audrey Bolger also identified disagreements about the type of school for the community between community members, based on the fact that not all community members were of the Catholic persuasion (1987, 31).

³⁸ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, Minutes of Warmun Community Council Meeting Turkey Creek 20th July 1978.

³⁹ Michael Dillon was recruited to work in the east Kimberley by Fr. Peter Willis—the former Catholic Parish Priest of Kununurra—who had worked with local Aboriginal people in establishing a number of Aboriginal organisations including Moongoong Darwung. Moongoong Darwung is where Dillon first worked.

The decision process

On the 27th of February 1978 Warmun community chairman Bob Nyalcas and DAAWA officer Ted Beard wrote to the District Inspector of the Education Department in Kununurra requesting a primary school.⁴⁰ This was shortly after the death of the young girl at *Gooda Gooda*. The Director General of the Education Department in Perth, WA, replied and suggested they look at community schools at Strelley and Noonkanbah to see how they run in order to work out the kind of school they wanted. On the 28th of June 1978, Fr. Kriener, a priest from Halls Creek, and five Sisters of the St Josephite order, visited the community unannounced, without an entry permit.⁴¹ In an informal meeting, they discussed the prospect of establishing a Catholic school with some community members, who were also Councillors. Several days later on the 1st of July, Bishop Jobst sent a letter to the Warmun community stating that the 'Warmun people had requested a Catholic school'.⁴² On the 5th of July Community Chairman Bob Nyalcas replied to Bishop Jobst and asked for copy of the minutes of this informal meeting.⁴³ The Bishop sent the minutes that proposed the establishment of a Catholic school. On the 10th of July the Aboriginal Lands Trust wrote to the Council to confirm arrangements for a Catholic school.⁴⁴ It also enquired about the status of the land set aside for the school site and it included the Bishop's letter to the Aboriginal Lands Trust which stated:

The Warmun community of Turkey Creek has asked me to provide a new school and convent at their settlement.⁴⁵

A Council meeting was held on the 20th of July.⁴⁶ Thirty community members were recorded as present, with additional unnamed attendees. The visitors present were Charles Hamilton, Tom Stephens who was working in Kununurra with the Moongoong Darwung

⁴⁰ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346.

⁴¹ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, Minutes of Warmun Community Council Meeting Turkey Creek 20th July 1978.

⁴² Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, *hand written chronology of events* and Minutes of the Warmun Community Council Meeting Turkey Creek 20th July, 1978.

⁴³ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, *hand written chronology of events* and letter dated 5th of July 1978.

⁴⁴ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, *hand written chronology of events*.

⁴⁵ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, *hand written chronology of events*.

⁴⁶ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, Minutes of Warmun Community Council Meeting Turkey Creek 20th July 1978.

Corporation and Michael Dillon, who recorded the minutes.⁴⁷ Bishop Jobst's letter and proposal were discussed (amongst other things). In the minutes, Clifton Gilmary remarked:

It is not right for people to come here and have small meetings with just a small mob from the community. All the mob from the stations should have a say.⁴⁸

Charles Hamilton said that they 'have to make an important decision' and he 'doesn't care which school they choose'. Chairman Bob Nyalcas replied:

Well this is the first time I really understood the idea of a community school. We really want a Two Way school here. Lots of our kids are forgetting our language.

Paddy Springvale agreed and said:

Yes, the kids are coming back from the state school in Halls Creek and the Convent school in Wyndham and have forgotten our language; they only know the European language; they can't understand us; they need to learn two ways: reading and writing yes but also spear throwing and making coolamon.

Tom Stephens then explained that they had three choices—State, Catholic and Community—and Bob Nyalcas stated:

We just agreed with the Bishop because he flew in here and said he wanted to put a Catholic school here. But now we have another idea as well which we understand better now. We'll think about it some more.⁴⁹

At the end of the meeting, the Councillors decided they wanted more time to think about their options. Bob Nyalcas and Councillor Raymond Wallaby wrote to the Strelley Community requesting to see their school. Their cover letter read:

⁴⁷ Ted Beard left the east Kimberley in early 1978 and asked Tom Stephens on behalf of the community, to take on the role of Warmun community advisor. Tom agreed and was designated as the 'bookkeeper' to make it clear that it was a support role to the community council and not a 'managerial' role (pers. comm. Tom Stephens, 2015).

⁴⁸ Meetings with small groups also occurred in the Argyle Diamond negotiations and this is likely to be a reference to that process (Rio Tinto 2006).

⁴⁹ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, Minutes of Warmun Community Council Meeting Turkey Creek 20th July 1978.

Just recently, the Bishop has been pushing hard to put a Convent school in Turkey Creek. He has not talked to the Council about this, though he has talked to some members of council. We know we want a school. We don't want a state school. We have heard about Community schools like yours.

It is clear some people felt pressured and wanted to find out more about their options. At the next Council meeting held on the 3rd of August, Bob Watkins from the WA Education Department was invited to explain the difference between State, Catholic and Community schools.⁵⁰ Two days later, advisor Tom Stephens wrote a letter to Bishop Jobst requesting he attend the meeting with the entire Council and Bob Watkins. On the 11th of September the Warmun community sent a telegram to Bishop Jobst proposing a date change for the meeting, from the 14th of September to the 21st of September—as Bob Watkins was unavailable. Bishop Jobst replied and said he was coming on the 14th. However he failed to appear on that date because he was in a plane accident.

On the 26th of September Shirley Bray complained of continued meetings between Fr. Kriener and select members of the community. On the 28th of September, a Council meeting was held without Fr. Kriener. During this time, John Bucknall, then Principal of the Strelley Community School, had responded to Bob Nyalcas's request to visit and stated that they were welcome to visit their Strelley school in the second half of September. Michael Dillon took a small group to the school (pers. comm. 2015).

On the 3rd of October Colin Stewart, the area officer for the North Eastern section of the DAAWA wrote to Resource Advisor J. Foley in the Perth DAAWA about the meeting on 14th September.⁵¹ He stated that the community wanted a 'community type school' and a couple of Sisters to do the teaching. They said they wanted an element of Catholicism, but they also wanted to be in control of their children's education. He wrote:

The meeting was adamant in its desire to maintain control over all of their land and hence refuse the Bishop or anyone else for that matter the right to have independent control over a section of their land. They are annoyed at the pseudo Council meetings called at various times by outsiders where so-called community decisions are reached by an unrepresentative gathering of people.

⁵⁰ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, *hand written chronology of events*.

⁵¹ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, C.A. Stewart, area Officer, North Eastern section, letter to J. Foley re: Turkey Creek School, 3rd October 1978.

On the 12th of October 1978, the Warmun Community Council met. Forty-five community members attended, with visitors Fr. Lorenz (representing the Bishop Jobst), Fr. Kriener, Colin Stewart (DAA, Wyndham), Bill Lewis, Sandy Taylor, Grant Kingston (Department of Social Services, Kununurra) and Michael Dillon. Fr Kriener spoke and emphasised his long-term relationship with the community. He said:

A community school is a bush school and that is not good enough, because some of your children are smart children so smart they can get jobs as *Kadia* have.⁵²

He also said that a Community school would have non-Christian teachers because the Bishop did not give Sisters to a Community school and the boss would be *gardiya*. He counter-proposed that a Catholic school would be 'Two Way' and the school board would be the boss for the school. Bob Nyalcas was recorded as responding: 'I reckon it's better what you said Father. I don't believe in a community school.' But Paddy Springvale asked:

Are they going to listen to us what we tell them? No other way around - *Kadia* bin driving us all we life... why can't we be boss for first time? *Kadia* not going to tell us what to do.⁵³

The community was familiar with Catholicism. The Josephites were already in the Kimberley and people were familiar with their work. One large Gija family, who had been living on Texas Downs cattle station to the east of Turkey Creek, had brought the values and practices of Catholicism into *Warrmarn*.⁵⁴ The Catholic school in Kununurra was run by the Josephites, and had aspects of a Two Way curriculum, involving leaders teaching local Aboriginal culture (Lang 1978). People were also familiar with the Christian Brothers in Broome who ran the Nulungu Catholic High School—a boarding school Warmun children had been sent to.

⁵² Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, Minutes of Warmun Community Council Meeting Turkey Creek 12th October 1978.

⁵³ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, Minutes of Warmun Community Council Meeting Turkey Creek 12th October 1978.

⁵⁴ Winnie Budburria is still remembered as being a strong Catholic advocate in this family (pers. comm. Rusty Peters, Patrick Mung Mung, Shirley Purdie, Nancy Nodea, Churchill Cann, Sr. Theresa Morellini, 2014). This family practiced Catholicism on the station; they had their own altar and recited some of the prayers from the Mass (i.e. the Eucharist) and were baptised (pers. comm. Sr. Theresa Morellini, 2014).

The meeting culminated in the decision for a Catholic school with the following requirements: teaching would be in Gija and English and a school board would be formed to supervise it. The agreement was signed by the Councillors at the end of the meeting and the deed was written up and signed eight months later on the 16th July 1979.⁵⁵ In the requirements written to Bishop Jobst it was stipulated that the Two Way system would emphasise learning aspects of local Aboriginal culture as well as the acquisition of skills more directed to life in a European context. The staff provided had to be skilled in Aboriginal education techniques and willing to work with the community to teach Aboriginal language and culture. The scheme was to be initially implemented for a trial period, after which the community would hold a review.⁵⁶

However, tensions and issues surrounding the school and its Two Way curriculum were not over. At a community meeting on the 20th December 1978 Queenie McKenzie, Joe Thomas and Raymond Wallaby reminded everyone that:

They want to have nuns at their school but they want to own the school, the land on which it is on, and most importantly they want to run the school themselves.⁵⁷

Perhaps Queenie, Joe and Raymond thought that they were losing control of their school and their land. Other people did not speak their opinions about the school and how it would be run, but instead, as Frances Kofod remembers, stayed away from the school:

People didn't speak up because they didn't want conflict. Instead of arguing for an independent school, they just stayed away. There were others who had nothing to do with the school. While some spoke out about it, others just chose not to be involved (pers. com. Frances Kofod 2014).

Michael Dillon engaged in written dialogue with the Church, arguing on behalf of the community. Dillon believed that the decision making process was at odds with community self-determination and not aligned with the recent Statement of Concern released by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. On the 14th November 1978 he wrote to the 'Mother General' of the Sisters of St Joseph in North Sydney stating that the Bishop's

⁵⁵ With the help of Phillip Vincent from the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia.

⁵⁶ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, Letter from Phillip Vincent of the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia to Bishop Jobst, 20th November 1978.

⁵⁷ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, Turkey Creek Community meeting, 20th December 1978.

ongoing and past actions were 'causing tremendous disruption within the community.'⁵⁸ Ten months later, Sr. Elizabeth Murphy, Superior General, responded to Dillon and assured him that 'the two Sisters in Turkey Creek have gone to open the school in a spirit of total concern for Aborigines.'⁵⁹

In 1979 Dillon wrote a paper for the Australian Council For Overseas Aid Research and Information Service, entitled *A Case Study: Kadia power in an Aboriginal Community* (1979). He argued that the church had built up paternalistic relationships with Aboriginal residents that were 'benevolent in intent, destructive on content' and were the real cause behind the establishment of a Catholic school in *Warrmarn* (1979, 1). The thrust of Dillon's argument was that due to Aboriginal people's position of dependence and lack of knowledge in operating within the Western world, they had adopted a 'patron-client' relationship to whitefellas vis a vis dominant institutions such as the Church, where access to resources is exchanged for obeisance to Western ways and belief. He argued that Bishop Jobst gave them an ultimatum—they couldn't have the Sisters if they chose a community school which meant that if they wanted the Sisters they had no choice but to have a Catholic school. Dillon went on to argue that the Church manipulated people by engaging in positive, long-term relationships with them. Ultimately, Dillon suggested that the entire process diverted the community from self-determination because Fr. Kriener and Bishop Jobst did not actively support the community to try and make the most informed decision.

Fr. Cyril Hally responded to Michael Dillon's case study.⁶⁰ Hally argued that Dillon's study of 'Kadia power' should be a study of Dillon himself, as Dillon was not outside the power dynamics he critiqued. Whilst Dillon was in a position of power in terms of knowledge about *gardiya* worlds, the evidence suggests that Dillon sought to support the community in making the most informed decision, for example, by taking some people to see the Strelley School. Hally agreed that Aboriginal people were in a powerless position because they had been degraded and demoralised upon losing their station jobs and moving onto unemployment benefits, but this was because the community had 'no productive role whatsoever in the Australian economy.' But, Hally also argued that Dillon undermined

⁵⁸ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, *Michael Dillon letter to Mother General*, 14th November 1978, Reference number 78/9.

⁵⁹ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, *Sr. Elizabeth Murphy letter to Michael Dillon*, 17th September 1979.

⁶⁰ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, 3rd May, 1979.

Aboriginal people in their ability to judge character when he supposed that the Church used its friendliness to manipulate and influence them.

Six months later Bishop Jobst wrote to Fred Chaney, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and questioned the actions of Tom Stephens and Michael Dillon.⁶¹ Bishop Jobst objected to Dillon's inference that the Church was 'a white institution yielding power' and like Hally, argued that Stephens and Dillon were also in positions of power 'more detrimental to the development of the Aboriginal people than the alleged paternalism of the government and Church put together'. Chaney replied neutrally and encouraged Bishop Jobst to write a response to Dillon's paper.⁶²

Ultimately, Michael Dillon's archives bring to light the issues that occurred in the formation of the Ngalangangpum School. Dillon's archives show that the community wanted to be in control of their school, teach their children their culture alongside *gardiya* knowledge and eventually run the school themselves. His archive presents the Catholic Church as playing on people's lack of knowledge about school structures. Three pieces of evidence suggest that some people felt pushed by the church: Colin Stewart's letter to the DAA, which stated that the community wanted Sisters and for it to be community run, Bob Nyalcas and Raymond Wallaby's letter to the Strelley Community stating that the Church was 'pushing them hard' and Eileen Bray's phone call note where she is recorded as saying she disliked the fact that Fr. Kriener and Bishop Jobst held informal meetings with some community members and then presented these meetings as representative of the community. The archive also shows that the community advisors made efforts to educate community members about their options.

In outlining this history, I have shown how *Warrmarn* people negotiated throughout the establishment of a school. Dillon's archive presents a picture of a community that needed time to make decisions because they were navigating through the *gardiya* world; learning about Western ways, responsibilities and language, negotiating with non Aboriginal people and dealing with large institutions like the Catholic Church, whilst simultaneously working out what they wanted for their future. It is possible that many people were not fully aware of their options for choice between a State, Catholic or Community school, nor did they fully

⁶¹ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, The Reverend J. Jobst to the Honorable F. M. Chaney, MHR, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, 11th June 1979.

⁶² Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, F. M. Chaney, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to Reverend J. Jobst, 23rd July 1978.

understand the difference between these schools.⁶³ In addition, community members had differing opinions about Western religion and its congruence with Gija culture. Indeed, whilst Dillon's archive should be considered as well-intentioned and seeking to empower Aboriginal people, it too is not without its subjectivity.

The Two Way Curriculum

Once the school was established and up and running, what did its curriculum look like? How satisfied were the Aboriginal residents with their school, what was taught and how was it taught? When Sr. Clare Ahern and Sr. Theresa Morellini arrived in May 1979 they conducted the first lessons in a bough shed, which the community had erected as their meeting place. After the bough shed was damaged one night, they moved to the *Walarri* tree nearer to Turkey Creek. Sr. Clare, the first principal, recounted that she was 'armed with the pedagogy of Paulo Freire' (Freire 1996) and strove to work with the community to start the schooling program. Clare remembered that people wanted the children to learn equally *gardiya* ways of reading and writing and math and as well as their culture. Paulo Freire argues that specific ideological structures dominate school systems and classrooms and, what is taught and how it is taught is shaped by the mainstream culture, which in this case, was Western.⁶⁴ Clare wanted Gija and Western content taught equally.

In the first lessons, Sr. Clare and Sr. Theresa taught in English and if family members were present, Gija words were interspersed. Sr. Clare recalled there were some young women who could read and write and they worked in the school. The community then appointed one adult from each camp to work alongside Sr. Clare and Sr. Theresa in lessons. The classes were small and consisted of reading and speaking together using demonstrative and instructional teaching methods, with some visual teaching aids (Plates 5.1 & 5.2). They worked in small groups with the Sisters and family members.

⁶³ Michael Dillon papers, series 1, MS 4346, Warmun Council meeting.

⁶⁴ 'Institutional, western literacy and numeracy frameworks are not free of ideological structures' which influence what is taught and how it is taught, effectively subtracting 'knowledge acquisition as an 'active process of inquiry' (Freire 1996, 52-53).



Plate 5.1 The Tree School 1979. Photo courtesy of Sister Theresa Morellini.



Plate 5.2 The Tree School Turkey Creek July 1979. Photo courtesy of Sister Theresa Morellini.

Sr. Clare said that they had wanted to start the school gradually, bringing children slowly back from the other schools but as soon as they started lessons, children stayed in the community and did not return to the schools they had been attending. When a bough shed was completed on the present-day school site, the main classes moved there (Plates 5.3 & 5.4).



Plate 5.3 The Bough Shed May 1979. Photo courtesy of Sister Theresa Morellini.



Plate 5.4 The Bough Shed c. 1980, with Sister Theresa and children. Photo courtesy of Sister Theresa Morellini.

Many community members were involved in the School's development. Sr. Clare recalled:

We would start about 7:30 and it seemed to be that the community had decided who was to be in the school. We never asked, they just arrived, there were certain people who just were there. They must have decided that this is how they would look after their kids.

Sr. Clare and Sr. Theresa both remembered that community people would come every morning to teach. They would sit with and stand in front of the students and talk to them in Gija (Plate 5.5).

According to Sr. Clare, some adults took responsibility for the grounds—planting trees, caring for the play areas and running the school community kitchen. Queenie McKenzie took responsibility for language and George Mung Mung took responsibility for culture teaching (Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart 2004, 12). Other teachers were Hector Jandany, Left-Hand George, Paddy Williams, Winnie Budburria and Eileen Bray.



Plate 5.5 Queenie McKenzie reading with children c. 1987-1988. Photo courtesy of Frances Kofod.

In the beginning, everyone was taught under the bough shed until a girls' dormitory was brought over from Beagle Bay school. It was converted to fit *Warrmarn's* needs: divided into two teaching areas, toilets and quarters for the Sisters. It was adjacent to the bough shed. The official opening of the school was on the 27th of November 1979. (Ryan 2001, 270) and teaching under the bough shed occurred in tandem with the 'new' building throughout the 1980s (Plates 5.6 & 5.7).



Plate 5.6 Painting at the Bough Shed c. 1987-1988. Photo courtesy of Frances Kofod.



Plate 5.7 Sister Kathleen Bissett and students, 1981. Photo courtesy of Sister Theresa Morellini.

What was taught?

For Sr. Theresa, Two Way meant giving the *gardiya* three 'Rs'—reading, writing and arithmetic and teaching the children about 'being Aboriginal.' She recalled:

Every morning before school started, the elders used to come down and teach. We would have our Gija lesson and they learned songs and words. Then they brought boards and told stories, using the board to teach. The different stories were painted on cardboard boxes and ply boards. When they finished, we put them up on the walls, for everyone to see and they would come back and retell those stories. The other part of it was that because we were a Catholic community, the elders would also paint religious stories and bring them and tell them to the children. We would then use them for religious ceremonies, such as mass and gospel stories (pers. comm. 2014).

Sr. Theresa recalled that in these days, from September till Christmas, they had corroborees regularly. After the performances, the boards used in the corroborees would be hung up at the school and used again when needed. Stimulus cards, objects and paintings were made and referred to, often incorporating Catholic content and used in liturgical ceremonies (Plate 5.8).



Plate 5.8 Hector Jandany and George Mung Mung discuss paintings at the school for Eucharist c. 1980.
Photo courtesy of Sister Theresa Morellini.

In the years 1985-1986, the School employed linguist Patrick McConvell to help facilitate language transmission. His role was not to teach Gija but to assist the older Aboriginal people in preparing classes and material for the children and record Gija speakers. Patrick recalled that when he was there, Gija language was taught for half an hour in the morning and then it was Western Australian Catholic Education Curriculum in the afternoon. Patrick said that the morning session consisted of repeating words and on cards with animals, plants and body parts and sometimes there would be an excursion outside of the school where they would collect bush tucker, make a traditional utilitarian object or speak about their paintings to the children. He remembered the occasional over night bush trip. The school had to meet the Western Australian Catholic Education Department's requirements and the time given to 'being Aboriginal' did not extend beyond the morning session.

In the years 1987-1988, Frances Kofod was employed as a linguist to support the language program. Like Patrick, Frances recalled that Gija continued to be spoken to students for a short time in the morning:

Morning language classes were mostly single words. I tried to bring in a few sentences that were reproduced every week that we negotiated with the elders but it was words and sentences with a narrative that people would say. Sometimes they would bring paintings and talk about them (pers. comm. 2014).

More than twenty books were made as teaching aids that had Gija, Kriol and English translations for Gija beliefs and practices (Plate 5.9). These books were made by the Aboriginal and *gardiya* teachers and remain as digital files with some hard copies in the School's archives. These books were a result of the period when Frances Kofod and Patrick McConvell worked at the school. They did not have any Catholic content in them as both Patrick and Frances stipulated that they would not work with Catholic content.



Plate 5.9 A resource book by George Mung Mung, a book that includes Queenie McKenzie teaching how to skin goannas and a Gija book of insects. Images courtesy of the Ngalangangpum School.

In 1986 Ashton Scholastic commissioned artist Pamela Lofts to work with Gija leaders (and other leaders from other communities) to make children's books based on Dreamtime stories. Two books came out of Ngalangangpum School—*The Bat and the Crocodile Story* by Jacko Dolmyo (Dulmyu) and Hector Jandany (Sandaloo), illustrated by Jane Yalunga (nee Thomas), and *How the Kangaroos Get Their Tails* by George Mung Mung (Spunner 2013, 11). These books were illustrated by children in the school and also affirm the practice of linking art with story.

Currently, the Ngalangangpum School holds archives of early lessons taught in the 1980s by Queenie McKenzie, Winnie Budbarria, George Mung Mung, Hector Jandany, Henry Wambini. Teachers and Frances Kofod and Patrick McConvell recorded a few of these lessons. Although a lot of the archival documents belonging to the school were lost in the 2011 flood, some still remain.

Frances recorded one lesson on the 25th of February 1987 in which Queenie McKenzie and Winnie Budbarria spoke to the children about three paintings. The two women repeated Gija words to the children and then the children repeated them back. Queenie and Winnie also discussed the painting in Kriol and spoke about the site, the Country, about coolamons and skin names. The strategy of repeating singular words to students continued into the 1990s. Filmed in the *Warrmarn* community in 1990, the documentary *The Serpent and the Cross* (Hilton and Thomas 1991) contains footage of George Mung Mung and Hector

Jandany teaching at the school, repeating words to the class. In the scenes, the adults walked around the classroom shouting single Gija words and the children repeat the words back to the adults (Plates 5.10 & 5.11).



Plate 5.10 Hector and George talking to the children about paintings at the school. Screen shot taken from the film *The Serpent and the Cross* (1991).



Plate 5.11 George Mung Mung repeating body parts in Gija to children at the school. Screen shot taken from the film *The Serpent and the Cross* (1991).

Like Patrick, Frances also remembered excursions outside the schoolroom: a trip to *Winepa Spring* taught children how to cut palms for Palm Sunday and a morning excursion showed children how to collect spinifex resin (Plates 5.12 and 5.13). Frances took photos and Hector gave her all the words used in Gija, with the intent to have follow up lessons, but there was no follow up.



Plate 5.12 Collecting spinifex resin with Hector Jandany c. 1987-1988. Photo courtesy of Frances Kofod.



Plate 5.13 Hector Jandany demonstrating on a school excursion c. 1987-1988. Photo courtesy of Frances Kofod.

According to Frances, Hector Jandany's idea of Two Way was equal hours of Gija and English. Following his lead, she suggested a structured language program from Kindergarten to Year 6, where learning was tailored to the competence and age level of the children. At the end of the year, children would be expected to know a certain level of vocabulary. Frances recalls the use of art to transfer Gija culture. The photographs in the Plates 5.14-5.17 show adults sitting and standing next to paintings in front of seated children. These were typical instructional, formal lessons where students were spoken to by the teachers. Paulo Friere may term this method a 'banking' style of teaching where students become 'receptacles to be filled' (1996, 53), not active in the knowledge acquisition process.



Plate 5.14 Queenie McKenzie and Winnie Budbarria teaching with paintings at the school. Photo courtesy of Frances Kofod.



Plate 5.15 Queenie McKenzie teaching with paintings at the school. Photo courtesy of Frances Kofod.



Plate 5.16 Queenie McKenzie, Left Hand George and Paddy Williams teaching Gija at the school. Photo courtesy of Frances Kofod.



Plate 5.17 Gija teachers Hector Jandany (walking past in the top left hand corner), Winnie Budbarria, George Mung Mung and Queenie McKenzie. Sister Veronica leans on the painting. Photo courtesy of Frances Kofod.

Although the school continued with the morning sessions it is questionable whether there was a commitment to develop bi-cultural education in which language learning would be an integral or equal part. Frances Kofod and Patrick McConvell both recall tension around the Gija content of the Two Way curriculum. Frances remembers that some stimulus cards used for Gija teaching depicted objects, animals and plants not from or relevant to the region, such as the koala. This did not stop lessons however. On one occasion, Frances remembered George Mung Mung holding a picture of a dilly bag in front of the children and explaining to them (in Gija): 'these are the kind of dilly bags we don't make here' (pers. comm. 2014).

Frances recalled another card that depicted a butterfly. As the Gija word for butterfly is known to be a euphemism for female genitalia, the teacher, Queenie McKenzie, said the word very quickly and then took the card away from the children. Afterward, Eileen Bray, who assisted in classes on occasion, suggested to Frances that the card was inappropriate and should not be used. But Eileen did not want to tell this to the Sisters, Frances recalled, rather Eileen wanted Frances to raise the topic with them. Frances did not; she believed they would not believe her when she asked them, so the classes continued with the

butterfly. In these two examples, George and Queenie employed strategies to counter the irrelevant or inappropriate content: George explained that the dilly bag wasn't made in the area and Queenie only showed the butterfly card briefly. They adapted and compromised to the situation instead of speaking to the Sisters. Similarly, Patrick recalled that Hector incorporated Gija culture into the Catholic sermons:

When I was there, the priest used to come from Halls Creek and he used to give the sermons. Hector would translate some sermons into Gija. The priest was talking about Easter and the resurrection of Christ, and Hector spoke about Jesus being born in the Aboriginal way—reincarnation—instead of the Catholic story (pers. comm. 2014).

In this situation, Hector used the situation as an opportunity to transfer Gija beliefs as well as the biblical story. Another strategy used to counter the incorrect information, was for the teachers to make their own artworks, which is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Gradually, Two Way teaching lessened. Upon reflection, Sr. Theresa thought it was a combination of factors that led to its demise: the Catholic Education Department stopped funding for the linguists (only one more linguist was hired after Frances Kofod); the leading Aboriginal teachers grew old and passed away; new teachers and principals came in and new relationships had to be formed with successive generations. These changes, and the lack of impetus from younger generations to teach Two Way, meant that the Gija side of the curriculum went from a small portion of school time, to none at all.

From its inception, Two Way at Ngalangangpum meant a very small proportion of time dedicated to teaching Indigenous practices and Gija language. The leaders in the community taught Gija language and Gija culture in classrooms and on occasion outside of the school grounds. Attaining equality in Two Way teaching was always going to be difficult when one group's values, obligations and priorities did not match the others. The extent to which the Gija-related content was an important and necessary part of the children's learning trajectory seemed somewhat disingenuous because of the time allocated to the classes. However, it was the beginning of change, and an attempt to deal with the circumstances of the time. Two Way was effectively a short-lived compromise between two different world-views in order to co-exist.

Conclusions

This chapter has discussed the impetus and the process of establishing a Catholic school at *Warrmarn* in the period of transition between the pastoral station era and the beginning of the Warmun community. Residents wanted a school at *Warrmarn* because it was safer than travelling long distances to other schools, children could live with their families and community members could (potentially) guide the school curriculum and be in control of what was taught.

Archival documentation on the establishment of the school reveals how *Warrmarn* people exerted their beliefs and priorities when faced with decisions that had to be made, such as what type of school they wanted in their community. Archival documentation also shows that outsiders, which include the community workers and members of the church, had their own motivations and opinions about what type of school was needed for *Warrmarn*. The Bishop was determined to build a Catholic school at *Warrmarn*, possibly to generate more funding and support, and the community workers were trying to facilitate informed choices and more options for the community. At the same time, both groups were providing support and resources for the community: the community advisers were providing access to social security and government funding for housing and the church was providing pastoral care and assistance. *Warrmarn* people sought support in these areas and subsequently used these outsiders (their resources and structures) to meet their needs and aspirations. Thus, community members were positioning the community workers and the church workers as much as they were attempting to position the community. Perhaps both the community workers and the church gave too little acknowledgement to the agency of the community.

It seems the community sought to appease both groups who appeared to have opposing views of what was possible with a school, in order to maximise their benefits. They accepted a Catholic school so that they could have the two Sisters, who they knew, and were given the hope that an Aboriginal committee would oversee the schools operations in the future. In this way, the community (or elements within it) adopted all-embracing views, which may seem contradictory. My research shows that people agreed with or supported the views they thought their interlocutors were seeking from them in order to create and maintain useful relationships without losing their autonomy.

This is an idea canvassed by Peter Willis in his identification of respondent roles in relationships (or 'transactions') between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people on

east Kimberley pastoral properties (1980). Willis argues that within the dynamics of the engagement itself, the patron [the non-Aboriginal station owner/worker] 'exerts pressure on his target/client [the Aboriginal worker] by creating needs through the strategic bestowal of goods [and then] the client is driven to seek the goods of the patron, thus becoming constrained' (1980, 99). The expression of agency by the client is the cooperation with the patron in order to achieve their own objectives. This behaviour of maximising one's benefits Willis terms 'riding', which involves the 'strategic cooperation with favourably disposed patrons who belong to the ranks of the oppressors' (1980, 101). For example, Aboriginal station workers worked amicably with non-Aboriginal station owners because it eventually allowed Aboriginal people to reclaim and resettle parts of their traditional lands. I referred to this occurrence in Chapter Four when I discussed the irony of the pastoral period: whilst individuals were generally not paid or treated equally to their non-Aboriginal counterparts, they reclaimed autonomy by remaining mobile, continuing cultural practices and gaining pride and confidence in the station work.

Notwithstanding that, there still remains some ambiguity about whether the Warmun community was fully informed about their options and the long-term ramifications of their choices for a Catholic school. Nonetheless, the community made the choices about who would or could provide the most support and assistance to meet their needs and aspirations, even if the community did not fully understand the long-term consequences of the different educational options.

This chapter also examined the Two Way curriculum in the early years at Ngalangangpum School. The research shows that Two Way was more of a conceptual and philosophical idea than a practical reality. It differed from bilingual education programs, which are structured and outcome oriented. Two Way at Ngalangangpum meant that the Aboriginal residents had to merge with and adapt to *gardiya* teaching methods and structures. For example, class time for Gija language and culture was limited and teachers had to follow the WA Education Curriculum for the majority of school hours. Also, Aboriginal teachers had to adapt to Western strategies of teaching: in classrooms and generally in out-of-context settings. The Aboriginal teachers had to accustom themselves to teaching in these ways, effectively teaching Indigenous knowledge through a Western framework.

Whilst positively motivated by those involved, the school's commitment to the development of learning Gija language and practices seemed limited. Gija language and local practices were not given enough time and space to thrive. The loopholes that enabled Aboriginal

teachers to pass on specific cultural knowledge occurred in covert, creative and pragmatic ways. At Ngalangangpum, the teachers employed strategies to counter the irrelevant or inappropriate content—explaining that the dilly bag didn't belong to Gija country and speaking about Gija culture and law at Catholic sermons. Artworks were also made to transfer specific information important to the teachers, which I discuss further in the next chapter. The actions and strategies discussed in this chapter reveal Indigenous agency but Ngalangangpum was not an Indigenous institution—it was and continues to be externally defined, even if Indigenous agency was present at various times. Conclusively, children received an education that was largely Catholic and sympathetic to but not encouraging of, local beliefs. Syncretism of Gija and Catholic beliefs and practices arose as a consequence; local culture evolved and people adapted.

In these early years of the Warmun community, members were in the process of building a community they wanted and resolving dichotomies between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of being and beliefs. The enculturation of Catholic and Western values systems and practices through the curriculum was significant. Indeed, it is easy to over-emphasise the role and control of the Church at this time, given the advantage of hindsight from which I write, and because Catholicism has become less a part of the present day. By all means, it must be assumed that the intentions of the outsiders involved in the establishment and running of the School were supportive of or at least working toward Indigenous empowerment and autonomy, but many opportunities for the community's development—which may have entailed slow processes, mistakes and challenges—were not given the opportunity to play out. At this time, structures that encouraged and allowed for Indigenous control and leadership were few. This is another idea I return to in Chapters Eight and Nine. With this history in mind, in the next chapter I will discuss the artworks used in the school as teaching aids. It is these objects that now form the Warmun Community Collection.

Chapter 6

Ngalangangpum art

Introduction

Thus far in the thesis I have developed the argument that Aboriginal people living in the east Kimberley have adapted to and at times remained autonomous within the cultural, social, political and economic frameworks imposed by European settlement. I have shown that the establishment of the Warmun community came from the group's need for a home base after their displacement from pastoral properties. The study of the Ngalangangpum School provided an example of how individuals decided on the type of school for their community and how *Warrmarn* people sought to satisfy their own needs by agreeing with different groups in order to maximise their benefits. In my study of the Two Way curriculum, I have shown how Aboriginal leaders employed strategies to ensure continuity of culture and autonomy in spite of the limited time given to practicing and learning about culture. I also described the initial use of objects at Ngalangangpum School. In outlining their original use, I laid the groundwork for notion that these objects were valued for their use *in context*.

In this section I explicate the link between art and knowledge transfer by examining the items now known as the Warmun Community Collection, before they became a Collection. This is the period from their first use at the Ngalangangpum School until 1998. Although it is not possible to ascertain precisely which works were used and for what purpose, (only a handful of archival documents exist), it is a reasonable assumption that the objects documented in the first register of 2000, conducted by conservator Karen Coote (not successive registrations), were first used in the school. It is this collection, documented by Karen, that constitutes the body of material analysed in this chapter. It is important to note, that some of the items in the Warmun Community Collection were not made by east

Kimberley people, and were collected by the Sisters from people outside *Warrmarn* community (pers. comm. Sr. Theresa Morellini 2015)⁶⁵

To begin, I discuss the meaning and content of the objects. Through a content and visual analysis supported by primary and secondary sources, I develop a picture of what the objects meant to the users and makers. I have grouped the objects into four themes, which are significant because they demonstrate what leaders wanted to pass on to younger generations. The groups are: Catholicism, Country and *Ngarranggarni*, Corroborees and *Ngarranggarni* and Everyday Practices. Ultimately I show that these art-objects were initially valued *by the makers* as objects to help transfer information.

The art

The works in the Warmun Community Collection include paintings and markings on canvas board, compressed wood, cement sheeting, tea chests, plywood, cardboard, cloth, chipboard, panels and plywood boards with pokerwork. There are colour pencil drawings on paper and a range of carved objects—shields, coolamons, carved animals and figures, spears, water carriers, clap sticks, an adze, boab nuts, clubs, spear heads, wooden vessels, nulla nullas, didgeridoos, a tortoise shell and a bullroarer. Many of the objects were painted, incised, whittled and marked with decoration and motifs. There are works by east Kimberley artists: Rover Thomas, Paddy Jaminji, Queenie McKenzie, Jack Britten, Freddie Timms, Paddy Williams, George Mung Mung, Left Hand George and Hector Jandany and the next generation which include: Mabel Juli, Madigan Thomas, Beerbee Mungnari and Rusty Peters and the generation younger, as children: Mark Nodea and Peter Thomas.

The handmade items were used as teaching aids, made in classes, used in religious ceremonies, prayers and liturgical practices and corroborees. Adults made the objects to demonstrate and explain in formal classes and informal learning experiences inside and outside of the school. Some people, such as Hector Jandany and George Mung Mung, gifted their handmade items to the Sisters and other schoolteachers. Some items were part of the personal collections of the Sisters, collected from other parts of Australia. Children at the school also made some as part of learning experiences.

⁶⁵ They include incised rocks with Wandjina spirits painted on them (WCC219), carved and painted slate work (WCC220), carved Boab nuts and painted rocks. It is difficult to determine the provenance of these items.

The objects were displayed in the schoolrooms and the Sisters' living area. Sr. Clare recalled encouraging people to make objects and display them. At her first Christmas in *Warrmarn*, Sr. Clare remembered remarking to Hector that they had nothing 'Warmun'—in relation to a *Warrmarn* cultural understanding of Christmas. He soon came back with a painting of 'Aboriginal Mary and Joseph under a Boab tree with baby Jesus' (pers. comm. 2014).

Catholicism

There are seventy works that refer to Catholicism in title, description or motif. They cover a range of topics related to Catholicism that include enculturation and syncretism. There are many works that are titled with a Catholic theme or depict a religious person, event or belief, such as the Last Supper, The Holy Trinity, The Crucifixion, Priests, Mary, Jesus and The Ascension. In WCC110 (Plate 6.1) Mabel Juli painted an Aboriginal figure, framed by a yellow light and then a border of white lines and strokes. He appears to be floating on a cloud and has a cross-shaped motif above his head. Dots, perhaps stars, surround him in the sky. It is drawn on cardboard, with paint and pencil. Karen Coote has written that Mabel said about this work: 'Jesus going back to heaven'. This painting is likely to be about the Ascension, as per its title.



Plate 6.1 WCC110, *The Ascension*, attributed to Mabel Juli. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

There are a number of similar works which also depict variations of Jesus surrounded by white light, people, clouds and stars (Plates 6.2 & 6.3).



Plate 6.2 WCC082, attributed to Queenie McKenzie. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.3 WCC116, attributed to Madigan Thomas. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

The Pentecost is painted or referred to in at least eighteen paintings and one carving, by title, visual motif of the Holy Spirit/Bird/Dove⁶⁶ or in the story recorded for it (Plates 6.4, 6.5, 6.6 & 6.7). Sr. Theresa, Sr. Clare, Patrick McConvell and Frances Kofod all remember works such as these being use in the Ngalangangpum celebrations of the Pentecost. The Pentecost was celebrated annually at the school and was a gathering for all of the communities in the east Kimberley, including the other St. Josephite schools in Wyndham and Kununurra. Frances Kofod remembers that at the celebrations many people painted and gave objects to the Sisters that ended up part of the School's Collection (pers. comm. 2012).

⁶⁶ The descent of the Holy Spirit onto the people, after Jesus returned to Heaven, is commonly symbolised by a white bird or dove.



Plate 6.4 WCC191, unknown attribution. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.5 WCC108, attributed to Queenie McKenzie. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.6 WCC089, attributed to Queenie McKenzie. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

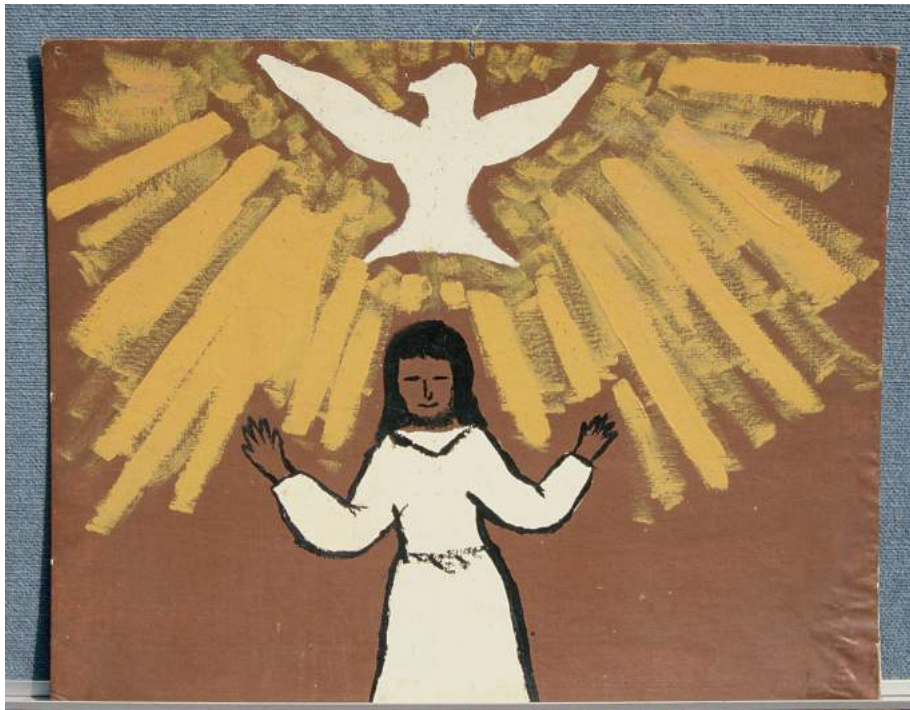


Plate 6.7 WCC115, attributed to Mabel Juli. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

George Mung Mung's *Mary of Warrmarn*, also known as *The Pregnant Mary*, is the most well-known syncretic artwork from *Warrmarn* (Plates 6.8 & 6.9). The carving is of Mary Magdalene, with an adult Jesus in the womb (pers. comm. Sr. Theresa Morellini 2015). Painted in ochre patterns, Sr. Rosemary Crumlin believes Mary's markings are typically reserved for unmarried girls: 'Her womb is like a shield under her heart where her unborn man-child dances. He is the One. She is the Mother' (Archdiocese of Sydney 2013). Sr. Rosemary Crumlin has said the work epitomises 'the two pillars of Warmun culture: the *Ngarranggarni* and the bible' (Archdiocese of Sydney 2013). Sr. Theresa Morellini recalls that George called it *The Pregnant Mary*. He told her it was Jesus in the womb and: 'he said that he saved us, he died on the cross to save us. This painting is really about salvation' (pers. comm. Sr. Theresa Morellini 2015).



Plate 6.8 *Mary of Warmun*, (recto), George Mung Mung. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.9 *Mary of Warmun*, (verso), George Mung Mung. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

The Archdiocese of Sydney describes the carving as 'one of the great art works of the 20th Century' (Archdiocese of Sydney 2013). Its high regard and admiration from non-Aboriginal people can be attributed to three factors: it being symbolic of the 'successful' convergence of Aboriginal and Catholic culture, its aesthetic impact and style and its well-known theme. It has been discussed and presented numerous times in the media as a showcase of the enculturation of Indigenous culture (Murada 2013) and has been a centrepiece for several religious exhibitions including:

- *Aboriginal Art and Spirituality* in 1991, at the High Court of Australia in Canberra, curated by Sr. Rosemary Crumlin and Anthony Knight.
- *The Rosary Art Exhibition: Catholic Education Festival*, Kimberley in 1995 at the Our Lady Queen of Peace Cathedral, Broome.
- *Beyond Belief: Modern Art and the Religious Imagination* in 1998, at the National Gallery of Victoria, curated by Sr. Rosemary Crumlin.
- *Gifts of the Artists*, May 1—25, 2013, McClade Gallery, The Australian Catholic University, Strathfield, N.S.W.

The carving was on display in the main office of the school for years, next to a non-Aboriginal porcelain statue of Mary, which was brought to Turkey Creek by Winnie Budbarria and Queenie McKenzie in 1973. In the early years of the school *The Pregnant Mary* was used in sermons and lessons together with the porcelain Mary statue. Sr. Theresa said that they represented the Gija and Western sides of Catholicism. Today it lives in its own display case at the reception entrance of the school (Plate 6.10). It is occasionally used in ceremonies.



Plate 6.10 The Pregnant Mary in its display cabinet at the Ngalangangpum School, March 2015.

Often assumed to be a part of the Warmun Community Collection because it was included in the Warmun Community Art Collection Catalogue 2013 (Ormond-Parker, O'Connell, and Hirst 2013) (discussed in Chapter Two) and the 2006 Significance Assessment (discussed in Chapter Seven), it was in fact gifted to Sr. Theresa by George Mung Mung. Sr. Theresa relates the story of receiving the gift and the responsibilities associated with it:

Georgie carved it and brought it over to me and he said, 'here this is for you'. He gave it to me and I was goggled-eyed. I asked him if this was really for me and he said it was. I thought it was too beautiful and said, 'can we share?' I thought it should be for everyone it was so special. George said, 'you can share it with everybody' and that's what I have done. After Georgie died, Patrick became involved with that Mary of Warmun because we use it in ceremonies. I have also got Beryline Mung and Sophie Mung, the next generation involved. I am trying to keep it alive for them too. George also carved one for Sister Clare Ahern, Sister Veronica Ryan and one more. But I was the first. He made them for the Sisters and I don't think he intended to give it to Patrick (pers. comm. 2014).

Other paintings in the Collection depict the processes of learning and the adjustment to Catholic and Western ideas. WCC079 (Plate 6.11), attributed to Queenie McKenzie, shows a white figure standing in front of an audience of black figures. The attached story, written on two A4 sheets of paper in Gija and English reads: 'This mob did come to him to owe him a prayer, he finished with it he did send the Holy Spirit down to everyone.' Karen has also noted on the work: 'Priest teaching people. Queenie, Hector Community spirit.'



Plate 6.11 WCC079, attributed to Queenie McKenzie. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.12 WCC078, attributed to Queenie McKenzie. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

Similarly, painting WCC078 (Plate 6.12) depicts a meeting that occurred to establish the Catholic school. Attributed to Queenie, the note with the painting reads: 'school meeting story Queenie'. The painting shows a white figure with a star motif on top of its head standing in front of a crowd of black figures. Such depictions were perhaps conscious representations of the enculturation process and learning Western ways.

There are a number of paintings that combine Catholic beliefs with some form of Gija practice, belief, visual reference or title. WCC077 (Plate 6.13) merges the Gija Fire Stick ceremony with the Pentecost. Gija people perform the Fire Stick ceremony to welcome the new moon and ensure bountiful hunting.



Plate 6.13 WCC077, *Fire Stick Ceremony and Pentecost*, Queenie McKenzie. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

A stick is lit from a fire and held up to the moon and the moon is asked to bring good hunting. It is said that if you do not welcome the new moon you will have a very bad month for hunting (pers. comm. Betty Carrington 2014). Whilst there is no visual reference to the Pentecost, or the Holy Spirit, the link to Catholicism is in the title and in Queenie's description of the work:

Marnem ngarak kungulung pirri kualet miriam, ngarrinpa kalurr, pum pirrilumpa naapangna kalurr.

Fire make firestick-with tree/stick Mary light up high they put them father-for him up high.⁶⁷

This suggests that Mary made the fire with the stick/tree and held it up high for Father, instead of the moon.

⁶⁷ Translated by Frances Kofod, 2015.

As with many *Warrmarn* artworks, their meaning can be obscured or unrepresented. Paintings can appear to be about one topic, but are in fact about something else unrelated, as I discussed specifically in Chapter Three, in relation to the works of Betty Carrington, Madigan Thomas and Gordon Barney. Objects can also have multiple meanings and serve as a way for people to transfer Gija knowledge and values in covert ways. For example, WCC050 (Plate 6.14), attributed to Hector Jandany, contains what looks like Aboriginal Mary and Joseph sitting around Jesus in a manger, with Boab trees behind them. However, in the notes for the painting, Hector is recorded as saying: 'promised relationship way—old man to young girl.' This suggests that the painting is also about the skin law that decides what woman a man must marry. This means the painting could represent the importance of skin law and draws from Catholicism by making an analogy with Mary (the young virgin) and Joseph (the older carpenter).



Plate 6.14 WCC050, attributed to Hector Jandany. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

Similarly, in WCC114 Mabel Juli painted what looks like the Holy Spirit (a white bird) and an Aboriginal baby in a coolamon; however, the title attributed to it in Karen's notes is *Moon Dreaming out at Springvale Station* (Plate 6.15). Although the painting appears to be about the Pentecost ie. the Holy Spirit descending on an Aboriginal baby, in her title for the painting, Mabel has linked it to the *Garnkiny Ngarranggarni* for another meaning, which is the story about how the moon came to be and the importance of following skin law (see Plate 6.21 for detailed discussion of Mabel's *Garnkiny Ngarranggarni* paintings).



Plate 6.15 WCC114, *Moon Dreaming out at Springvale Station*, Mabel Juli. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

Finally, Hector Jandany's painting WCC047 depicts a man carrying a cross on his right shoulder and something else in his left hand (Plate 6.16), recalling the Catholic subject of Jesus Christ carrying the cross on his way to his crucifixion. Sr. Clare Ahern recalled to me that: 'it was not Jesus carrying the cross; it was Hector carrying the cross. And he's got this stick in his hand, his *waddy*, to straighten out his people.' She believed that Hector identified with Jesus and his task of straightening up his community, which was 'then was in trouble with alcohol' (pers. comm. 2014). Veronica Ryan also recalled that Hector said about the painting: 'You know, some people might think that picture is about Jesus carrying the cross. Some other blokes might think it's Moses leading his people away from trouble. But I'll tell you who that man is: it's me, Hector Sandaloo, helping my mob to keep the law.'

That's who that bloke is (Ryan 2001, 288). Sr. Clare recalled that when Hector made a painting it was never only one story: 'he would start somewhere and end up somewhere else, bringing it up into the contemporary. He was always in the story. He always painted in those Bungle Bungle shapes and the body painting shapes' (pers. comm. 2014).



Plate 6.16 WCC047, Hector Jandany. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

The aforementioned three works WCC050, WCC114 and WCC047 are paintings with multiple meanings and messages. Ultimately, they show how Catholicism was adapted into Gija culture. Hector and Mabel were doing what many people have done when faced with a new culture: they were using the stories and symbols of their own culture to express their understanding of the new culture. They used their knowledge to explain the unknown. Hector, Mabel and others were converging their belief system with another. They saw similarities between the two systems and built bridges between them. This is an age-old story of transition and means that the objects can be analysed from different perspectives and have different roles over time.

Country and Ngarranggarni

There are one hundred and six works that depict Country and its associated *Ngarranggarni*. WCC125 (Plate 6.17) is an aerial map of the hills of Turkey Creek, attributed to George Mung Mung. It has been called 'Hills of Turkey Creek' and the notes with it explain: 'Middle part small/creeks coming down/Bottom part: the high way and small hills'.



Plate 6.17 WCC125, attributed to George Mung Mung. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

Similarly, Hector Jandany's painting WCC063 (Plate 6.18) has the descriptive line: 'My Country, beside Bungle Bungle country'. Hector's work depicts this geographical area (of Purnululu—Bungle Bungles) but his description impresses a sense of ownership and belonging to the area.

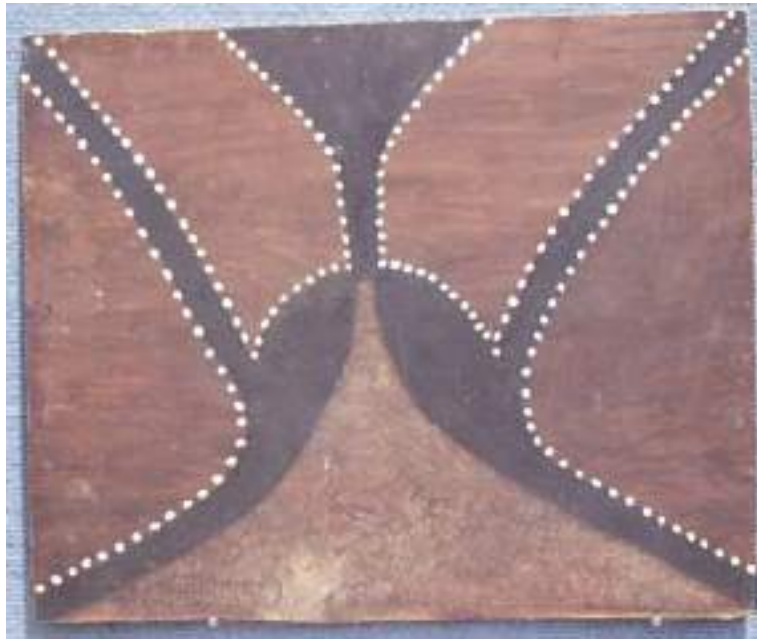


Plate 6.18 WCC063, attributed to Hector Jandany. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

George and Hector's works are examples of typical east Kimberley aesthetic. They are made with an ochre palette and the motifs of hills and waterways are outlined with white dots, in aerial and/or profile perspective (for further discussions see Caruana 1989; Holmes à Court Gallery 2005, 2003; Nowra 1998; Ryan 1993, 1998). Features in the landscape such as hills, trees, rocks, waterholes and rivers appear as motifs, but they were once *Ngarranggarni* ancestors who traversed the land and then became the very features within it. A line might be a road, a river and at the same time the resting place or path of the *Gurlabal* (*Ngarranggarni* snake). These motifs act as symbols of something else. The *Ngarranggarni* explains how things came to be – why a rock is in a certain place or a particular shape, why the crow has a white eye, why the moon returns full every month.

George Mung Mung's painting WCC097 (Plate 6.19) has the story documented in Veronica Ryan's book:

The rainbow serpent is going into the limestone cave. He stays there because that's his camp. When it's time for rain, the Rainbow Serpent comes out, standing on his tail; he has whiskers too. The Rainbow Serpent then lets water go to make the rain. Kids mustn't throw stones at the Rainbow Serpent. Like Ngapuny, the Rainbow Serpent will punish wicked people (Ryan 2001, 101).



Plate 6.19 WCC097, George Mung Mung. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

The artists describe Country pictorially and the associated *Ngarranggarni* story orally in order to share their beliefs. It ensures the transmission of knowledge, culture and the self. The depiction of places and sites of significance in these paintings means that associations, experiences and memories are retained.

There are some depictions of Country and stories that are similar between artists and demonstrate continuity in content and form. Hector Jandany's 'Moon and Star' WCC058 (Plate 6.20) has the same motifs as Mabel Juli's famous *Garnkiny Ngarranggarni* (Plate 6.21) and *Wardel and Garnkiny* paintings (Limelight 2013; The University of Melbourne 2013). Mabel usually paints *Garnkiny Ngarranggarni* with a heavy background made from several layers of ochre or charcoal mixed with glue. Sometimes this layer is black, brown, green or burnt orange. When she begins a painting, she often sketches with a pencil or rock the main motifs—moon, star, hill—depending on which idea or stage of the story is being depicted. Sometimes the moon is depicted perched on a hill and other times it floats on the canvas. Sometimes the star hangs from the moon's top crescent, other times it floats next to it. Her story is from a place on *Darrajayin* Country, commonly known as Springvale

Station.⁶⁸ Hector's *Wardel* and *Garnkiny*, on the other hand, is from his traditional Country, which is different to Mabel's. Mabel's painting tells a story that relates to Gija marriage customs; Hector's we do not know. They do however, share the same formal qualities of the moon and star motif. The paintings in the Collection that depict Country and *Ngarranggarni* are layered with meanings and demonstrate continuity in form.



Plate 6.20 WCC058, attributed to Hector Jandany. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

⁶⁸ An exhibition in 2014 entitled *Garnkiny Constellations of Meaning* presented the artworks and words of nine *Warrmarn* people, all pivoting off *Garnkiny* and revealing layers of knowledge, lessons and Law associated with *Garnkiny* (Warrmarn Art Aboriginal Corporation 2014, 30-38).

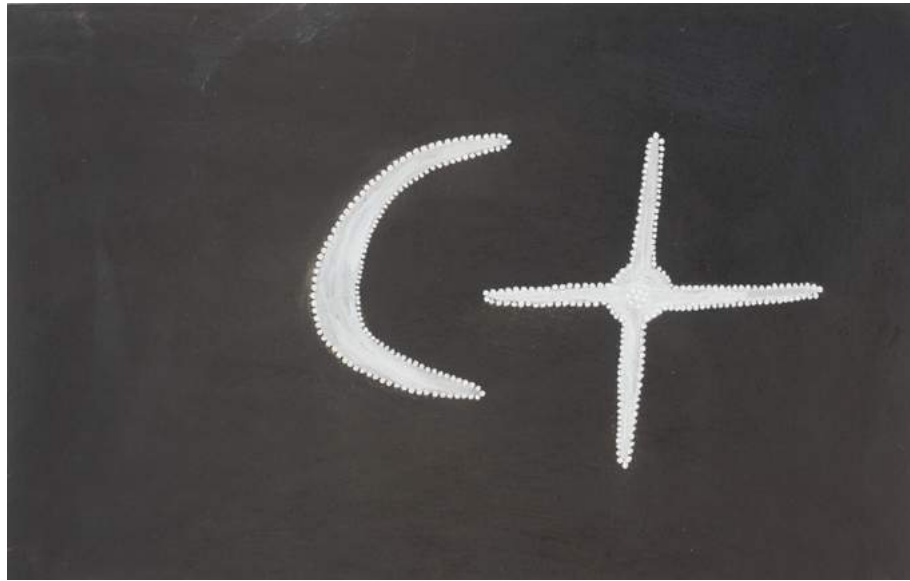


Plate 6.21 Mabel Juli, *Garnkiny Ngarranggarni*, natural ochre and pigment on canvas, 140 x 90cm (WAC518/12). Image courtesy of Warmun Art Centre.

Corroborees and Ngarranggarni

There are twenty-five works that refer to song and dance events (also called *Joonba* and corroborees) in name, depiction or description. There are paintings on plywood and masks made from cardboard, compressed wood and panels. Seventeen are identified as being connected with the well-known public *Joonba* from *Warrmarn*, the *Goorirr Goorirr*.⁶⁹ The *Goorirr Goorirr* performance was first developed in the mid 1970s and performed publicly at least as early as 1977 in Maningrida (Spinner 2013) and became more publicly known by 1979 (Christensen 1993). The story is about the journey of the spirit of a Worla woman travelling back to her Country after dying en route to hospital, following a car accident in Gija country. It is relayed through word, dance and painted boards and bodies. In the early years of the community, it was performed for hours on Friday nights and weekends, before television had arrived (pers. comm. Sr. Theresa, 2015). The performance has a number of chapters associated with *Ngarranggarni* and Country and each chapter is related to the

⁶⁹ In Karen's registry they are noted as 'KK, Krill Krill, K.K. Gora Gora, Gooray Gooray' - all variations on the now written *Goorirr Goorirr Joonba*.

previous one, but often the chapters are not performed chronologically. No single performance is the same as another, but often a core of four or five chapters are performed.⁷⁰

In this group of works, there are seven paintings on plywood attributed to Paddy Jaminji, the first painter of the *Goorirr Goorirr* ceremony (Plates 6.22, 6.23 & 6.24) (Akerman 2005; Christensen 1993; Holmes à Court Gallery 2005; Kofod 2006).



Plate 6.22 WCC117, attributed to Paddy Jaminji. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

⁷⁰ Frances Kofod attests that there were fourteen or so verses and, over time, verses have been subtracted and added (pers. comm. 2014), also discussed by Christensen (1993), Doohan (2008) and Sweeney (2009).



Plate 6.23 WCC121, attributed to Paddy Jaminji. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

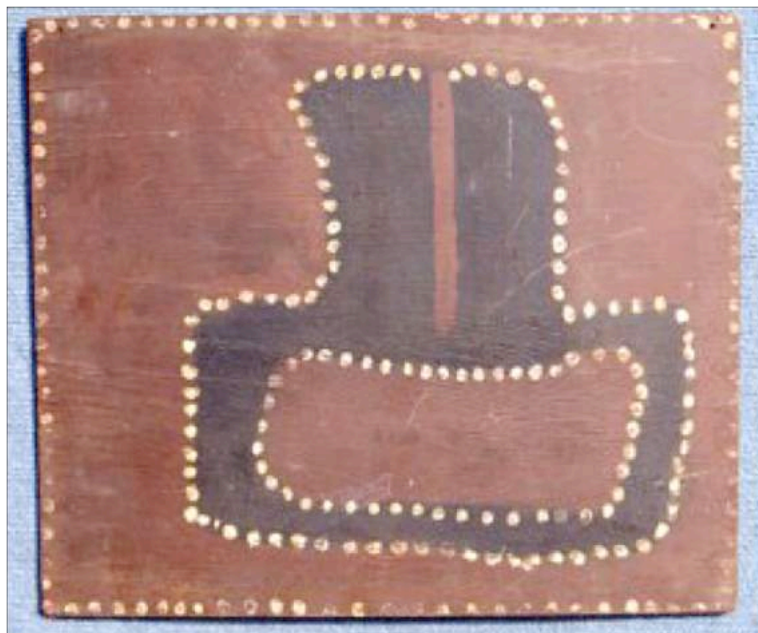


Plate 6.24 WCC119, attributed to Paddy Jaminji. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

Plates 6.22, 6.23 and 6.24 represent the places passed by the deceased woman's spirit on her journey back to her Country. WCC119 (Plate 6.24) is recognised by many as Pompey's Pillar, a *Ngarranggarni* landmark that signifies the border between Gija and Miriwoong Country and also the site of the *Loomoogoo Ngarranggarni*. These sites of significance are still painted for today's practice of the *Goorirr Goorirr* and on canvas for sale.

Six works are attributed to Rover Thomas and noted as being associated with the *Goorirr Goorirr*. WCC179 and WCC177 are two examples (Plates 6.25 & 6.26), however there is no story or title noted. Spinner asserts that WCC179 is directly comparable to other Rover Thomas works and argues it depicts Kelly's Knob in Kununurra, the location of a specific verse in the *Goorirr Goorirr* performance (pers. comm. 2014).



Plate 6.25 WCC179, attributed to Rover Thomas. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.26 WCC177, attributed to Rover Thomas. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

Objects in the Collection inform contemporary artworks for corroborees. Four of the *Goorirr Goorirr* items in the Collection are similar in content and form to the *Goorirr Goorirr* dance boards made at the Warmun Art Centre in 2010, performed at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2010 and subsequently sold to the Gallery.

In 2010, twenty-one *Warrmarn* residents were invited to the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, to perform the *Goorirr Goorirr* as part of the launch of the *Art + Soul* documentary (Thornton and Perkins 2010). In the Warmun Community Collection there are three *Joowarri* masks (Plates 6.27, 6.28 & 6.29) similar to masks made in 2010 (Plate 6.30). An image of the 2010 mask was sent to the Art Gallery of New South Wales for reproduction but it was not worn in the performance of the *Goorirr Goorirr* in 2010 in Sydney. The masks appear in the 'Dance of the Devil Devil' chapter of the *Goorirr Goorirr*. This is the part of the story when the woman dies. In this chapter, three men enter the dance ground backwards, wearing the *Joowarri* masks, and women come onto the stage after them. People say that the accident that caused the woman's death happened 'when the snake crossed the road' in a big storm near the creek closest to the *Wungkul* store.



Plate 6.27 WCC129, attributed to Rusty Peters. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.28 WCC147, attributed to Rusty Peters. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.29 WCC146, attributed to Rusty Peters. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.30 Unknown attribution, *Joowarri* mask made in 2010. Image courtesy of the Warmun Art Centre.

Two paintings in the Warmun Community Collection depict *Woonggool* the Dreamtime snake, the woman who visited Rover Thomas in a dream and the *Joowarri*. They are attributed to Rusty Peters and Rover Thomas (Plates 6.31 & 6.32). They are similar to Mabel Juli's 2010 painting of the same chapter (Plate 6.33), however Mabel did not

include the *Joowarri*, only *Woonggool* and the woman. These works represent the chapter in the *Goorirr Goorirr* performance when men sit around a hidden object and a woman walks up to them, holding a digging stick, poking it into the ground. She lifts the object the men are seated around and a snake jumps out and bites her. Similarly, Jane Yalunga, Rover's daughter, also made an etching of the motifs in this chapter (Plate 6.34). The woman and snake has also been painted on the skirts of the female dancers in the *Goorirr Goorirr* performance.



Plate 6.31 WCC145, attributed to Rusty Peters. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.32 WCC175, attributed to Rover Thomas. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.33 Mabel Juli, *Woonggool*, 2010, for AGNSW. Image courtesy of the Warmun Art Centre.



Plate 6.34 Jane Yalunga, *Old Woman*, etching, 19 x 14 cm, edition of 30, (WACP31/15). Image courtesy of Warmun Art Centre.

There are other examples of continuity in form and content between recent and past renditions of the *Goorirr Goorirr*. Paddy Jaminji painted a *Joowarri* (Plate 6.35) and is in the Collection. It has similar formal features to a painting made by Charlene Carrington for the 2010 performance (Plate 6.36). The *Joowarri* is depicted in both paintings as a horned creature, its face and features is outlined in dots and its eyes stare straight ahead. The *Joowarri* painting is used in the part of the story where one bearded Gija man dances and a group of women dance and point their sticks at him (Warmun Art Centre and Kofod 2010).



Plate 6.35 WCC120, attributed to Paddy Jaminji. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

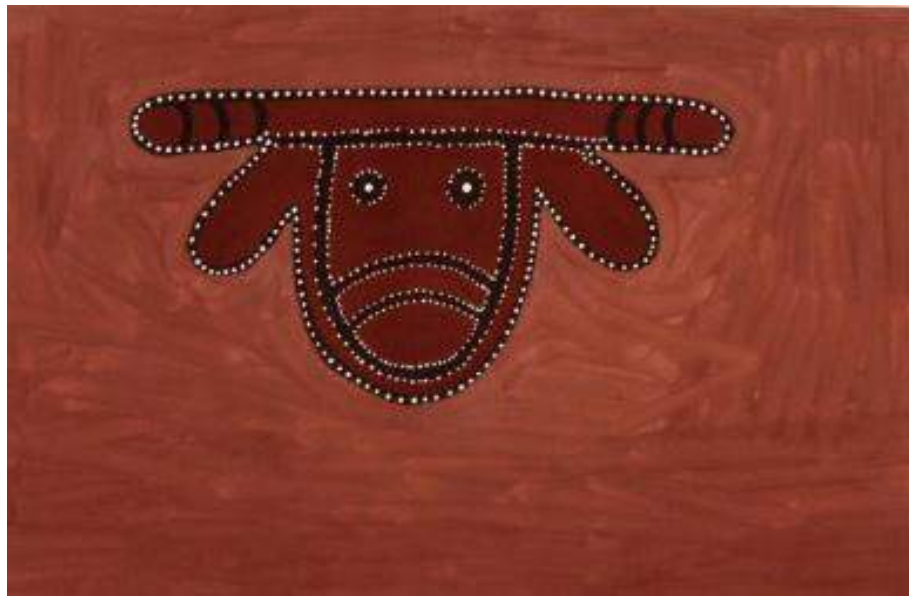


Plate 6.36 Charlene Carrington, *Darraroo*, for AGNSW, 2010. Image courtesy of Warmun Art Centre.

Phyllis Thomas' *Manjalji* painting for the 2010 performance at the Art Gallery of New South Wales depicts Crocodile Hole, where March Fly Creek feeds into Bow River (Plate 6.37), another location in the *Goorirr Goorirr Joonba*. Phyllis's work has formal features in common with WCC122 (Plate 6.38). In both paintings, dots and colours demarcate geography and waterways intersect. They also both represent the same subject.



Plate 6.37 Phyllis Thomas, *Manjaliji*, 2010 for AGNSW. Image courtesy of Warmun Art Centre.



Plate 6.38 WCC122, disputed attribution. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

Finally, other corroborees are referred to in objects in the Community Collection. There are two paintings connected to the *Moonga Moonga Joonba* and attributed to Hector Jandany—WCC052 and WCC053 (Plates 6.39 & 6.40). Karen Coote's note for WCC052 reads: 'Hector said he made em for mummy corroboree - *Moonga Moonga*' and the note for WCC053, reads: 'For *Moonga Moonga* Corroboree with boomerangs, clubs and leaves'.



Plate 6.39 WCC052, attributed to Hector Jandany. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.40 WCC053, attributed to Hector Jandany. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

My analysis speaks not of shimmer as Howard Morphy found (1989) or of optical effects such as outlining, concentricity and dotting, as John Carty found in contemporary art from Balgo (Carty 2011, 257). Instead, it speaks of continuity in form that deserves closer scrutiny. It involves the relationship between art form and knowledge transfer. The formal style of Warmun art seems to be consistent in the works, but does that mean that the meaning of the works are transferred consistently as well? The paintings made in 2010 for the AGNSW and the paintings in the Warmun Community Collection that refer to the *Goorirr Goorirr* have features in common and represent the same subject. This suggests the older works perhaps have become templates for today's works. The compositions of the older works are templates from which people copy and do not often deviate from or experiment with. The early works are effectively objects of reproduction—in the same way as Morphy found with Yolŋu designs:

In each particular case, the [...] design is made into or becomes an appropriate representation of the place by the meanings encoded into it and by the sets of other paintings that it is linked with or that it generates, in other words, by becoming a template (Morphy 1991, 244).

The anthropological and art historical interpretation of these older works is that they are referential. The perpetuation of the compositional and formal template suggests that there is continuation in knowledge transfer but does the knowledge and information contained in artworks endure? The reproduction of icons, forms and motifs does not necessarily mean that the content they represent is also transferred, let alone understood. Indeed, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to quantify if the information contained in these works have been transferred to others, however, the questions raised here bring to the surface fundamental questions of the thesis: how are information and values transferred in daily life? And, are artworks used in this process today? I raised this issue in Chapter 2, with reference to the use of the Collection and will return to it in the following chapters.

Everyday life

Objects that are part of everyday life and practices are also in the Collection. They range from handmade wooden items such as spears, coolamons, axe heads, digging sticks, shields, clubs, animal carvings (snakes and birds for example) to paintings. WCC028 (Plate 6.41) is

a necklace made from local seeds and WCC030 (Plate 6.42) is an undecorated shield. Other items are decorated with ochre and are incised, for example, WCC002 and WCC26 (Plates 6.43 & 6.44). Kaberry found that such ornamentation and aesthetics were a part of daily life (Kaberry 1939).



Plate 6.41 WCC28, unknown attribution. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.42 WCC030, unknown attribution. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.43 WCC002, attributed to George Mung Mung. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.44 WCC026, unknown attribution. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

There are eighty-four objects related to everyday life and seventy-six are unattributed. These items were either made specifically as teaching aids or they were actually used and had been brought in to the school for teaching purposes. The lack of attribution may

indicate the objects were not classed as artworks and so individual identity was not considered important.

In the Collection there are also carvings that replicate people and animals of the 'everyday'. The carved objects of animals and figures act as models of their real-life counter parts. WCC248, WCC044, WCC045 and WCC247 (Plates 6.45, 6.46, 6.47 & 6.48) show two Aboriginal people painted up for ceremony, a bird and a fish. They are small, conscious versions of things in quotidian life—people and animals in the local environment.

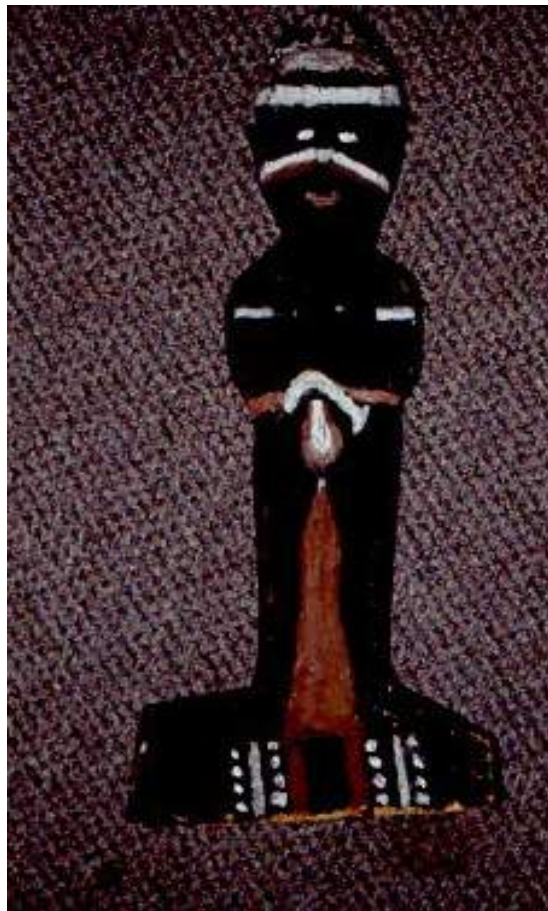


Plate 6.45 WCC248, unknown attribution. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.46 WCC044, attributed to George Mung Mung. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.47 WCC045, attributed to George Mung Mung. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.48 WCC 247, unknown attribution. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

In addition to their association with the real, these objects show formal continuities that are used today. Like the aforementioned paintings, the carvings are decorated with ochre colours and painted dots.

Although I have separated the objects into themes, this does not mean the categories are separate and distinct. They are in fact interwoven. There are paintings that represent everyday and meaningful events and practices as part of Gija culture. For example, WCC049 (Plate 6.49) depicts the Gija burial tradition of placing the deceased wrapped in a coffin-like-structure in the top of a tree. In this painting, the person is wearing the white *naga*. Cultural practices were part of everyday life and works such as these underscore that link.



Plate 6.49 WCC049, attributed to Hector Jandany. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

There are six pokerwork pieces in the Collection that depict scenes of everyday life at pastoral stations. Three of the works are by children (Plates 6.50, 6.51 and 6.52). Harold's piece is pokerwork on chipboard with crayon and pencil, Peter's work is pokerwork on plywood with pencil and Mark's piece is pokerwork on compressed wood with crayon and pencil. They depict station yards, with hills, horses, paths, trees and fences.

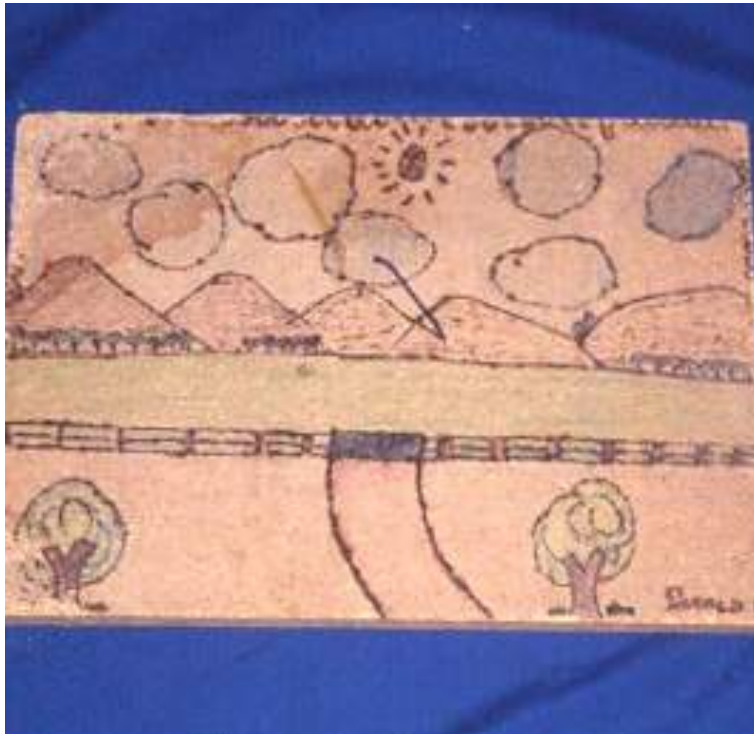


Plate 6.50 WCC210, attributed to Harold. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.51 WCC209, attributed to Peter Thomas. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.52 WCC206, attributed to Mark Nodea. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

Given the diversity of the Collection, it is not surprising that many items cut across the categories I have defined so far and do not fit neatly into the topics. The remaining three pokerworks for example, WCC205, WCC211 and WCC212 (Plates 6.53, 6.54 and 6.55) are portraits incised on compressed wood with hot pokers. Signed as 'R Peters', WCC205 depicts a 'traditional' Aboriginal man in the bush with spear and club. WCC211 could be a man of European decent, with neatly curled hair and wearing a shirt. WCC212 seems to be an Aboriginal man with scarification and body paint. They all relate to the adaption to new and different values and practices as well as the maintenance, continuation and cessation of old ones.



Plate 6.53 WCC205, Rusty Peters. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.54 WCC211, attributed to Rusty Peters. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.



Plate 6.55 WCC212, attributed to Rusty Peters. Image courtesy of Karen Coote.

Conclusions

In the previous chapter I described how the Warmun Community Collection objects were used in semi-formal classes held in the mornings. The items reflected the values important to the makers, such as cultural practices, Country and *Ngarranggarni*. When used at the school, the items had an undetermined future, part of present-focused activities that served a purpose, as momentary as it may have been. They were meaningful objects because they were used *in context*. The fact that one hundred and twenty-nine items in the Collection have no attribution, indicates that when the objects were first made and used, the artist did not matter as much as the practice of them.

In this chapter, my analysis of the items reveals tenets of continuity, change and syncretism. The seventy Catholic-inspired artworks in the Warmun Community Collection represent the period of adjustment to Catholic and Western values and ultimately challenge linear views of ongoing enculturation, as the majority of artworks made today for the Warmun Art Centre barely refer to Catholicism (except for artwork by artists such as

Shirley Purdie, Benita Everett and Kathy Ramsey). The works in the Warmun Community Collection also reflect practices that have ceased, such as placing the deceased in tree tops as part of the grieving process and making pokerwork as part of art practice.

Another example of syncretism and change is George Mung Mung's *Pregnant Mary*, a strong symbol of the convergence of Catholic and Gija beliefs and entanglement. The *Pregnant Mary* is the embodiment of Catholicism through a 'Gija' frame, it is a gift given from one friend to another, it personifies the fusion of Gija beliefs with Catholicism, it is a symbol of the breakdown in transference between generations, it is a vestige of the past for Sr. Theresa, it is a symbol of the enculturation of east Kimberley Aboriginal people and it is a representation of Two Way education. In this way, it is the perfectly entangled object (Thomas 1991). The Collection is a resource for understanding the dynamics of *Warrmarn* art: how it has developed, changed and what has and has not remained consistent over time. These artworks show continuation in some aspects of formal style (such as the use of ochre and dots) as well as the cessation and change of practices and values of the community.

The Sisters in the Ngalangangpum School were interested in Aboriginal culture and they demonstrated this through their engagement with the community; by holding onto gifts received, by being involved in collaborative projects and by supporting the practice of performances. It was ultimately the Sisters who ensured that objects in Warmun Community Collection survived. In other Aboriginal communities, similar embryonic collections have been dispersed, discarded and removed when people left. This is a rare occasion where individuals who have a long-term engagement and investment in the community have built up a collection, albeit serendipitously. The Sisters were, in effect, creating an embryonic art centre at the same time as bestowing Western and Catholic values.

The next stage of the Collection's life further explicates the changing role of the Collection. In the following chapter, I track the engagement with the Collection from people within *Warrmarn* and people from outside, from 1998 onwards. In doing so, I expose how the works moved into different areas of value and developed different meanings and values in different contexts. It is this shift that contributed to the change in my research trajectory: I moved away from objects and towards examining actions and agency.

Chapter 7

The beginning of a Collection

Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the meaning of the works in the Collection, based on visual analysis and archival documents. In this chapter I look at the period between 1998 and until the 2011 *Warrambany* in relation to the events that led to the formation of the Warmun Community Collection. Using action and inaction as a form of agency, I track the interactions that artists and art workers had with the Collection objects in this time period. Such a history has not been examined. In tracking the history of engagement, my research shows that the objects changed from being unattributed, pedagogical items to being a Western-style art Collection that was valued according to specific aesthetic, social, spiritual and art historical criteria. Moreover, whilst the objects were manifestations of 'human agency, experienced within the material world' (Gell 1998, 20) at the time of their first use in the Ngalangangpum School, in this time period, the community was relatively disengaged from them and seemed to value them in a different manner to Western arts workers.

From my vantage point of the present, it seemed as though the Collection had moved away from its original role and value. I wondered what this Collection meant to the community as they did not use it nor did it seem pivotal in knowledge transfer. It was this discovery that contributed to my change in research trajectory.

The beginning of a Collection

In 1998, most of the Warmun Community Collection objects were at the Ngalangangpum School and on display in the *Nawanji Kijam Purru Jarrakirem* (Cave of Gija Language and Culture) (Bibby 1997; Kjellgren 2002; Warmun Art Centre 2005). The *Nawanji Kijam Purru Jarrakirem* served as a museum-type space that displayed the objects as they were no longer used in school classes. Other objects were kept in various places at the Ngalangangpum School. In April 1998, Mary Macha and then-senior curator of Indigenous Art at the Australian National Gallery, Wally Caruana, visited *Warrmarn* for the funeral of

Rover Thomas. On this visit they viewed the items and advised the Sisters (Sr. Margaret Keane, Sr. Anne Boland and Sr. Theresa Morellini) that the objects required professional care and documentation (Davidson 2006, 28). On Friday 3rd July 1998, Sr. Margaret Keane, then Ngalangangpum School principal, wrote a letter to the Acting Chief Executive Officer of Warmun community, Dave Wormald, expressing her concern:

- We realize that now in the heat of the Language area, the art would deteriorate more quickly than it would in more moderate temperatures. To preserve the art and to display it to an advantage, we need
- To have the names of the artists and the stories written down
- To have the art pieces curated
- To have them housed in a small museum type display area (Keane 1998).

Sr. Margaret applied to the Conservation Department at the National Gallery of Australia for advice on the care of the objects and said she intended to employ a suitable person to 'have them curated and write the stories of the paintings with the help and permission of the community' (Keane 1998). She stated her aim was to build a small museum to house them in a prominent area of the school. Clearly, the impetus to conserve the items came from non-Aboriginal people. At this time, the Warmun Art Centre, then called Kelarriny Arts, was being established. On the 13th July 1998, Dave Wormald forwarded the letter to the Art Centre Coordinators Jonathan Kimberley and Anna Moulton and asked for their advice on the matter (Wormald 1998).⁷¹

On the 12th of November 1998, four months later, a meeting was held to discuss the 'Ngalangangpum School Art Collection' at the school's bough shed. Sr. Margaret Keane, Sr. Anne Boland, Sr. Theresa Morellini, Queenie McKenzie, Mabel Juli, Eileen Bray, Lena Nyadbi, Anna Moulton, Betty Carrington, Patrick Mung Mung, Rammel Peters, Winnie Budberria, Shirley Bray, Madigan Thomas, Shirley Purdie and Jonathan Kimberley were present. The minutes stated that the paintings 'have been taken down because it was too

⁷¹ The message on the fax cover note read: 'Please find attached copies of a letter from Sister Margaret of the Ngalangangpum School and Council's reply. Would you please contact Sister Margaret and provide whatever advice you are able to give regarding this worthy school project.'

hot and they were being damaged [and] have been put in a locked store room at the school' (Warmun Art Aboriginal Corporation 1998, 1). The minutes also listed the people thought to have work in the Collection. The minutes of the meeting note that everyone agreed that the Collection needed to be looked after and housed in a new building that was climate controlled and secure. Sr. Margaret Keane suggested that the museum be located on the highway. She is recorded as saying:

A lot of people will want to come and see that Collection therefore it would be good if it was not in the school, so that there would not be so many people coming into the community and into the school (Warmun Art Aboriginal Corporation 1998, 2).

The momentum to look after the items and designate them as a Collection came from Sisters at the school. Conservation and art-related guidance came from people within the art and museology worlds: Mary Macha, Wally Caruana, Jonathan Kimberley and Anna Moulton. No doubt the rise in popularity of Aboriginal art and the shifting perception of objects made by Aboriginal people also contributed to the move to conserve and house the items in a museum-type space.

By December 1998 the items were formally constituted as a Collection, the 'Warmun Community Collection'. In 1998, they received their first formal donation. Kelarriny Arts drew up an agreement with Catherine O'Brien on the 15th of December for the five works she entrusted to the Art Centre, with the aim that they be conserved, housed in a 'future community art museum' and 'not to be sold' (Kelarriny Arts 1998).⁷² Two years later, a Community Heritage Grant was obtained from the Australian Museum⁷³ and Anna and Jonathan invited the conservator Karen Coote to *Warrmarn* to conduct a preservation and collection survey of the objects.⁷⁴ The objects were formally constituted as a Collection following the project that conservator Karen Coote led in 2000.

⁷² The five works were: 1. George Mung Mung, 74 x 61cm, purchased 1990 from the artist. 2. George Mung Mung, 92 x 61cm, purchased 1990 from the artist. 3. Jack Britten, *Eagle and Crow*, 125 x 51cm, purchased 1991 from the artist. 4. Jack Britten, 91 x 61cm purchased 1993 from the artist. 5. Queenie McKenzie, 76 x 58cm, purchased 1996 from the artist. Warmun Art Centre records.

⁷³ Letter dated 12th September 2000, Warmun Art Centre records.

⁷⁴ Letter from Karen to Steve Moore dated 30th of August 2000, Warmun Art Centre records.

The first registration of a Collection

Karen took twelve days to complete the initial registry at *Warrmarn*.⁷⁵ Anna, Jonathan and Karen collected works from all over the community but the majority of the items were around the school: nailed on walls, placed on shelves and desks, on the floor. Karen remembered that 'there was no forward planning about what was to be included and not included in the registry. It was a simple process of getting every handmade and/or painted object in the community, photographing it and giving it a number' (pers. comm. 2013). The (potential) aesthetic, historic, monetary, educational, cultural, social and political value of the items was not considered. Karen recalled it was all about keeping everything for the community:

It was anything that was around, absolutely anything and everything. I basically went looking in every nook and cranny in that whole community. Everything was reported. We pulled everything together and we had a big meeting in the school. We put everything on the floor, everything we could find. We sat with Hector and everybody. It was at that stage [...] that the community all agreed it was all to be included in the Collection: paintings, sticks and all sorts of things. There was no concept of a will we or won't we [include an item], it was just yes. There was no debate. And it wasn't for me to say should we or shouldn't we. The whole community just said, 'this is the Collection' (pers. comm. 2013).

Karen's statement suggests strong Aboriginal agency in the initial formation of the Collection. On the 10th of October, 2000 Karen noted that it was agreed with Steve Moore, (then Warmun community Chief Executive Officer) that the title of the Collection was to be "Warmun Community Collection".

In the registration process, works were given a WCC (Warmun Community Collection) number, photographed and the photos were printed in Kununurra. Each item's photograph was stuck to an A4 sheet of white paper and placed into a plastic sleeve (Plate 7.1). Meetings were held with community members and as much information as possible was recorded for the works, such as attribution, story, title and year. Notes were written on the A4 sheet or on a sticky note and attached. Handwritten notes and sticky-notes were added to each item's individual record (sometimes with conflicting information). Approximately half of the Collection was attributed to individual artists during Karen's visit. Items were

⁷⁵ Assisted by Louise Bacon for the first week, Karen flew to Kununurra on the 8th of October 2000 and stayed in Warmun until the 20th of October (pers. comm. 2013).

discussed with community members on the 9th and 13th of October, after a Community meeting on the 16th of October and also on the 17th of October. Plates 7.2 and 7.3 show one of the meetings conducted in a schoolroom. Some of the oral recordings taken from these meetings are currently held at the Ngalangangpum School.

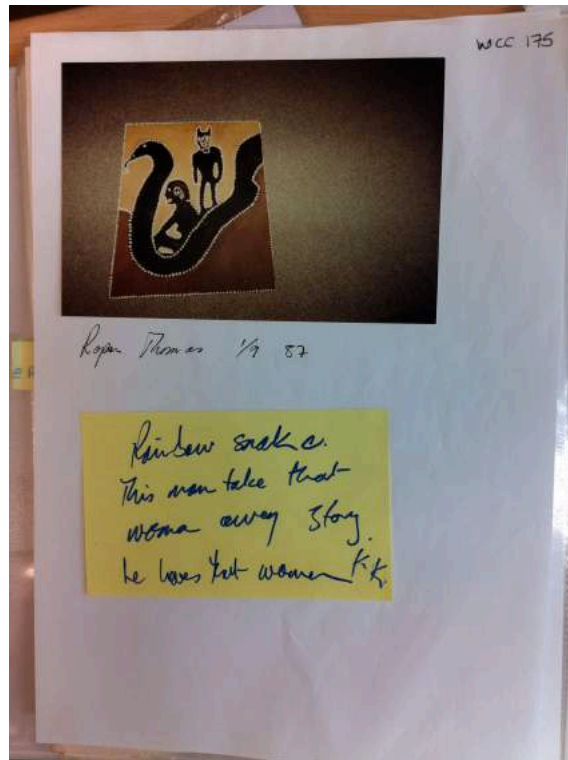


Plate 7.1 An example of a page from Karen's registration folder.



Plate 7.2 L-R: Winnie Budbarria, Hector Jandany, unknown person (with back turned), Anna Moulton, Patrick Mung Mung, Betty Carrington, Karen Coote and another unidentifiable person. Photo courtesy of Karen Coote, taken by Louise Bacon.

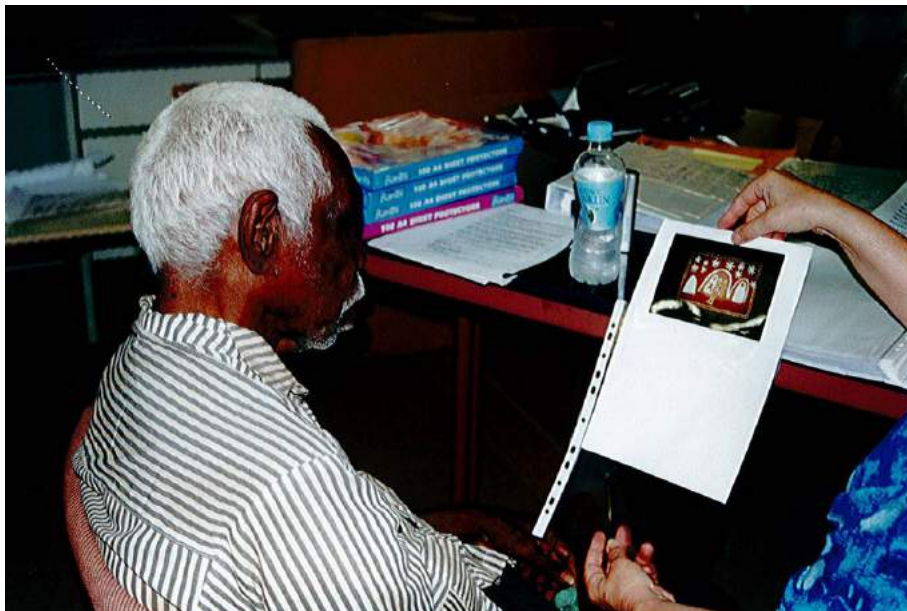


Plate 7.3 Karen Coote showing Hector Jandany an image of an item. Photo courtesy of Karen Coote, taken by Louise Bacon.

Karen placed each plastic sleeve into one of five different folders: 'To be registered', 'Catholic', 'Country and Dreaming', 'Children?' and 'Objects'. The folder 'to be registered' was works that had not had as much information sourced on them and were not given a number. These categories were chosen because they 'seemed logical' (to Karen) based on the consultation with artists. Karen also performed a basic brush clean of the works and removed wires and hanging devices and started condition reports. A treatment sheet was assigned to each item.⁷⁶ At this stage, none of the items were at the Art Centre; all of this work was unrelated to the Art Centre, except that Anna and Jonathan facilitated the process on its grounds.

On the 14th October 2000, Karen's final inventory consisted of: one hundred and eighty paintings, seventy-two 'cultural' objects, as well as books, VHS and cassette tapes, twenty photo albums, negatives, three sets of 'instant photo albums' of painted objects, a total of two hundred and fifty-two objects. Two days later a community meeting was held and Patrick Mung Mung and Eileen Bray were elected as Collection custodians. This meeting also informed the community of the progress of the project. The options for the use of the Collection were discussed as being:⁷⁷

- Not for sale
- Growing Collection
- Book
- CDs
- Exhibition in community
- Museum building
- Travelling exhibition—Visions—curated by Sr. Theresa and Anna Moulton
- Teaching tool in school by parents and grandparents
- Apply for funds for storage and care

⁷⁶ Items were designated as having one of three levels for required treatment: A—urgent, B—needs treatment and C—no treatment. The sheet had space for artist name, story, date of creation, identified by, date, description of materials, condition, size, 'survey conducted by' and the date. Karen assessed the items and allocated a treatment ranking based on their physical condition only. She did not complete the entire Collection. The audit noted that of the two hundred and seventy four objects registered and audited, all required cleaning, 13% required urgent remedial or full conservation, 37% needed treatment and 50% did not need any treatment (Warmun Art Centre 2005).

⁷⁷ Karen Coote's diary, page 9.

According to Karen's notes from the meeting in her diary, 'Hector insisted that a building be built for the Collection and then every one else did too, independently'.

Following her visit, Karen developed an action plan for the future of the Collection. On the 6th of November 2000, Karen wrote an expression of interest to Margaret Anderson, Chair of the Conservation and Collections Management Working Party at the Heritage Collections Council to ask for a grant to assist in the management and preservation of the Warmun Community Collection. It stated that this recent work resulted in the formation of the Warmun Community Collection. In this letter, Karen noted that the Collection was comprised of over two hundred and fifty items including paintings on boards, canvas, corrugated board, wood, plywood and fibro as well as smaller items. Karen stated that 'the Collection was created by parents of the school children from 1979 in order to teach the children Dreaming stories and cultural law'. When Karen left, Sr. Theresa recalled that the majority of the objects were moved into the storeroom of the science room at Ngalangangpum School and some of the objects that were gifts given to the Sisters were returned to their houses (pers. comm. Sr. Theresa 2015). Karen took the five folders back to Sydney and made copies for the community. No further work was conducted by Karen (Warmun Art Centre 2005; Davidson 2006, 29). After this time, the Art Centre managers began to put aside for the Collection works they deemed significant and stored them at the Art Centre (Davidson 2006, 29). The Collection was now official, but it was only partially documented.

The second registration and a Significance Assessment

The items remained relatively unused until 2005, when the then Art Centre managers Megan Buckley and Eamonn Scott applied for a National Library of Australia Community Heritage Grant to conduct a National Significance Assessment. Sr. Alma Cabassi, then Principal of the Ngalangangpum School, wrote a support letter with Patrick Mung Mung and Eileen Bray.⁷⁸ In a letter dated the 23rd of March 2005, Patrick Mung Mung and Eileen Bray wrote to Karen Coote and Christina Davidson—on the Warmun Art Centre letterhead—giving permission for Karen Coote to pass on any documents and information to

⁷⁸ In a letter dated May 2005, Sr. Alma wrote: 'At present the Collection is housed carefully but inadequately in a room at the school. We support the plan to move parts of the collection to the new art centre building once it is completed and look forward to the opportunity to use the new facility for many years to come to educate the children of Warmun about the origins of the school in their Community and the elders who were integral to the establishment of the school and the two way learning tradition' (Warmun Art Centre records).

Christina Davidson who would conduct the National Significance Assessment (Appendix H). The Art Centre had now officially become involved in the Collection and was instigating the National Significance Assessment.

With Christina Davidson as Consultant Art Historian/Researcher, Tina Hayne as photographer, Patrick Mung Mung and Eileen Bray as translators and community liaisons and Sr. Alma Cabassi then Principal of Ngalangangpum School, the Warmun Art Centre set out to organise and document the items again with some reference to the inventory that Karen had completed.⁷⁹ More meetings were held to discuss the meaning and attribution of the items (Plate 7.4). Although the National Significance Assessment stated the Assessment followed on from the numerical system established in 2000, some new numbers were assigned (Davidson 2006). The Assessment listed some stories and attributions that were new or differed from those in the 2000 inventory.



Plate 7.4 Warmun Community Collection meeting 19th of January 2006. L-R: Hector Jandany, Megan Buckley, Eamonn Scott, Winnie Buddbaria, Rusty Peters, Eileen Bray. Image from Warmun Community Collection National Significance Assessment, 2006, p. 14.

At this time, the Collection was stored at the Ngalangangpum School, the Art Centre and in some community buildings. The completion of the National Significance Assessment coincided with the building of a new Art Centre gallery, due for completion in mid 2007.

⁷⁹ The 2005 NLA grant application repeated the attributions from Karen's 2000 assessment.

The new building had a designated room with temperature control intended for the future storage of the Collection.

In the assessment, object files were created for each items, which included TIFF and JPEG digital images, an A4 sized colour print of the object, a condition sheet and any information collected on the items such as statements from community members, associated photographs, information about how they were used, notes and articles. The Assessment noted the murals that existed in the community (eg. Queenie McKenzie's mural at the pensioner unit) and some oral history records, videos and photos, but it stated that whether these items would be included in the Collection was yet to be decided. The Assessment recorded in total over three hundred items, more than the 2000 inventory. Some additions were never officially decided on or methodically documented, making some records inconsistent. During this period it was decided that the oral history recordings, video and old photographs were to be moved to the new Art Centre Gallery storage space, as it was considered the safest place for them. The written Assessment and the object files were also stored in the Art Centre studio.

The physical move of the objects to the Art Centre's purpose built space also meant that the value and understanding of the objects symbolically shifted from being the Ngalangangpum School's Art Collection of pedagogical aids to being 'artworks'—they were now associated with the Western art world and began to be viewed and understood according to Western frames of critiquing art. The frameworks that the Assessment deemed the objects to fit in with were:

- Art Historical
- Aesthetic
- Social
- Spiritual
- Historic

(Warmun Art Centre 2005, Section 6.1; Davidson 2006, 69-70)

Whilst not seeking to undermine the significance of the objects and the work in the National Significance Assessment, some statements in the document tend to over exaggerate or over simplify the history of the objects, perhaps to stress its importance in the Western art sector. For example, the Assessment states that 'the collection was started in 1979' (2006, 19) but

it is impossible to accurately date when the items were first made. There are only two paintings that had dates assigned from the time of their making: Queenie McKenzie's *Old Texas* (August 1984—WCC075) and *Bungle Bungle* (1984—WCC086) (Ryan 2001). There are nine works that have been assigned dates but these dates are estimates (WCC078, WCC176, WCC175, WCC059, WCC050, WCC047 and WCC062). Also, the school was only established in November 1979 and, some items were already owned by Sr. Clare and Sr. Theresa, bought by them or given to them by Aboriginal people (some people from outside *Warrmarn* before their arrival) thus, the statement that the Collection started in 1979 is misleading.

The Significance Assessment also states that 'the main body of the collection was made exclusively for community use in the period before Warmun artists were painting for exhibition and sale outside the community' (Davidson 2006, 10). To be precise, it should read that the community used many of the items in the Collection for pedagogical purposes but some of the items were made by people from outside of *Warrmarn* and some were made for the religious celebrations at the Ngalangangpum School. The second half of the statement—that they were made prior to people painting for sale and exhibition—requires updating. Aboriginal people had been selling and trading handmade items since the first contact with *gardiya* in the region. Nathaniel Buchanan's diaries of his expeditions describes occasions where sharing and trade occurred with Aboriginal people (Buchanan 1984). Frances Kofod attests that Aboriginal people began to paint when they were moved off the stations and when welfare payments began, before the Warmun community was established (pers. comm. 2014). It is impossible to accurately date when people started painting for exchange or money. Thus the statement the objects in the Collection were made prior to people painting for sale (but perhaps exhibition) is dubious.

Dating the objects without proof also, perhaps unintentionally, reinforces a fixation on 'authenticity.' The 2006 National Significance Assessment reiterates the point that some of the works in the Collection were made by the 'first generation' of east Kimberley artists. Association can interpret this as creating a binary of 'modern' and 'traditional' Aboriginal people. In such a perspective, 'traditional' or older Aboriginal people are more 'authentic' than younger generations because they are/were relatively untouched by external influences of Western culture (see Morphy 2008; Price 1989; Shiner 1994 for further discussion). This is problematic because it reinforces the idea that Aboriginal culture is valued more when it is 'untouched' and unaltered by Western (or other) cultures, reinforcing a static identity for individuals and groups. Such a perspective assumes that if Aboriginal people are able to

operate proficiently in the Western economy and the cultural and social world, then they are by default divorced from their 'traditional' culture and heritage (see Lane 2014 for a discussion on 'Being Aboriginal') and are therefore 'modern'. Often in this perspective, any change in cultural practices and values is seen negatively as 'culture loss' (Morphy 2008, 16) rather than a change or development.

The third stage and the beginning of this project

The new Art Centre gallery was completed at the end of Megan Buckley and Eamonn Scott's term as Art Centre managers in 2007. In 2008, under new managers, Jacqueline Coyle-Taylor and Rodger Taylor, the items were moved to the new keeping place. On Friday the 24th of October 2008, Shirley Purdie's painting *Stations Of the Cross* was presented to the Warmun Art Centre to hold, with a number of other works from the Collection (Appendix I).⁸⁰ Sr. Theresa remembers that other objects were also moved to the Art Centre's new space at this time. At this stage, only Sr. Alma and Sr. Theresa had keys to the room (pers. comm. Sr. Theresa 2014). There was no inventory taken for what was moved to the new site. The new purpose-built room had no natural light, 24-hr temperature control and many storage shelves. Sr. Theresa said that the items:

Were only taken over to the Art Centre because at that time they had good air-conditioning and they were locked up and the school had a key and I had a key so we could go at any time we liked to use it and get them, it is not the Art Centre stuff. Wasn't intended to be. They were sent over there because they thought that was the best place for them to be looked after. And that was the only reason why they were taken to the art centre (pers. comm. 2014).

The items remained there until Maggie Fletcher started as the next Art Centre manager in June 2009. When Maggie arrived the Collection was still in the locked room of the new gallery. Initially she was not given a key. She recalled:

When we first got there, the gallery had been up for two years and the Collection was put in a room. Megan and Eamonn had finished off the building and put all the Collection in that little back room, with a locked door. We couldn't get in and the key wasn't at the art centre. [...] I am not sure how long after Sister Theresa and Alma decided we should have a key at the art centre, that it was ok, it was

⁸⁰ Shirley's painting won the 56th Blake Prize and it was purchased by a group of individuals who donated it to the community.

safe, we weren't going to do anything. It had been in the school before the new building (pers. comm. 2013).

Sometime later, Sr. Theresa and Sr. Alma handed her the keys to the Collection room (pers. comm. Maggie Fletcher 2013 and Sr. Theresa 2014).

When I arrived in 2010 to work at the Art Centre, the Warmun Community Collection was stored on shelves and on the floor in the back gallery rooms with the archival boxes. The boxes contained VHS footage, colour photographs, analogue tapes, notes and ephemera. I understood these items to be the books, tapes, 20 photo albums, negatives, three sets of instant photograph albums of painted objects that Karen had documented in 2000. Plates 7.5 and 7.6 shows what the storage room looked like in 2010.



Plate 7.5 Collection items on shelves in the Art Centre's storage room, 24th November 2010.



Plate 7.6 The Warmun Community Collection in the storage room, 24th November 2010.

When I spoke to Maggie Fletcher about her perceptions of the value of the Collection for the community, she said that she found people were disinterested in using them to teach or look at. She speculated that for the Community, the Collection represented those people who passed away and so the objects were avoided because they reminded them of deceased people. She recalled:

When Betty Carrington's old sister died, Gabe was especially upset because it was her that had taught him Gija. I went to the Collection storeroom with him one day and he looked in and said 'No I don't want to.' I believe when he viewed those works by deceased artists it was as if he was meeting up with those old people, viewing their country and Dreamings and feeling close to them again. He was not seeing the objects as such, but what and who they represent. I think that is what Gabe maybe saw and the memories and the old people who taught him so much and he did not want to actively engage with those old people through the objects (pers. comm. 2013).

But over time, Maggie noticed a shift in attitude toward the items:

Now that more people have died, the younger community members have a responsibility to look after what the old people did. The objects have perhaps replaced a lot of the old teaching ways (pers. comm. 2013).

I also perceived similar disengagement, although I wasn't sure why. One day in 2010 Maggie's husband Gary Fletcher, Operations Coordinator at the Art Centre, took a few items out of the Collection room to present to a class of Ngalangangpum students visiting the Art Centre to learn about carving. Rusty Peters, coincidentally at the Art Centre that morning, was invited into the class. But Rusty did not engage in the activity. He sat nearby and listened, but he did not speak. Gary and the teacher proceeded to teach the boys how to carve and burn patterns onto wood, using objects in the Collection as examples. I wondered why Rusty was not interested in talking about the items. Perhaps it was because they were objects he didn't make himself so he could not speak about them, maybe he did not feel like it that day or maybe there was some personal reason. Perhaps it was a combination of these factors. The items were put back and the Collection remained in the keeping space until 13th of March 2011, when the flood tore through the community, as I have detailed in Chapter Two. It was this disengagement that led me to query the role and value of the Collection over time and look beyond the role of objects themselves.

Conclusions

When the objects now known as the Warmun Community Collection were used in the school they were a part of Two Way classes, used as teaching aids to explain, describe and affirm Country, *Ngarranggarni*, Catholicism and cultural and everyday practices. At this early stage, there was minimal emphasis on attribution. Like the original storage of the objects, impetus and initiative to conserve and document the items, formalising them as a Collection, came from non-Aboriginal people, although Aboriginal community members were consulted and supported the process. At the end of 1998 the objects were considered a 'Collection' and different roles and values were placed on them. They became valued in their own right and they were seen to hold special meaning in relation to one another. No longer used to teach, they stood alone, as containers of information, receptacles of the past,

holders of 'traditional' knowledge and stories. They were now relegated as 'art' and had not been used by community members for some time.

In 2000, Karen Coote, representatives of the community and the Warmun Art Centre coordinators, documented a vast array of objects and performed basic conservation of them. The 2005 Community Heritage Grant application and 2006 National Significance Assessment had plans for the Collection in terms of organising, exhibiting, future storage and future display. However, after it was conducted, there was minimal engagement with the items from community members. During this period, Art Centre managers added works they deemed significant to the Collection. Sixty more works became part of the Collection after the year 2000, thus adding the Western values and criteria of the Art Centre managers.⁸¹ Step by step the Collection moved away from its original role and value, and distance between *Warrmarn* people and the objects developed. In 2008 the objects were moved to a purpose built room at the Art Centre that prohibited casual access, but was not difficult to access if anyone expressed interest or concern. The physical move of the objects to the Art Centre's purpose built space also meant that the value and understanding of the objects symbolically shifted from being the Ngalangangpum School's Art Collection of pedagogical objects, with minimal emphasis on attribution to being 'artworks'—they were now associated with the Western art world and began to be viewed and understood according to Western frames of critiquing art, valued by people outside of *Warrmarn* according to particular aesthetic, social, spiritual and art historical criteria.

In my observations and interviews in my fieldwork periods discussed in Chapter Two and this chapter, there was a critical difference between the way the community approached the Collection and the way that non-Aboriginal people approached it. There was a cacophony of noise about the Collection from the outside people involved and silence and inaction from community members. Was their inaction toward the Collection a positive exercise of agency? Not necessarily, it could be a reflection of other factors, such as shyness, powerlessness, discomfort or cultural reasons. On the other hand, I had perceived community members avoiding confrontation before (discussed further in Chapter 8 and also in Chapter 6). I observed that the community was not resolute, united or sure about which way they wanted to go forward and what role the items would have in the future. To be sure, I perceived a pause from the Warmun community.

⁸¹ The works added to the Collection were by artists who are deemed significant to the community and/or have posthumously been deemed significant to the Warmun Art movement: Jack Britten, Hector Jandany, Betty Carrington, Henry Wambini, Madigan Thomas and Clancy Patrick.

Remembering my analysis in Chapter Two, the impetus to rescue and conserve the Collection after the *Warrambany* mainly came from the Sisters at Ngalangangpum School, art conservators, arts workers and art historians. Articles published pressed the importance of saving the objects and less was written about *Warrmarn* people and the community rebuild. Although those involved in the Collection 'saving' were theoretically positively motivated, there was minimal input by leaders and the community as a whole—they were more concerned, understandably, with dealing with the trauma of the flood, the loss of their homes, their dislocation and relocation. The organisation, recovery and display of the Warmun Community Collection can ultimately be linked to the external imagination and values of people outside *Warrmarn*. The role and value of the objects had begun to change according to art market appreciations. These introduced value regimes and the actions that produce them, seem to have contributed to the alienation of the community. Essentially, the 'rescue' became a non-Indigenous endeavor. While the arts workers I have discussed here value Indigenous culture and are largely sympathetic and supportive of cultural change and development, the Collection objects moved into different worlds and frames of viewing art.

In the Warmun community in 2014 and 2015, there was general reluctance to engage with the Collection although Shirley Purdie has spoken publically about the importance of the Collection (ABC Kimberley 2013; ABC Radio National 2013) and Sade Carrington, Gabriel Nodea and Mark Nodea have been nominated as spokespeople at different times for the Collection. However, from my observations, I have perceived a general lack of interest and engagement with the Collection. This lack of ownership for individual items and the Collection is likely to be due to four compounding factors:

1. Most of the makers have passed away and there has been minimal knowledge transference between older and younger generations
2. The items were largely ephemeral and made as teaching aids, not objects intended to last
3. The items were locked away for over ten years and out of control of *Warrmarn* people

4. The recovery of the items after the flood placed them further (not only geographically) from the community's grasp, into frameworks and fields many people are not confident to navigate, creating a larger chasm between *Warrmarn* people and the items.

In this journey of engagement with the objects, I am reminded of a key point made by Nicholas Thomas: 'objects can be transpositions of the features and effects of relations' (Thomas 1991, 9), suggesting that this is a case where the type and level of engagement with the Collection (from the community) is a reflection of the relations between the community, outside groups and the objects. From interviews conducted and observations I have made, *Warrmarn* peoples' attitudes towards the Community Collection seem to be that it is there and it was initially the outcome of their agency, but it is not a central reference point for the community today. The items essentially changed from being largely ephemeral to becoming containers of knowledge, representative of the 'past'. From the community's inaction it is clear that the objects were not a priority in this period (for whatever reason); but this did not mean that they did not value the objects then or now, or would not in the future. This chapter has shown the proprietorial relationship that people have with objects and how the purpose, use, interpretation and reinterpretations of objects can mean that people become at times tangential to the objects they make.

It is the younger generations now—who have had very different experiences from their elders—who will decide how and if they will engage with the Collection. The Collection is involved in an ongoing value creation process where the community must work out the future of the objects. It is at this pause—of inaction and disengagement—that my original plan to focus on the objects disappeared from my grasp because it was evident they were not highly valued in their role for teaching, learning, agency and creativity today. I redirected my attention towards how people did this in daily life instead. What was the role of art now and where did learning and teaching occur that was in the control of *Warrmarn* residents? In the following chapters I take a broader look at place and the meaning of the Warmun Art Centre, in the local production and reproduction of culture and knowledge. With this new trajectory, important insights were illuminated to me regarding what *Warrmarn* people value and want in their day-to-day life, where they express agency and how they express it.

Chapter 8

The Warmun Art Centre

Introduction

The *Warrambany* had consequences for the Warmun Community, the Warmun Community Collection and this thesis. The absence of the Collection from the community in my 2012 fieldwork period combined with the lack of interest and engagement in the Collection from the community before the flood and during its conservation after the flood, made me wonder if knowledge transfer occurred through artworks. Thus, in my fieldwork I began to explore the broader roles of art. I had assumed the main role of the Art Centre was art production, but I discovered, through close ethnographic examination, that the activities at the Art Centre were not all related to painting and selling art. The activities at the Art Centre had significance that was in many ways more far-reaching; namely the cultural production of everyday life.

I begin this chapter by recounting the establishment of the Art Centre to highlight the original aims of the organisation. I discuss the official values, mission and structure of the organisation and then look at what occurs in the space: how it operates, what its constraints are, how its members use it and how it articulates within the community. I then show the mediating role it plays for individuals. I go on to reveal the difficulties the Art Centre faces in balancing the needs of its members, navigating different knowledge domains and values of those who use it and being financially sustainable and creatively productive. I find that the balancing act it must perform makes its operations precarious. Ultimately, this chapter is a study of what happens at the Art Centre and what it supports and hinders on day-to-day levels for individuals and the community. I reveal how *Warrmarn* people actively engage with the Warmun Art Centre to meet their needs and aspirations.

Selling art in Warrmarn

In the early 1980s many *Warrmarn* people turned to art for financial stability and autonomy following from the move off the stations, the transition to welfare and because of a lack of

employment opportunities. *Warrmarn* people sought out and were sought by non-Aboriginal people to sell their paintings (Altman 1981; Nieuwenhuysen and Altman 1979; Newstead 2014; Spinner 2013). By 1986, Bob Nycalas (then Warmun Community Chairman) wrote a letter to Waringarri Arts (established in Kununurra in 1985), stating that *Warrmarn* wanted its own art centre, on their Country (Healy 2002; Spinner 2013, 117).

Two 'Arts and Crafts' centres were established in *Warrmarn* before the now-existing Warmun Art Centre was established. The first business operated in 1994 and was called Warmun Aboriginal Corporation or Warmun Community Arts. It was managed by Peter Harrison of Kimberley Art Gallery in Melbourne and run in the community by David Rock, a Warmun community policeman and later employee of the Warmun Community Council (Spinner 2013, 127). This enterprise did not last long and dissolved when David Rock left the community. The second enterprise developed after the Warmun Council recruited Maxine Taylor and Terrence 'Serge' Brooks to run the Turkey Creek Roadhouse (Healy 2002, 183). Taylor and Brooks began to sell artworks under the business name Narrangunny Art Traders at the Roadhouse. In 1997, Brian Fitzpatrick of Aboriginal Business Development and the Warmun Community Council employed them to run their art enterprise from the old *Warrmarn* post office/police station and set it up as their home, under the name Warmun Traditional Artists (Healy 2002, 183; Newstead 2014, 30 & 361; Spinner 2013, 127).

Jacqueline Healy argues that the latter business started to unravel after Helen Reid of Digeri Art Tours/Palya Art, visited the centre. Suspicious of the apparent not-for-profit status of the business, she wrote a querying letter to the Community Council (Healy 2002, 184; Spinner 2013, 129). Consequently, the Community Council discussed the enterprise at a council meeting on the 11th of December 1997. They also discussed broader issues relating to galleries and art production (Healy 2002, 184-186). It was established that Warmun Traditional Artists/Narrangunny Art Trader was a private business, not not-for-profit, but that the matter needed to be discussed further. Another meeting was held on the 16th of December 1997.⁸² At this meeting, the Council unanimously resolved to ask Taylor and Brooks to leave and they would:

⁸² 'On 16th December 1997 the agenda was: Did the Warmun Council wanted to establish a community owned and managed art centre; What would be the location of the enterprise and; Should Warmun Traditional Artists/Narrangunny Art Trader should continue running their private business and if not, how they would be asked to leave' (Healy 2002, 185-186).

Set up a Community owned and managed Community Arts Centre Enterprise, where the people who worked there would manage the centre and report to and be accountable (operationally and financially) to Warmun Council.⁸³

Healy argues this decision was a 'reassertion of control over the production and distribution of their culture' (2002:210-11, 181). Such a business had not been run in *Warmun* yet (as also noted by Spinner 2013, 127). It appeared as if the Council wanted to participate in the art market on its own terms and under the community's control, however, it is beyond the scope of the thesis to investigate the motivations of all involved.

The development of the new enterprise meant that the community had to learn how to run a not-for-profit business and navigate the arts industry. The artists had to decide whom they wanted to paint for/with and where they wanted to paint. Newstead and Spinner note that Jack Britten travelled to Wyndham to continue to paint with Taylor and Brooks. By contrast, Hector Jandany and Queenie McKenzie left Narrangunny Art Traders and supported the new community art centre (Newstead 2014, 362; Spinner 2013, 131). Whilst people were decisive about whom they worked for, some people lacked comprehensive understanding about their rights and obligations as artists. For example, Taylor and Brooks took Hector Jandany and other artists to court over an exclusive contract the artists signed (unknowingly) for Narrangunny Art Traders. Hector Jandany summarised his obliviousness about the situation: 'I did not know what was going to happen when I signed the paper. I am not a schoolboy. I don't understand *gardiya way*' (Geogeff 1998).

The beginning of the Warmun Art Centre

With the help of Kevin Kelly, Heike Hess and Mick O'Byrne, the Community Council employed two non-Aboriginal people to coordinate the Art Centre: Anna Moulton and Jonathan Kimberley.⁸⁴ The centre began as a subsidiary of Warmun Community Turkey Creek Incorporated. Originally it was called *Kelarriny Arts* to distinguish it from the previous enterprises. It was founded with financial assistance from the Argyle Diamonds Mine and from an interest-free loan of \$50,000 from Canila Pty Ltd—an Aboriginal enterprise owned

⁸³ Minutes of Extraordinary meeting of Warmun Community Council, 16 December 1997, Warmun Community Council (Healy 2002, 186).

⁸⁴ Kevin Kelly, an arts entrepreneur, was employed as a consultant in the selection process. Heike Hess, through the Department of Trade and Commerce was asked to write a business plan. Mick O'Byrne from Argyle Diamond Mine assisted in the position description (Healy 2002, 189).

by the Warmun community—and initially it received funding from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

Healy has documented the process of the Art Centre's establishment in great detail, covering the associated financial, social and cultural issues as well as the motivating factors behind the community's decision to create an Art Centre (See Healy 2002, 188-211). Whilst there is no need to repeat this, and similar research (Healy 2005; Spinner 2013; Newstead 2014), Healy's research concluded that that the community-run Art Centre came from the impetus of community members, as a result of being unclear about the activities of dealers and businesses *and* because residents wanted to paint on their Country. Although non-Aboriginal people led the practical side of its establishment (and subsequent managing), the critical difference was that the organisation was community owned and controlled, a necessity for Aboriginal Art Centres (Wright 1999, ix) and it aimed to work towards being run by Aboriginal community members.

From 2003 the Art Centre became financially self-sustainable and did not need ongoing ATSIC funding. It continued on as a subsidiary of the Warmun Community Turkey Creek Incorporated until the 21st of June 2005, when it became separately incorporated as the Warmun Art Aboriginal Corporation under the Commonwealth *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976* (Australian Government Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations n.d.). Warmun Art Centre then became an Aboriginal owned not-for-profit corporation, governed by the Office of Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (Corporations n.d.).⁸⁵ Incorporation meant that the Art Centre was a separate entity from the Community Council and the community. This was a significant shift because it meant that the Art Centre was no longer under the control of the Council—the priority at the beginning—it was now independent and, although run by its Board of Directors and member base (who were community members), was not accountable to the community per se. Now, no longer under community control, the Art Centre Board of Directors steered it.

Incorporation timed with the centre's financial independence and strength. In 2005 sales reached \$955,752.02 with a profit of \$411,195.51 (Australian Government Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations n.d.). At the end of the financial year in 2006, sales were at \$994,791.60 and other revenue (government grants and philanthropic support) was at a low \$73,791.60. There was a financial peak at the end of the financial year in 2007—sales and

⁸⁵ ORIC is an independent statutory office holder appointed by the Minister for Indigenous Affairs under the CATSI (*Corporations [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] Act 2006*) Act.

grants were at \$1194,074.30 (Australian Government Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations n.d.), reflecting a stronger art market (Warmun Art Centre and Creative Economy 2015 ,11). At the end of this year the Art Centre completed an architecturally designed gallery to display artworks on a par with galleries in the southern states. The new white cube gallery was spacious and had a storage room (with temperature control) to hold the Warmun Community Collection.

However, the economic stability of the Art Centre declined over the next few years. The Global Financial Crisis of 2007/2008 and unstable management caused a decline in sales from 2008 to 2009 and a loss of nearly a quarter of a million dollars,⁸⁶ which was a downturn of 45%—other Art Centres experienced on average a 15-20% downturn (Warmun Art Aboriginal Corporation 2012, 8). This led to the resumption of low-level funding from the Labor Government's Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts in 2009-2010 however it was less than \$20,000 (pers. comm. Maggie Fletcher 2013). Sales for the end of the 2009-2010 financial year were back up at \$1082,646.48, which was an increase of 40%, however this was due to extraordinary circumstances: a visiting cruise ship of art collectors generated \$80-100,000 in one day—not a regular event for the Art Centre (Warmun Art Aboriginal Corporation 2012).

When the *Warrambany* hit in 2011, sales in the financial year 2010-2011 did not decline exponentially, but they did reduce. There were less visitors to the Art Centre and fewer opportunities to curate solo and group exhibitions or support artistic development. Money came in from existing exhibitions and the Art Centre organised two exhibitions post-flood: *Warrambany of Warrmarn-Floods of Warmun* at Gecko Gallery, Broome WA (Kalmar 2011) and *Deeper Water* at Tim Melville Gallery, New Zealand. Art production had not stopped, but it had slowed. Since 2011 the finances of the Art Centre declined, culminating in a loss of over \$200,000 in 2013 (Warmun Art Centre and Creative Economy 2015, 8). It is interesting to compare sales and other income just before and after the 2011 flood. Sales in 2010 were at \$108,2646.48 and other revenue was \$239,605.10. In June 2011, just after the flood, the sales were at \$738,539.14 and other revenue \$427,782.56. A larger drop is evident in the financial year after the flood, ending June 2012, where sales were at \$581,585.28 and other revenue was high again \$480,026.75. In 2013 sales picked up to \$811,174.54 and other revenue was still high, at \$490,461.74.

⁸⁶ Warmun Art Centre financial report for the year ended 30 June 2009.

When money coming into the Art Centre was low, the Art Centre staff had to turn to other avenues to continue operations. Funding was sought from government and government arms such as Australian Council for the Arts, Country Arts Western Australia and Lottery West for short term projects. In these projects, participants received wages for their work, in kind support and per diems for their time. Some projects tied in with exhibitions, in the hope of generating sales. As a result of these financial restrictions, the Art Centre staff were split between balancing different priorities and needs: more time had to be spent on applying for and acquitting grants, which meant less time was spent marketing art to tourists, in art production and in curating exhibitions.

The structure of the Warmun Art Centre

The Warmun Art Centre is structured in such a way that its Aboriginal members and Board of Directors control it. It is an incorporated business whose members must be 'an Aboriginal person from or a resident in the Gija Language region or are associated with such persons, or have been a past or current regular contributor to the previous Warmun Art Centre or the corporation' (Warmun Art Aboriginal Corporation 2013, 4). Like all incorporated businesses, members nominate a Board of Directors who steer the organisation.⁸⁷ The members cannot vote to make changes in the Constitution (Warmun Art Aboriginal Corporation 2013) or the day-to-day running of the organisation, however they are able to voice their concerns and desires for the business to the Board of Directors. The Board listens to the members' needs and makes its decisions based on the desires and the recommendations of the employees and the members. The Board wields greater power than the members in terms of passing changes in the Rule Book, such as making day-to-day decisions and signing off on financial documents. The Board appoints the non-Aboriginal staff to run the Art Centre under the guidance of outgoing non-Aboriginal staff. The decision-making process is by consensus, to encourage people to take on the responsibility for the Art Centre, to ensure that no one improperly uses their position to gain an advantage and finally, to prevent non-Aboriginal control and influence.

⁸⁷ The usual requirements of an incorporated business are necessary for it to operate as a legal entity: monthly Board Of Director meetings, weekly member meetings, Annual General meetings, quorum at meetings to pass changes to the constitution, democratic voting for Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary positions.

In spite of the power of the Board, the artists also yield power because they constitute the economic base of the structure through their art production. Their success in sales helps them maintain their autonomy and power within structure. A structure such as this recalls Louis Althusser's definition of a 'social whole' as one constituted by levels. According to Althusser, the social whole:

Contain[s] a base on which are erected the [...] 'floors' of the super structure[. It] is a metaphor [...] which suggests that the upper floors could not 'stay up' alone, if they did not rest precisely on their base' (Althusser, 1972:134-135).

Thus, the management determines the values and guidelines for the business's cohesion, the Board ultimately control the management and has final say and, the artists can leverage power.

The values and goals of the Warmun Art Centre

In February 2015, the Warmun Art Centre Strategic Action Plan (2015-2017) identified their most important values as being:

- Community - strong healthy Warmun community
- Country - going out bush
- Gija Culture - strong Gija culture, Gija ways
- Old people - older people as knowledge keepers and passing on stories
- Next generation – passing knowledge between generations with parents as the link
- Sharing Gija culture with everyone through stories and art
- Business - a business owned by and for Gija people of Warmun Aboriginal community.

The 2015 goals were identified as:

- A business that's strong into the future that supports and looks after the community
- Create more jobs for Aboriginal people
- A lively, changing Gija Centre for all generations in the community

- Keep knowledge and learning of culture going by supporting bush trips on country
- Use digital media and technologies to help Gija stories and culture get out to more people inside and outside Warmun
- The knowledge and strength of Gija people, culture and language is valued
- More people recognising Gija artists for their art and culture (Warmun Art Centre and Creative Economy 2015, 18).

Under this new plan, these goals are linked with key performance indicators and annual targets for staff to ensure they are met. It is clear from these values and goals that the Art Centre is a locally evolved institution that is owned by its members. However, the values and goals in the 2015 Action Plan do not elucidate how the Art Centre supports the social, cultural and political world of *Warrmarn* on a day-to-day basis. They do not show how the Art Centre responds to the daily community needs and how it takes on other functions, which make it more a Two Way institution than most in *Warrmarn*.

The unofficial roles of the Warmun Art Centre

In my 2012 fieldwork period that covered sixty-seven days (not including weekends) there was a daily average of 3.6 cars at the Art Centre and an average of twelve people at the Art Centre. There were always people at the Art Centre. What were they doing? I noted that the resources commonly accessed at the Art Centre included the phone, the fax, the internet and its cars. People used the Art Centre to connect to Facebook and YouTube, to make identification cards so they could travel on the plane (if they did not have birth certificate or a driver's licence), to do internet banking, to set up bank accounts and to get lifts around the community. People used the phone to activate key cards, to contact ANKAAA, to contact Centrelink, to check their Basic Card balance, to call the Kimberly Land Council, to book bus tickets, to contact the police to find out how they can pay off fines, to organise mechanical repairs for their car, to organise funeral business, to call station owners to ask for permission to access Country and to have interpersonal conversations. People also submitted tax returns at the Art Centre, borrowed Art Centre swags for camping out, asked for money in advance and asked the Art Centre to hold their money because they don't want to keep it on themselves. People came to the Art Centre to

photocopy, to take fuel to someone broken down, to transfer money, to borrow tools, to mow grass, to eat, to collect personal mail and to have *naliya*. Often they were able to do these things with the help, support and guidance from non-Aboriginal staff. In forty-four days I recorded the resources used at the Art Centre (Table 2):

Table 2 Resources used at the Warmun Art Centre in 44 days in 2012

Date	Art Centre resources used
19/01/2012	Facebook used.
20/01/2012	Facebook used.
30/01/2012	YouTube used.
03/02/2012	YouTube and Facebook used.
07/02/2012	YouTube used.
08/02/2012	Made ID cards for family travel on the plane - computers used.
14/05/2012	Phone, fax and internet used for banking.
21/05/2012	Phone used for bank. Phone used to get a car fixed, to get to a funeral.
23/05/2012	Phone used to organise car repairs.
24/05/2012	Phone used to organise funeral business.
28/05/2012	Phone used for access to mining money and Basics Card.
29/05/2012	Phone used to find money. Art Centre staff asked to fix someone's table. Art Centre staff help with Basics Card problems. Art Centre steel rake borrowed. Staff asked to drive to Roadhouse for money and food.
30/05/2012	Phone used for banking, flights, fax, food, shopping trips.
31/05/2012	Phone calls from Broome prison to speak to family.
01/06/2012	Art Centre troopie used for money and shopping trip.
02/06/2012	Art Centre troopie and camping gear used for weekend bush trip.
05/06/2012	Art Centre staff spent one hour at the shop with artists.
06/06/2012	Meeting at Frog Hollow for mining royalties. Art Centre troopie used to get to meeting. Phone used to call mine to transfer money. Phone used for Centrelink. Phone used to call medical clinic. Art Centre trailer borrowed to move house.
07/06/2012	Help needed to sort out fines. Phone for teleconference. Phone and internet to transfer money.
13/06/2012	Phone and internet used.
15/06/2012	Phone used to set up a new bank account. Troopie used to get wood for charcoal paint and for individuals to use.
18/06/2012	Art Centre staff asked to help activate new bank key card. Phone used for ANKAAA. Phone used for personal reasons.
19/06/2012	Seventy-five minutes spent at the shop helping older people shop and drive them home with their supplies.
20/06/2012	Phone used. Troopie used to drive Art Centre worker's mum to council meeting then to take her to Kununurra hospital.
21/06/2012	Phone to call Commonwealth Bank to set up new card.
25/06/2012	Phone and fax used to send Centrelink Tax Declaration forms. Phone used for Gelganyum. Phone used for banking; trying to set up a Commonwealth account and credit card. Art Centre car used twice for trips to Roadhouse.
26/06/2012	Computer used to burn music. Car used to go home for deaths certificate.
27/06/2012	Phone used for bank.
29/06/2012	Phone used for Jirrawun matters.
03/07/2012	Phone used to check Basic Card balance and bank balance.
04/07/2012	Phone used to call Jirrawun about money. Car used to go shop to buy elastic.
05/07/2012	Phone used for bank balance.
06/07/2012	Art Centre camera used to photograph unsafe fences in the new houses for complaint letter.
11/07/2012	Two troopies used to go out bush.

13/07/2012	Phone used to organise money. Phone used to call another Art Gallery in Kununurra for money.
16/07/2012	Phone used to book bus to get people back from Derby. Internet used to find out how to pay a fine. Art Centre staff asked to lend money.
18/07/2012	Calls into the Art Centre about group stuck in Derby; phone used to organise more buses.
24/07/2012	Car for personal use. Internet used to transfer money.
25/07/2012	Phone and email used to work out a youth justice meeting in Kunnurra. Internet used for tax return. Phone used.
26/07/2012	Phone, fax and internet used. Phone used to call to Springvale Station for permission to enter.
27/07/2012	Swags borrowed from Art Centre. Phone used to call Springvale Station owners to get permission to visit their country.
31/07/2012	Phone to organise something with Gelganyum. Phone to resolve matters relating to the death of community member. Internet used to put tax return in.
20/08/2012	Art Centre car used to drive to Kununurra and around town.
21/08/2012	Phone used to call parole officer. General phone use for money matters.
23/08/2012	Art Centre troopie used to take artist to clinic. Phone used for Gelganyum money. Phone used to organise funeral at Halls Creek. Phone used to access family money.
28/08/2012	Phone, fax and internet used.
04/09/2012	Family calling in for money. Phone used to organise family meeting for money.
05/09/2012	Phone used for money matters.
10/09/2012	Phone used to organise work hours with Centrelink.
11/09/2012	Phone used to sort out money matters.
17/09/2012	Phone and Art Centre bank account used to book bus ticket. Art Centre used to hold money.
19/09/2012	Phone used to fix car. Phone used to organise Gelganyum money.
28/09/2012	Two troopies used for day trip to Spring Creek.
02/10/2012	Phone, internet and fax used.

As evident in Table 2, *Warrmarn* people use the Art Centre for their own needs. The Art Centre is also a space for community meetings, which involve speaking out about social issues, expressing problems, worries, frustrations and needs. The regular Tuesday artist meetings provide the opportunity for people to speak up and exercise agency. These meetings are a forum where information is shared and where access and input is equal. On one particular Tuesday meeting I noted that:

- An individual was frustrated that everyone was still smoking and drinking too much and nothing was changing
- An individual was angry because people weren't working hard enough at the Art Centre
- An individual was cross because some people went to her Country without her consent

- Two people expressed disdain that another family did not help them when they were broken down on the roadside on the weekend
- One Aboriginal staff member was worried about how Art Centre money had been spent on a bush trip last year: 'Who got paid and how much? Who went on the trip and what was the money spent on?' She demanded the *gardiya* Art Centre staff write a letter to those involved to find out what happened.⁸⁸

On another occasion, there was an ongoing issue between artists about knowledge transference and *lirrgarn*—teaching and learning 'the right way'. One senior man was agitated because the snake prop for the upcoming *Goorirr Goorirr* performance was not put away safely, but left outside. He believed this was not the 'right way' to take care of the prop. The snake was a significant part of the performance and the senior man blamed a younger man for the misdemeanor, as the young man had taken responsibility for the performance. The debate culminated in a confrontation at a Tuesday meeting:

Senior man 1: [speaking to the young man] You gotta watch that fucking snake, you can't fucking leave him like that. It's true, you gotta *lirrgarn*.

Senior woman 1: [speaking to senior man 1] You gotta *lirrgarn* him!

Senior man 1: [speaking to the young man] You gotta be smart. You can't leave him.

Senior woman 2: Should be well known people who know law. You blokes gotta fucking lead, for another next generation to carry on. We don't get any help, you fellas gotta lead him. He [the young man] not an old man, he never run this thing. That's all I got, from in here, from my bloody insides.

Senior man 1: He gotta fucking *lirrgarn*, he don't know, he not smart.

Senior man 2: [walks up to young man and says] You gotta wrap him up, don't forget to cover him up.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Cate Massola field notes, 23/01/2012.

⁸⁹ Cate Massola field notes, 10/07/2012.

This example shows a rift in knowledge succession and an attempt to resolve the matter. The senior woman argued that the men—the right people—needed to teach the younger man how to look after the snake, the right way.

Another point of tension occurred in regard to a painting that a younger artist made. The young artist had painted a significant site that one leader thought should not be public. The issue was dealt with over a course of a week. I documented how the matter unfolded:

- 18/08/12 The senior man came round to my donga at 7:15am to tell me he worried for the painting, *Doomoorriny*, because it was dangerous and the manager put it in the gallery for the public to see. He said he was worried because 'all you women work there and its dangerous'
- 18/08/12 Later in the morning the senior man spoke to a male *gardiya* staff member and asked him take the painting down from the gallery. He said he would resign from the Art Centre and not paint because of that painting
- 19/08/12 The senior man took two artists and two male *gardiya* staff members, including the manager, into the studio to tell them that the painting was dangerous. They moved the painting from the Gallery to the back of the Studio
- 21/08/12 The young artist who painted *Doomoorriny* told me that that he would 'throw the painting in the river'
- 24/08/12 The senior man told a male *gardiya* staff member to turn the painting face down in the studio, so no one could see it.
- 26/08/12 The young artist mentioned to me in passing that no-one likes his painting and laughed
- 28/08/12 The manager earmarked the work for an exhibition about dangerous places in Gija country. ⁹⁰

The painting remained in the studio until I left in October 2012. When I returned in 2014, the painting was back on public display in the Gallery. In my 2015 visits, the painting was in the Gallery storeroom, for sale. This case study is an example of two contrary dynamics: how the Art Centre's activities can be steered by the artists and also how non-Aboriginal

⁹⁰ Cate Massola field notes 18/08/2012—28/08/2012.

staff can undermine the priorities of the artists. Indeed, the Art Centre staff responded to the requests of the senior man, and moved the painting accordingly. It is also quite possible that there were different views amongst the artists about the painting, to which I was not privy, which may have made it difficult for the Art Centre manager to resolve and may explain why the paintings' location kept shifting. Nonetheless, the painting ended up for sale again, and it was the same manager who moved it.

Thus far I have shown how Art Centre members use the organisation for its resources, how it is a place for members to express themselves and I have highlighted the positions of power *gardiya* staff hold and the contested situations they are faced with. The next case study highlights the unofficial roles of the art centre for its members and the difficulties faced when balancing the needs of the members and staff.

The Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair

In August 2012, the Art Centre staff and artists travelled by road to Darwin for the annual Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair and accompanying exhibition (the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards) and performances (at the Art Awards and the National Indigenous Music Awards). We had a particularly large group because of our commitment to these events. There were six artists, three *gardiya* Art Centre staff (including myself), two Aboriginal Art Centre workers and an additional nine people for the performance at the National Indigenous Music Awards. Four of the artists were elderly and quite immobile. We had to be at the stall at the Art Fair for eight hours a day, for three days. When we arrived in Darwin we unloaded at our hotel, ate dinner together and talked about the logistics of the next few days: who was going to watch the stall and when, what events were on and what we must attend. The artists all expressed their desire to go shopping. They spoke about the mall, what presents they were going to buy for family and who was going to drive them to do it. The Art Centre manager told two of the senior artists he would lend them money for shopping as he had not had a chance to get them their cash per diems. At breakfast the next day, we discussed what we had to do that day and what people wanted to do. We had to begin setting up at 3:30pm at the Art Fair, which gave us the morning free. Shopping was voted for. We went to a Country and Western store and bought some cowboy shirts and jewellery. We ate lunch at a shopping centre and then went on to the Fair in the afternoon to set up the stall.

At the Fair, the first thing we had to do was install the paintings. The Art Centre manager consulted with me about the hang formation, but not with the Gija staff, much to their dismay. The workers had attended many Art Fairs in Darwin and had their own opinions about how to hang and what would sell and why. The Art Centre manager wanted to hang the best-known and highest priced artists on the wall. These were the works he believed the Western art world would appreciate because they were: aesthetically pleasing (according to Western criteria and frameworks of viewing art), the artist has good reputation (has had many exhibitions at reputable galleries and won prizes) and the artist is senior and holds 'traditional' Aboriginal knowledge. On the other hand, the two Gija staff wanted to display works from emerging artists and those that were cheaper in order to give an equal display of all the artworks and be assured of sales. The Art Centre manager went ahead with his plan and marked out the paintings he wanted hung. He left us to install them. Both the Gija staff members complained to me about it, but said nothing to the manager. After a while, they stopped helping with the hang. I finished the hang. Over dinner that night we discussed the next few days. Shopping was still everyone's priority as well as visiting nephews and sons at a nearby boarding school.

On Friday we rose early and requests for visiting relatives, shopping and money continued over breakfast. We resolved to do more Saturday. The Art Centre manager arrived over breakfast and told two senior artists he would still lend them money for shopping but did not give them any. Everyone continued to enquire about shopping. We departed the hotel and spent the day at the stall, at rehearsals and at meetings. On Saturday morning I went to the apartment where the older male artists were staying. I started to cook breakfast for them. The two senior artists who were expecting money from the manager arrived and asked about shopping and their money. They were annoyed and told me there was also no food left in their room. They asked me to call the Art Centre manager. I did, and the manager arrived soon after. The two senior artists voiced their frustrations firmly. An argument ensued until the Art Centre manager gave out some money and committed to a shopping time: tomorrow, the last day.

But the next day, the Art Centre manager woke up sick and said he could not take everyone shopping. The remaining *gardiya* staff member took them and I looked after the stall. When everyone arrived back at the stall from their shopping, the workers were still annoyed with the Art Centre manager about the hang and insisted on taking the big paintings down early before close. They pulled some of the expensive large works down and wrapped them up in

bubblewrap. They left the mid-sized and children's paintings hanging. At closing time a few hours later, we wrapped up the rest of the works.

On the drive back to Kununurra the following morning, there was a lot of negativity expressed toward the Art Centre manager from the artists and Aboriginal staff. The artists exclaimed that they did not like the Art Centre manager, that he did not consult them, that they didn't believe he was sick and that he 'believed in himself'. They vowed to tell others at the Art Centre what happened. The following Tuesday in *Warrmarn* an emergency Board meeting was called.⁹¹ The manager was present. At the meeting, the members relayed to the Board members what happened in Darwin and what they were unhappy with. They questioned the manager's sickness and asked him to provide a doctor's certificate as proof. Some members told him they didn't like him and asked him why he was here. One older artist said, 'you're not my neighbour, you're not my *ngaji*. I don't want to be good neighbours. You go your own way, you don't listen. You talk, you read, write, but you not right in the *liyan*.'⁹² The Board decided that the Art Centre manager needed to provide a doctor's certificate and the matter was closed.

This experience reveals three key matters. Firstly, the Art Centre staff are expected to support daily needs, especially when travelling together. Members have expectations that *gardiya* staff give care (such as the provision of food and cooking for the elderly), enable and support familial obligations (such as visits to family and gift giving when the opportunities arise) and engage in reciprocal relationships (in this case, it was the exchange of money for work/knowledge/time given at the Art Fair). Members see these aspects as important as other Art Centre business. In order to be truly member controlled, the Art Centre needs to have the flexibility to cater for these priorities. At the same time, non-Aboriginal staff must avoid operating on an unsustainable basis, and becoming financially, emotionally or physically burnt out (see Mahood 2012).

Secondly, it exposes different knowledge domains and priorities held by *gardiya* and Aboriginal staff. The Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair is an opportunity for marketing, networking and sales—all related to the commercial side of the enterprise. This may explain the type of hang preferred by the manager: it was based on his experience and knowledge of the Aboriginal Art world. On the other hand, the two Aboriginal staff had their own opinions about the marketing opportunity that was based on social relations. Both had

⁹¹ Cate Massola field notes, 20/08/2012.

⁹² Cate Massola field notes, 20/08/2012.

different approaches, neither more valid. The breakdown occurred because the different values and hang methods were not discussed between the two positions. The manager did not explain his installation rationale or consider other installation options. The Aboriginal staff did not voice their concerns and opinions either. Both were obligated to express their reasons in order to have effective Two Way understanding.

Managers are employed for their skills and knowledge of the Aboriginal Art world, but they need to disseminate that knowledge and listen to others involved. They need to allow people to try out their methods/practices, and perhaps make mistakes (which can result in falling behind deadlines and missing out on opportunities), however, it can also result in personal growth and reciprocal relationships. In this case, the situation subordinated the members and reinforced hierarchies of knowledge and power, as it was the manager's preference that 'won' in the end. Consequently, the workers' lack of action and involvement in the installation was a way to *reclaim* power in this power-subtracting situation, but at the same time, it meant that they did not learn about the manager's installation logic. A backlash against the manager developed, on the journey back to *Warrmarn* and at the meeting. This reminds me of a similar backlash described by Paul Willis (1977) in his study of working class 'lads' in England who resist the values of their school and develop a counter-culture to re/gain control. This is also an example of how *gardiya* and Aboriginal people may at times have only a partial view of each other and their knowledge.

The final key matter is that this is a case study for how agency is expressed. Direct confrontation occurred on two occasions—to the manager on Saturday morning in the hotel and at the Board meeting upon their return to *Warrmarn*. Passive resistance and silent protest occurred twice: in refusing to help with the installation and in the premature deinstallation of the larger expensive paintings. In a similar way, Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's (1993) ethnography of youth subculture in Britain demonstrates how youth resist social expectations requirements (such as working, going to school, doing exercise and family commitments) through inaction and disengagement. Indeed, the inaction of Aboriginal staff at the Art Fair installation may speak of cultural difference—for example, in avoiding confrontation or shyness. In sum, these three points of tension are all related to power, knowledge and relationships. They reveal what people want and expect from Art Centre staff and how they exercise their agency when they feel *gardiya* staff are not fulfilling these needs and expectations.

Conclusions

Thus far I have shown the changing purposes and meanings of art production, allowing for a wider perspective that indicates the meaning of creative practice is both the same and different. It has gone from being a vehicle for local history and culture and a central aspect of intergenerational knowledge transfer, to now being an asset that can support cultural production and reproduction in new and unexpected ways.

The Warmun community established the Warmun Art Centre in order to change the power dynamics of their art production and marketing, but it is still negotiating these dynamics today in different ways. Like many other Art Centres, the Warmun Art Centre is most commonly known for its role in facilitating artistic careers, however it plays other roles. Not only does it educate the broader public about Aboriginal regional and cultural history and values, record and preserve works and the knowledge contained in them, facilitate knowledge sharing between generations and teach Aboriginal people about business and governance skills in the production and distribution of art, it is also a place that accommodates local and cultural values and priorities and supports its members in their daily lives. It is a place where members have a voice and can express and fulfill their priorities, values and aspirations, perhaps more than other structures in the community. On a daily basis, the Art Centre mediates the needs and expectations of its members whilst maintaining its requirements as an Incorporated, Aboriginal-controlled business, such as meeting its commercial needs, financial constraints and governance requirements.

Local residents use the Art Centre for resources, artistic practice and a myriad of personal, educational, financial, social, cultural and political reasons. The Art Centre works to generate funds to continue the desired activities of its members, which are visits to Country, visits to town, access to digital technology and resources, vehicles and earning money. Artists, workers and family members use the Art Centre's resources to help them complete daily chores and errands. Its unofficial roles, which are not listed in job descriptions, the 2015 Strategic Plan (Warmun Art Centre and Creative Economy 2015) or the Rule Book (Warmun Art Aboriginal Corporation 2013), are things such as providing in-kind support for cultural matters and social needs, granting access to digital infrastructure, supporting people to learn about mainstream structures and processes and increasing English literacy. Members expect the Art Centre to fill these gaps. Members use the organisation to speak up about things that matter to them, for example, buying presents at cheaper prices for

family on interstate trips, visiting family members when travelling and social and cultural obligations.

Art Centres are 'communities enmeshed in meaningful relationships' as Sally May explored in her thesis on Injalak Arts in western Arnhem Land (2006, ix). But the Warmun Art Centre is also a field of struggles (Bourdieu 1993) that confronts and is confronted by problems that relate to broader issues of Indigenous agency, autonomy and dependency. The Art Centre is a fragile thing, as Healy concludes (2005), and various Art Centre workers and academics have described the challenges of meeting the social needs alongside the practical, financial ones to keep the organisations afloat (Jones and Birdsall-Jones 2014; Kjellgren 1999; Mahood 2012; May 2006). It is necessary to assume that the Art Centre staff want to provide a resource for the members and the community and make it less dependent on art sales, because this is one of the aims of the organisation. It also must be assumed that the Art Centre employees, though constrained by the wider society, are not its agents but are also people trying to navigate their own lives. Therefore, if the Art Centre wasn't filled with highly motivated people it would crash when difficulties such as the Global Financial Crisis occur.

Ultimately, the Art Centre supports agency by creating a space for people to speak their minds, by working toward attaining Aboriginal management and by being a space that is conducive to locals having a sense of ownership and direction over its activities. Whilst the 2015 Strategic Plan (Warmun Art Centre and Creative Economy 2015), the Business Plan 2012-2015 (Warmun Art Aboriginal Corporation 2012) and the Rule Book (Warmun Art Aboriginal Corporation 2013) acknowledges and incorporates social and cultural goals of its members, how staff must fulfill these expectations and priorities in day-to-day life is not fully outlined or explained. Thus, the Art Centre can disempower people and work against the development of Indigenous independence or relative autonomy when outsiders ignore or do not prioritise equally social or cultural priorities or disseminate information between members and workers. People who are employed by the Art Centre would benefit from having these unspoken expectations outlined at the beginning of their employment.

In this chapter I have discussed how individuals steer the Art Centre's operations, processes, priorities and focus areas. I have shown points of tension and discussed dynamics between non-Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal members, when members can direct and lead the Art Centre but also when members struggle for power, knowledge and 'know-how'. The partial understanding of Gija and *gardiya* way—that is, the gap in knowledge of each other—

contributes to the Centre's precariousness. I have shown that the Art Centre provides resources, financial and in-kind support and future possibilities and that it must balance the different roles it plays for its members, its staff, the community and broader society. It must incorporate the social and cultural rules and values of its members, in order to truly be 'member run'. By placing this case study in the historical backdrop articulated in the previous chapters, it seems that *Warrmarn* people continue to use people and structures in order to meet their needs and goals, to remain autonomous and exert agency, although in the case of this chapter, Art Centre members do not agree with (seemingly) opposing interlocutors, as people have done so in the past. In the next chapter, I show how agency is achieved in other ways. I demonstrate how members use the Art Centre to transfer information and values significant to them, for cultural production and learning.

Chapter 9

The Warmun Art Centre and *Lirrgarn*

Introduction

In the previous chapter I looked at the history, objectives, organisation and operation of the Warmun Art Centre and what occurs in the space. I discussed how the Centre was founded, how it operates theoretically and practically, I showed how it responds to, is partly produced by, the agency, desires, concerns of the *Warrmarn* community and elucidated its precariousness and its constraints. Ultimately, I argued that the Art Centre is not only a space for creative production, but it is a place where people are able to exert agency and have control, to varying degrees.

In this Chapter, art is reintroduced as a pedagogical device, but in a different way to the early days at Ngalangangpum School. The Warmun Art Centre is positioned as a structure with its assets and resources—brought about by art—to show how it enables activities that provide larger learning potentials. I demonstrate an outcome of people's agency at the Warmun Art Centre—one that is often unnoticed—learning and teaching initiated and directed by local people (*lirrgarn*). Firstly, I explain why I moved away from looking at art production for teaching and learning. I present my findings that show how art was not commonly used to transfer knowledge between people. I then discuss how local people take up informal teaching roles and learn in the social environment of the Art Centre in other ways.

Like the previous chapters, this chapter is influenced by Kathleen Stewart's examination of everyday experiences. I present normal activities to evoke 'the ordinary'—which Kathleen Stewart understands as 'a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges' (Stewart 2007, 5). In an anecdotal and descriptive fashion I focus on what is said, acted, invoked and inflected in order to bring attention to how *lirrgarn* manifests in the every day. This chapter is specifically about the values, ways of being and practices that are transferred in quotidian situations. These are the actions that often seep through the cracks in terms of being recognised as effective learning environments (Kral and Heath 2013; Lave and Wenger 1991). I posit that these situations are in fact examples of deep learning that occurs

in the social environment and are another example of how *Warrmarn* people use the Art Centre.

Informal learning at the Art Centre

I had assumed when I started working in *Warrmarn* that artworks made by Aboriginal people in Aboriginal communities were a crucial component in transferring culturally-specific knowledge. Todd Jones and Christina Birdsall-Jones, for example, argue that Art Centres focus on the expression of knowledge through art (2014). After some time working in *Warrmarn*, I noticed that artworks (commercial artworks and the Warmun Community Collection) and art practice was not essential in the transference of knowledge. Artworks acted as a container of knowledge but they were not—at this time—used as an active method of knowledge transference. They were not 'alive' in the same way they were when used at the Ngalangangpum School.

At the beginning of my fieldwork in 2012, I recorded all the situations where I observed learning through art and creative practice at the Art Centre. I counted twelve times in one hundred and fifty-four days (7.79%). Eleven of the twelve cases involved younger people sitting with or hanging around older people and watching them paint, with minimal talking about the painting (see Appendix J). The conversations were about general, everyday topics, like who was where and doing what. The twelfth time was slightly different, it involved two young women coming to the Art Centre to crush their own ochre and get some painting certificates of their father and grandfather's paintings so they could copy them onto their own boards. On this twelfth occasion, the women may have learnt about their father and grandfather's Country by reading the information or seeing his topographical designs on the painting certificates, but it is hard to say. They may have used the paintings as templates, as discussed in Chapter Six.

Although I may have missed verbal transmission of artworks in Gija, and definitely missed any transference that may have occurred in homes, it seemed that artworks were not integral to the transmission of knowledge at the Art Centre. Perhaps this lack of activity was because young adults did not frequent the Art Centre much and during school hours no children of school age were allowed to be at the Art Centre (Warmun Art Aboriginal Corporation 2012, 19) or perhaps the role of art had changed.

As I turned my attention toward the social environment, I found that learning and cultural knowledge transmission often occurs in less pronounced ways. Where Jones and Birdsall-Jones identify the cultural institutional Gwiibwardu Mia Gascoyne Aboriginal Heritage and Culture Centre as a place of transference for the Gascoyne community (amongst other things) (Jones and Birdsall-Jones 2014), I found that the Warmun Art Centre is a space that supports informal learning (whilst engaging in the Aboriginal art market). In fact, I identified twenty-four everyday learning experiences that occurred in my fieldwork periods of 2012. In the following section I discuss the meaning of three of these cases, the impetus for them and the *lirrgarn* qualities, as well as the actions and interactions of the participants, in order to identify the qualities of the *lirrgarn* experience. The three cases presented exhibit the qualities of *lirrgarn*: they are led by Aboriginal people and they are primarily between Aboriginal people, although non-Aboriginal people can and are involved in the practices and processes. Table 3 shows the twenty-four cases that involved learning associated with the Art Centre. In these cases, the Art Centre either funded the activity provided resources for it and/or the Art Centre space was used.

Table 3 Informal learning case studies of 2012.

Date	Code	Content
26.01.12	L1.12	Cutting up Killer
29.01.12	L2.12	Catching and killing <i>Jarrambayiny</i> on <i>Barlinyin</i>
29.01.12_2	L3.12	Cooking <i>Jarrambayiny</i>
29.01.12_3	L4.12	Rusty showing birthplace and telling history on <i>Barlinyin</i>
31.01.12	L5.12	Ri-con <i>mantha</i>
7.02.12	L6.12	Teaching at Ngalangangpum
15.02.12	L7.12	Learning about <i>Marranyil</i>
19.01.12	L8.12	Ri-con <i>mantha</i> at women's centre
23.05.12	L9.12	Land maintenance on women's site, getting <i>Ngarem</i> & wood
25.05.12	L10.12	Getting <i>Mawoondoo</i> from Rose's Yard
9.07.12	L11.12	<i>Joonba</i> preparation: learning how to sew, learning <i>Goorirr</i> <i>Goorirr</i> stories
10.07.12	L12.12	<i>Joonba</i> practice
15.07.12	L13.12	Women-only trip for <i>Ngarem</i>
2.08.12	L14.12	<i>Joonba</i> practice
27-29.07.12	L15.12	Camp out on <i>Barlinyin</i> : learning <i>Ngarnaggarni</i> and station life
30.08.12	L16.12	Gija day
4.09.12	L17.12	Film workshop: learning how to make your own films
15-16.09.12	L18.12	Weekend camp out: killing and cooking turkey and kangaroo, language
28.09.12	L19.12	Rammel telling Gija history at <i>Yunurr</i>
30.07.12	L20.12	Learning to use Imovie with Art Centre staff
31.07.12	L21.12	Gabe teaching himself how to use IMovie
31.07.12	L22.12	Editing photos for SAM with Art Centre staff
1.08.12	L23.12	Learning how to use IMovie with Art Centre staff
28.09.12	L24.12	Learning how to use SAM with Art Centre staff

In all twenty-four case studies, I noted what was being learnt, who it was initiated by, the impetus for the activity, the methods for teaching and learning, the number of people and their age groups and which age groups the learning was between (peer to peer, older to young, younger to older and independently). I noted the actions of people in the age group in the activity. I separated people into five main age groups: 0-5, 6-12, 13-18, 19-34, 35-50 and 51 and older. I defined six keys age groups because I wanted to represent people at similar skill levels and behavioral traits. I wanted the groups to be detailed enough to represent a cross-section of the community, to ascertain the characteristics and attributes of the learning processes. I noted the behaviour of each of the age groups and the transference between different age groups: peer-to-peer, older to younger and younger to older groups. I constructed a table of learning attributes that included:

Table 4 Attributes and characteristics of learning within informal environments.

Following instructions	Watching	Asking	Doing it yourself	Mucking around	Guided, Supported	Implicit absorption	Taking responsibility
Explicit	Listening				Copying	Non-intentional	
Giving instruction	Observing		Having a go			By association	
	Intent Gaze		Trial and error				

I also noted the teaching attributes:

Table 5 Attributes and characteristics of teaching within informal environments

Giving instruction and directions	Showing by doing	Supporting and guiding	Encouraging with words	Transfer of responsibility	Overseeing
	Symbolic acts	Guided participation			

Finally, I noted what information was being transferred. I noticed that there were two broad categories of knowledge domains: Gija knowledge (which was anything specifically Gija,

such as cultural knowledge, traditions and history) and non-Gija knowledge (which is anything not in the Gija domain). Although I am reluctant to separate knowledge domains and create a binary, I must acknowledge these distinctions are made because there *are* Gija-specific knowledge/practices and because *Warrmarn* people make the distinctions. In total I found eight cases of non-Gija Knowledge and eighteen cases of Gija content. In the pages ahead I discuss the three cases.

Mantha

Ri-con, the main contracting company employed for the Warmun community re-build in 2010, set up a temporary workers' camp on the eastern side of the community, across Turkey Creek, on 'The Other Side' (See Appendix A). It had a tall perimeter fence that was locked each night at 7pm and opened at 6am. On the morning of Sunday the 29th of January, 2012, Ri-con worker Sam Richter was found dead in his donga.⁹³

When Shirley Purdie arrived at the Art Centre on Monday morning it was the first thing she spoke about. She said she felt bad for the man's family, his friends and colleagues and that 'they shoulda *mantha* at the start [of working in *Warrmarn*]'. She reminded people about the worker who was bitten by a snake in December 2011 in *Warrmarn*. Shirley said: 'we gotta *mantha* those workers'. She believed that bad things would continue to happen to the workers if they were not properly welcomed to *Warrmarn*. She asked me to find the site manager of Ri-con and tell him the *mantha* must happen. I passed on Shirley's request to the site manager.

Mantha is the Gija word for 'greeting' and 'welcome'. It is used to introduce someone to Country and the ceremony allows one to enter a part of the country safely. Some Aboriginal people believe that strangers are at risk of harm if they visit Country they do not know, and so permission must be sought and an introduction must be given to the Country.⁹⁴ *Mantha* is the same as the 'smoking' of someone in order to protect and bless them while they are on

⁹³ It was reported in *The Western Australian* that his death was alcohol related (Prior 2012).

⁹⁴ Frances Kofod has found that the co-verb *ganginy* is used in conjunction with the word *mantha* to mean 'fail to recognise someone and to ensure safety' to explain the practice (Kofod 2012, 18). Sometimes a water ceremony is conducted with the same meaning and it involves sprinkling water from the site onto a person's head. The leaves from the snappy gum or river gum are used in the smoking ceremony.

specific Country. In a painting from 2008 entitled *Wurrangga*, Rusty Peters explained the origins of *mantha*:

The rat and the hill goanna camped at this place in the *Ngarranggarni*. Deciding to go separate ways, they lit two fires, put their arms around each other, pressed hot leaves on each others heads and immersed themselves in the smoke. The two then parted, the rat travelling south to perform *mantha* for his countrymen and the goanna travelled north to do the same. This is how the ceremony came to be performed all over Gija country. Peters says this ceremony kept the two safe as they travelled through places they were unfamiliar with.⁹⁵

The next morning, the Ri-con workers gathered around the fire pit at the Art Centre. Richard Thomas and Frances Mung had been sent off to get young eucalypt leaves. The Art Centre was the logical place to conduct the ceremony because those who would be involved were already there, it was next to the Ri-con yard, there was a fire pit and there was space for the Ri-con group. Rusty Peters, Patrick Mung Mung, Betty Carrington and Shirley Purdie gathered around the fire. Shondice Purdie sat down under the artist's studio, several metres back from the fire. When Richard and Frances came back with the leaves, they placed some on the fire and the rest next to the fire. Rusty walked forward and pulled off some branches and threw them into the fire. Thick white smoke began to billow out of the pit. Betty and Shirley stepped up to the fire, took some leaves from the pile and stood back behind Patrick and Rusty, clasping their leaves behind their backs (Plate 9.1).

⁹⁵ Warmun Art Centre records, March 2010, Rusty Peters and Anna Crane.



Plate 9.1 The beginning of the *mantha*.

Richard and Frances stood in the background near the shed, but not as far back as Shondice. Patrick told the workers to come forward. Rusty puts his bunch of leaves on the fire to propagate smoke. Shirley stepped forward and addressed the workers:

All long time, we help. Smoke. We feel sorry what you mob lost, that young fella. We wantta get you mob for our feeling. Even though you're *gardiya*, and you're not our family, we still hurt for you when you get hurt. We sorry for you mob. That's why we wanna smoke.

Rusty interrupted and mumbled something, then Shirley continued: 'Come closer, all the smoke' and motioned for them to come forward so the smoke could waft over them. Betty bent over the fire to propagate smoke with her leaves (Plate 9.2).



Plate 9.2 Shirley and Betty begin.

Shirley began to speak Gija, and Patrick and Rusty stood back. Betty flicked the surrounding smoke towards the workers with her leaves and Rusty told the site manager to get everyone to come through the smoke. Patrick stepped forward and put a bunch of eucalypt leaves on the fire till they smoked, then held it over the first workers face (Plate 9.3). Shirley and Betty stood back.



Plate 9.3 Patrick places the leaves on the workers.

Frances came up behind Patrick, warmed his leaves and walked to the second worker. Richard came up and grabbed a bunch from the pile, warmed it on the fire and then shook it over another's legs. Patrick moved to the next person, Frances warmed his leaves again and placed them over another person. Richard warmed his leaves and brushed them over people's feet. Patrick stood at the front of the line, shaking the leaves and the smoke over people. Patrick, Frances and Richard rotated the smoking practice until the last worker was done (Plate 9.4).



Plate 9.4 Frances and Richard join in.

Summary

Although there was no deliberate intention to teach or learn in this activity, people did through the practice of it. The informal activity involved local people in three age groups:

6-12 years old	35-50 years old	51 + years old
Shondice Purdie	Frances Mung	Rusty Peters
	Richard Thomas	Shirley Purdie
		Patrick Mung Mung
		Betty Carrington

The activity was relevant to the learners Shondice, Frances and Richard: it was in their community, it was their family members conducting it and one day they could possibly be expected to conduct it themselves. Shondice Purdie, the youngest present in the activity, watched from afar, silently. She observed the entire activity but did not engage in it and was not expected to contribute to it. Gaskins and Paradise note that children are often present at adult interactions as silent but attentive observers (2010). Shondice showed intent observation in watching the activity unfold, undistracted, supporting Bock, Gaskins and

Lancy's definition that 'observational learning is the primary teaching/learning strategy where little to no formal instruction is given' (2010, 90).

Frances and Richard were given the responsibility of providing the support for the activity. They retrieved the leaves and were involved in the smoking process, following the cues from Patrick and Rusty. Although familiar with the activity, they copied the older people and did not lead the activity. Patrick, Betty, Rusty and Shirley led the activity. Shirley initiated the activity, spoke to the workers and Rusty and Patrick conducted the initial smoking. They gave no explicit instructions to Frances and Richard. The leaders taught the younger people by their actions. Knowledge was transferred by watching and doing.

Killer

On the 24th of January 2012, at a Tuesday meeting, the Warmun Art Centre artists and staff decided to have a cook up for the Australia Day public holiday of January 26th. Everyone wanted Killer, so the first task was to get the bullock. I asked Patrick Mung Mung and Rusty Peters what stations sold Killer. Patrick suggested Lissadell station. I rang Lissadell Station with Patrick next to me to verify it was for the community and one of the traditional owners of the Country. The station owner was away and the person I spoke with was reluctant to agree to the transaction. After some discussion between Patrick and Rusty, they decided to ask Springvale cattle station, which was on Rusty's Country. I called them and they said the Killer would cost \$400. Patrick wanted two but the Art Centre only had the budget for one. They said they would bring the bullock to the Art Centre on the 26th, cut up in large sections.

On Thursday morning, the station owners arrived at the Art Centre. There was already a crowd of people waiting. Richard Thomas, Andrew Daylight, Andrew Churchill and Glen Carrington had placed gum leaves on tables under the bough shelter in preparation for the meat. The station owner backed his vehicle onto the Art Centre grounds, near the bough shelter. Andrew Daylight, Andrew Churchill, Stuart Cuthbertson and Glen Carrington began to unload the carcass with the station owner (Plate 9.5). The older people—Rusty Peters and Churchill Cann—stood back and watched. Richard Thomas also watched.



Plate 9.5 Andrew Churchill and Andrew Daylight unload the Killer from the truck.

The station owner offered more top leaves to keep the flies off the meat and the younger men took them from him. A conversation began about cane toads. Andrew Daylight and Richard Thomas began to goof around with the body parts: they picked up the heart and placed it next to theirs. They were relaxed and jovial, possibly performing for my camera. Rusty got off his chair and came over to the tables. He picked up one of the knives and was the first to cut the meat. Andrew Carrington stood next to him and watched silently. As Rusty cut, Richard and Andrew Daylight placed more leaves on any exposed meat. At this stage, Rusty was the only one cutting (Plate 9.6).



Plate 9.6 Rusty cutting the meat, with Andrew beside him.

Andrew Daylight started to talk to the camera I was holding:

You know how you get really bored and you wanna go somewhere and just do something, you know, well this is a good fun now, just go out, just knock a beef, or just go out fishing.

Churchill hobbled over to the tables and cut himself some beef, then walked away. Andrew Daylight and Richard then began to cut the meat. Rusty continued to cut while Andrew Carrington held some of the meat down so it was easier for Rusty to cut. 'Thadayi straight down there?' Andrew Carrington asked Rusty. Rusty nodded and kept cutting the beef (Plate 9.7).



Plate 9.7 (L-R) Andrew Daylight, Andrew Carrington, Rusty Peters and Richard Thomas.

Glen sat further away and banged two sticks together. Sometimes he looked over at the tables. After some time, Rusty stopped and Andrew Churchill stepped in with an axe and started to hack the larger parts. Rusty stood behind him; watched and rested. In the meantime, Andrew Daylight made jokes and silly sounds. Rusty sat down but continued to watch.

Stuart picked up a knife and asked no one in particular: 'where do you reckon?' pointing at the meat. Andrew Carrington responded with 'yeah' and pointed to where he thought Stuart should cut. Rusty interjected, and showed with his hands a different place for Stuart to cut. Andrew Daylight kept goofing around and cutting. Rusty got up again and worked with Andrew Carrington in silence. Rusty grabbed a large section of meat, turned it over. Andrew Carrington leant on the table and watched him. Rusty got a short knife and cut off some more. Andrew Carrington continued to help Rusty (Plate 9.8).



Plate 9.8 Andrew Carrington holding the Killer for Rusty.

After a while, Rusty moved back to watch again. Betty Carrington arrived at the table and watched. Patrick, Betty's husband, walked up next to Betty. Glen Carrington then appeared next to the tables. Patrick and Betty walked to the second table and started to cut. Andrew Carrington helped them for a little bit but then went back to help Rusty. Patrick eyed off some large pieces. He asked no one in particular: 'ay ay, bring that knife' and Andrew Daylight got another knife for him. Patrick told Andrew Daylight what to cut for him. Rusty and Andrew Carrington continued to work together. Churchill walked up and hovered at the table. Patrick took some pieces over to the *Goonggoon* hole (Plate 9.9). Andrew Daylight then added some pieces to the *goonggoon*. Norman Echo walked up to the tables and started to cut pieces. Nothing was said. Rusty sat down. Andrew Carrington then watched Norman.



Plate 9.9 Patrick and the *Goonggoon*.

Patrick asked the air: 'any more rib bone going? Who for this one?' Norman sharpened his knife and kept cutting, Patrick grabbed some beef and put it on a piece of cardboard for himself, for later. Betty sharpened her knife and began to cut. More beef was loaded into the hole for cooking. A range of people came over and began to take the beef away, uncooked but cut up.

Summary

The decision to get Killer was made by the artists and staff at the Warmun Art Centre. As the decision came from the group, those involved had a sense of ownership for the activity and were motivated to do it. The Art Centre facilitated the activity to occur—they paid for it, made the phone calls, spoke to Station owners in standard English, had the knives that were used and the space for the activity. Although Art Centre resources were used, the *Warrmarn* residents led and controlled the event.

Killer is a popular meal in *Warrmarn*. The motivation for the activity stems from the enjoyment of eating the meat, the shared social aspects of the activity and I believe, the history of the practice. Killer has a specific history in the east Kimberley and is associated with particular sentiments and memories. With the arrival of pastoralists in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Aboriginal people killed bullocks for food. The cattle

were damaging the land—spoiling waterholes and food sources (such as *Garrjany*) and roads and tracks were cut into Country to make space for the stations to hold the cattle. Cattle were also implicitly associated with pastoralists and their power. In such a way, killing and eating bullock was an act of defiance and power reclamation. As generations came to work on stations during the early to mid twentieth century Killer became an accepted part of many people's diet. Some station managers allowed their workers a bullock regularly to feed their families, others did not. And, as I have discussed in Chapters Three and Four, the stations are remembered fondly today and so it is not surprising that many practices from station life are also romanticised. Killer is one such activity. Moving livestock, tending cattle, mustering, riding horses, partaking in rodeos gave some people a sense of worth and contributed to positive identity development, at a time when they felt dispossessed and disempowered. When people dress up for gatherings and social events cowboy outfits are worn with all the trimmings: hat, jeans and shiny boots. Families encourage young children to wear clothes like this and to work on stations, to ride horses and know the land on a horseback. Movie nights more often than not screen cowboy films with John Wayne and Paul Newman.

Thus, the practice of getting Killer not only provides a meal for many people but it recalls a specific part of east Kimberley history: it forms part of the community's individual and cultural identity. It is a complicated mix of defiance, independence, skill, pride as well as a reminder of the advent of colonisation, the loss of land and the struggle to survive amid all the changes. The trickle-down affect of this sentimentality has no doubt contributed to its popularity among younger people and its ongoing practice.

In this case study, the participants were intrinsically motivated. They wanted to eat and share the meat and engage in the social, historically loaded practice. This was an activity where there wasn't any intention to teach or learn—it just happened—and social processes and hierarchies were evident. The learning aspects of this informal activity involved peer to peer learning, older people teaching younger and independent learning. This activity involved people in three age groups:

19-34 years old	35-50 years old	51 + years old
Andrew Churchill	Andrew Daylight	Rusty Peters
Glenn Carrington	Richard Thomas	Churchill Cann
	Stuart Cuthbertson	Norman Echo
		Patrick Mung Mung
		Betty Carrington

The people in the age group 51+ years old were actively engaged and led the activity. The men aged between 19-34 and the 35-50 years provided support for the activity. They made sure the knives were sharp, that there were tables for the meat and the meat was covered with gum leaves. They did not lead the activity, they learnt through watching elders and doing it themselves. Andrew Churchill observed and helped Rusty cut the meat and asked him questions. He spent a lot of time silently observing. He gave Patrick a knife when Patrick asked for one. Glenn Carrington was least involved for this age group, in terms of support and participation, however he silently absorbed the activity from afar and in the end came to the table and was involved in the cutting.

Andrew Daylight, in the 35-50 year old category, did not lead the activity but was confident enough to do things himself. He sometimes watched and sometimes joked around. He cut meat, spoke to the camera about what he was doing and joked around. He took charge of his own actions and was noticeably comfortable. Andrew Daylight spoke about teaching yourself and learning yourself when, 'you don't have anything to do'. Richard hung around, gave minimal support but did not do much cutting. He watched Norman and Rusty intermittently and stayed in the immediate vicinity. He talked and joked with everyone. He was learning by observation and showed some initiative.

The five oldest people (aged 51 years and older) focused on doing and overseeing. The oldest man, Rusty, began the cutting and gave non-verbal instructions for cutting. He stood back from the tables on several occasions and watched the activity. He rested when he wanted. The other older people, Churchill, Norman, Patrick and Betty all cut meat for themselves and took it away, when they wanted—an indication of a social ranking that allows them to

have first choice. Patrick requested a knife, to no one in particular, and he was given one. Rusty was the only one working with the younger people.

In summary, the actions of those people according to their age group saw the 19-34 year olds learning through watching and doing, learning from direction and completing the medial aspects of the activity, such as moving the meat to the tables, sharpening knives, placing gum leaves on the tables, holding down the meat for the older people to cut. The 35-50 year olds watched, gave some peripheral support (sharpening knives) and played a non-vital role but learnt through silent absorption. The actions of 51+ year olds involved doing and showing, watching and overseeing. There was no instructional talk, encouragement or positive reinforcement. There was a transfer of responsibility from Rusty to Andrew Churchill. At first Andrew Churchill observed and helped Rusty and then he partook in the activity. The learning that took place here was part of everyday life. The roles in the activity seemed pre-organised and pre-arranged, but they were not. There was no prior discussion about who would do what. The unsaid social and cultural hierarchy of entitlements and obligations fell into place: Andrew Churchill knew to assist Rusty, Rusty by default started the activity. The activity affirmed historical process and reaffirmed the (cultural) hierarchies and social relations that exist between people in *Warrmarn*.

Jarrambayiny on Barlinyin

One Friday afternoon, Art Centre staff and artists decide it would be a good weekend to go out bush. Travelling south down the Great Northern Highway on Saturday morning, Rusty Peters, Eileen Bray, Hayley French, Alana Hunt, Marcus Nodea, Stuart Cuthbertson, myself and Trestan Peters were all talking about goannas. Rusty said, 'They out now, it's rain time'. I turned the troopie off the highway onto the Springvale station track. Marcus and Trestan jumped out to open the first set of gates. Our first destination was the station homestead, to ask for permission to visit. After gaining permission, we went on to see where Rusty was born, keeping an eye out for goannas on the way, and then we stopped for a few hours for lunch at a waterhole. Rusty spoke about growing up in the bush and learning things 'bush way.'

As we were making our way out of the station, on the way home, Trestan spotted a goanna. Trestan caught Marcus' eye and gestured to him with his hand. Marcus yelled out 'Goanna!' and I stopped driving. Trestan picked up the star picket from under the seats and jumped out of the troopie. He ran toward it with the star picket raised. Marcus jumped out too and

ran around the left side of the goanna. Trestan threw the picket at the goanna but missed. The goanna moved about half a metre away from him and turned to face him. Trestan picked up the picket again with both hands and held it behind his head. Meanwhile Marcus approached with his picket as the rest of us were just getting out of the troopie (Plate 9.10).



Plate 9.10 L-R: Marcus and Trestan.

Rusty yelled at the boys, 'Waitta wait, stop!' but Trestan and Marcus couldn't hear him. Eileen yelled out 'knock em on the head!' and Trestan threw the second picket but missed again. As Rusty hobbled over to them, the goanna took off and everyone chased after it. By the time I reached them, it was up a tree. Trestan looked at Rusty and pointed in the tree and said: 'he there on the tree, he just right there.' Stuart picked up a rock and threw it at the goanna. Marcus and Trestan followed his lead. Alana and Hayley held rocks and waited. Rusty walked in closer to inspect and then picked up one of the star pickets, pulled some branches apart and started knocking the goanna. Marcus picked up the other picket and held it like a spear, ready to throw.

Rusty finally knocked the goanna out of the tree. As it hit the ground, Marcus threw his star picket to spear it, but missed (Plate 9.11).



Plate 9.11 Marcus throws the star picket.

The boys moved closer, holding each others' arms, nervous and excited. Eileen yelled 'grab la tail!' and Stuart and Trestan tried to grab its tail, but they could not catch it. The goanna took off again. It ran into a hollow log and when we reached it, Rusty told Stuart to get a picket and open the log. Stuart used the two pickets to prise a hole. Marcus stood behind Stuart. Eileen and Rusty stood close and watched. Eileen told Trestan to go around to the other side of the log. Marcus grabbed one of the pickets from Stuart and also tried to prise the log open (Plate 9.12).



Plate 9.12 Marcus tries to prise open the log with Trestan, Stuart and Eileen watching.

Stuart started hammering the picket into the log to prise it open. Marcus stepped in and wanted to try. Trestan moved to one end of the log and looked down it and Rusty watched. Stuart let Marcus hold the picket with him. Eileen walked toward the opposite end of the log. She picked up a stick and started knocking her end of the log. Marcus watched. The goanna moved down to the end where the others were and Marcus squealed with excitement.

Marcus tried to make the hole in the log bigger with his picket. Trestan stood and watched. Rusty said 'get a rock. You got a big heavy rock?' Marcus positioned one of the pickets in the hole and Stuart started hammering it in. Rusty watched, picked up a stick and started jamming it in the hole. Stuart and Marcus stood back. When Rusty stopped they all moved in and tried to look inside. Rusty told them, 'put that thing there, leave it [the picket].' Stuart put the two pickets inside the hole and tried to separate it. Trestan waited with rock in hand. Stuart asked 'can you see him?' And Rusty replied, 'yeah. His tail. Well. Any rock?' Trestan responded: 'I got one!' Rusty said, 'smash him. Big one, heavy one.' Stuart handed Rusty a rock. Rusty ordered Stuart to get another rock and throw it. Stuart found one and threw it onto the log. Marcus took the picket and worked with Stuart to prise open the log again. At last they had a bigger hole. Rusty sighed and said to Marcus 'you got it'. Now they

could see the goanna. Eileen yelled, 'grab la tail and hit him!' and Trestan jumped in to grab the tail first (Plate 9.13).



Plate 9.13 Trestan sticks his hand in the log.

Marcus exclaimed 'Him making noise!'—the goanna hissed. Trestan tried to grab the tail but could not catch it. Marcus said to Rusty, 'you grab him Rusty, he too heavy.' Rusty looked down into the log and tried to grab him but gave up and said, 'sore shoulder.' Eileen yelled again, 'hit him la head!' Then the young boys stepped away and Stuart stepped in to grab it. Eileen started knocking on the end of the log again. Stuart got the tail and pulled the goanna out as Eileen whacked the log from the other end (Plate 9.14).



Plate 9.14 Eileen hits the log as Stuart holds the tail.

The boys joined in and knocked different parts of the log. The goanna's grip loosened. Just as Stuart pulled out the goanna from the log, Marcus tried to spear the goanna again. Trestan came over with the other star picket and hit the goanna six times. On the last time, the goanna whipped its head up and hissed at him. Trestan got a fright and stepped back. Eileen stepped forward, holding a big stick. Rusty picked up one of the pickets as Stuart raised the goanna by its tail and placed its head on the ground. Rusty moved in and hit the goanna three times on the head (Plate 9.15).



Plate 9.15 Rusty hits the goanna on the head.

Then Trestan stepped in and hit the goanna three times, copying Rusty. It still moved. Marcus interrupted, 'give me, give, I'll do something. Hey me, I'll do something. I'll do something.' Trestan yelled in triumph 'we got goanna!' Rusty hit the goanna another four times. Marcus moved around to the tail end, where Stuart was, and took the tail from him. He dragged its body and Rusty walked in closer and told Marcus what to do (Plate 9.16).



Plate 9.16 Marcus listens to Rusty.

Rusty pointed with the star picket to the goanna and said: 'Now here, now, *loonggoong*, *loonggoong*, *loonggoong*' and pointed the picket at the hind legs of the goanna. Trestan watched but didn't do anything. Eileen said, 'turn him round'. Rusty moved his hand to the left, indicating to turn around the goanna. Rusty repeated: '*loonggoong*. You know what *loonggoong*?' Eileen explained: 'guts down.' Marcus flipped the goanna onto his stomach (Plate 9.17).



Plate 9.17 *Loonggoong*.

Rusty moved forward and hit the goanna six times on the hind quarters. Eileen explained, 'make sure he doesn't run away.' Rusty said, 'that's the way. Take him, take him away.' Marcus went to grab the goanna by the head, and Rusty said: 'no no, la tail, pull him.' Marcus struggled to find a good way to carry the goanna by the tail (Plate 9.18).



Plate 9.18 Marcus does it himself.

Marcus tried to pick up the goanna but he could not. Rusty said 'pull em, pull em' and Eileen said 'yeah' in affirmation. Marcus then picked up the goanna and carried him across his shoulders. Trestan grabbed the star pickets and we all walked back to the troopie.



Plate 9.19 L-R: Marcus and Trestan with the goanna.

Summary

This was a spontaneous activity that occurred because the opportunity arose. The activity saw Rusty and Eileen *lirrgarn* Marcus and Trestan. They were shown how to catch and kill a goanna, they heard Gija being spoken between Eileen and Rusty and they learnt a new Gija word—*loonggoong*. They also learnt about Rusty's life by visiting the land—where he was born, where he worked, what he ate and his rest places. They learnt about the politics of the land, its complicated history and Rusty's respect for the station owners' property.

The activity involved people in four age groups:

6-12 year olds	19-34 year olds	35-50 year olds	51 + year olds
Trestan Peters	Hayley French	Stuart Cuthbertson	Rusty Peters
Marcus Nodea	Alana Hunt		Eileen Bray

The learning and teaching occurred implicitly and explicitly: by doing, through instruction, by watching and by repetition. It was contextual and the learners were motivated. The actions of Marcus and Trestan involved following direct verbal instructions when they did not know what to do and watching and doing it themselves (trying to knock out the goanna, hit it, chase it, pull it out of the log). They showed initiative even when they were unsure. They were motivated, interested and excited by the activity—they jumped out of the troopie, ran ahead and looked for the goanna and squealed in excitement. The 19-34 year old group provided support, such as driving, throwing rocks, handing out rocks and giving words of encouragement. The 35-50 year old group contained Stuart, who provided physical support for the activity: he bashed the log, split the log, pulled the goanna out, threw rocks and helped Marcus and Trestan prise the log open. The oldest age group of Rusty and Eileen gave explicit instructions and guidance, gave words of encouragement and demonstrated silently. They told Trestan and Marcus what to do; they showed them how to hit the goanna, where to hit the log, where to throw the rock and what the Gija word *loonggoong* means. Eileen repeated what Rusty said and gave Kriol translations to Rusty's Gija. She showed the boys how to scare the goanna out of the log, she told them to grab the tail of the goanna and hit the goanna. The boys copied Eileen, Rusty and Stuart. Rusty led the activity. He picked up the star picket first; he told them to wait; he told everyone what to do and participated in the activity. Everyone worked together in the activity of catching and killing the goanna.

Later that year, Rusty painted this Country and spoke about this event in a work entitled *Warndiwal* (Plate 9.20). Like other paintings discussed in earlier chapters, *Warndiwal* does not depict the events of the day, but rather the Country that it occurred on. Its meaning and value requires elucidation from the artist.

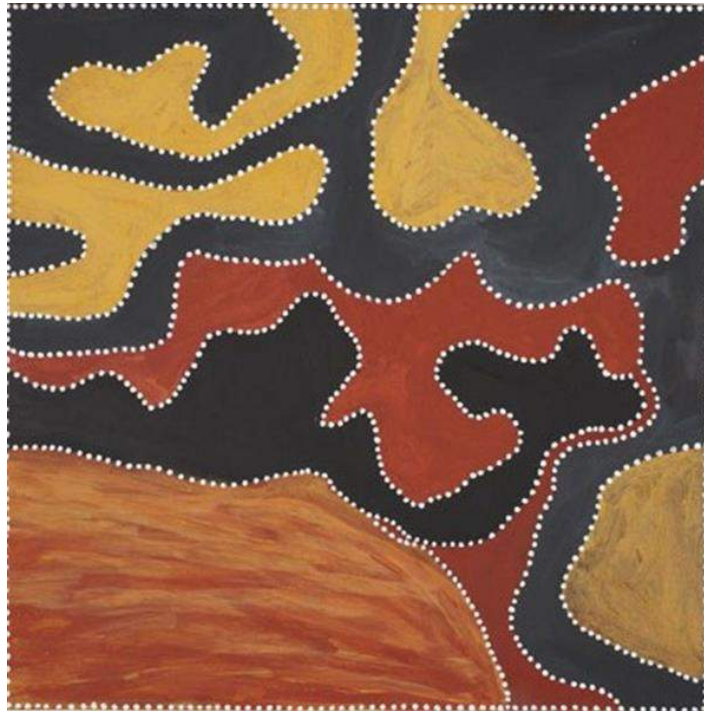


Plate 9.20 Rusty Peters, *Warndiwal*, 80 x 80 cm, natural ochre and pigment on canvas, (WAC14/12).
Image courtesy of Warmun Art Centre.

The story for the painting reads:

This painting is of the Country on Springvale station, Barlinyin. Recently, in the wet season, Rusty travelled to this place with his grandchildren.

There they were shown how to catch and kill a goanna, they learnt new Gija words, they learnt about Rusty's life on this Country - it is where he was born and where he worked as a young man.

They learnt about the historical, complicated politics of the land and Rusty's experience of it and relation to it. In the left hand corner, Rusty has painted red soil plains. The black area is black soil. The yellow ochre parts are flat country.

The grey part of this painting is Warndiwal creek. It is a tributary of Bullock Hole, a popular rest spot for Rusty and others in his family when they lived and worked on Springvale Station.

Rusty does not use the painting to *lirrgarn* the information transferred to Marcus and Trestan that day. The painting serves as a record of what happened, but the activity itself is the key part of the *lirrgarn* process. Whilst the painting becomes a record for Rusty, it is not

a 'live' artwork—in the same sense that objects were when they were used to aid the sharing of information at the Ngalangangpum School, as discussed in earlier chapters. It is an indication of how the process of *lirrgarn* is not represented in artworks but the contours of the land are. This underscores my argument that the artwork is a container of information but not used actively for knowledge transmission.

Conclusions

The 24 case studies show that different age groups display different actions. Appendix K shows graphs of the actions displayed by each age group in the case studies. The 6-12 year olds commonly watched and listened and did not ask questions. The 13-18 year olds were involved in activities the least: they mucked around and watched; sometimes they copied, repeated actions and helped support the activity. They followed instructions the least and did not ask questions. The actions of the 19-34 year olds showed that for the majority of the time they provided support for and guided the activity. The 35-50 year old age group primarily watched and listened but they also gave support and corrected younger people. The last group, the people over 51 years old, gave verbal instructions and corrections, demonstrated how to do the activity and gave verbal and non-verbal forms of guidance. Rarely did they watch and listen. This age group ran the activity.

In all of the cases there was a wide variation in learning and teaching styles. However, the key aspects present in all was that learning was embedded in the social environment, the learning was self-directed and the impetus came from the participants. Other significant components were that children took an active part in the pursuit of learning and those involved had pre-existing knowledge about when and how learners would progress to the next level of the activity (ideas drawn from Bock, Gaskins, and Lancy 2010, 11-12).

The three case studies specifically reveal the often-missed teaching and learning roles and characteristics adopted in social activities. The activities addressed the immediate needs and desires of community members. Some of those desires were to get out to Country, to share history and practices, to take responsibility for visitors in the community and to speak Gija. The themes and values shared in the activities cover recent and early settlement history, Gija language and communication, ways of being, cultural practices and beliefs. The three cases reflect the significant aspects of *Warrmarn* identity today, affirming sociologist George Mead's theory that the interactions between the individual and the world is a

dynamic process that shapes the way the individual develops a sense of self (Gaskins and Paradise 2010; Mead 1948).

I also found in the cases that it was not simply a case of teaching or learning, but rather the precise definition of *lirrgarn*—exchange and reciprocity. For example, in the age group 35-50, I found people teaching and learning at the same time. They followed instructions, watched/listened, repeated/copied, did it themselves/trial and error, they asked, helped/supported/guided, showed/demonstrated, oversaw, gave directions, corrected and disciplined. Thus my tables weren't simply about teaching or learning, but also about exchange.

Finally, all 24 case studies were associated with the Art Centre. Whilst art production is its most notable role, the Warmun Art Centre supports an environment where people are able to take up teaching roles and learn in the social environment. The Art Centre is effectively an informal community of practice, as defined by Wenger: 'a shared domain reliant on relationships to develop and share practices and transfer' (2007, 1). The Art Centre engages with the local world because it *is* the local world, which can at times make it difficult to recognise its 'success' or effectiveness in knowledge transfer. John Bock and David Lancy were correct when they argued that to 'find' learning we should not [...] situate ourselves in a classroom, because at school learning is a decontextualised process' (Bock, Gaskins, and Lancy 2010, 6).

The Art Centre enables a multitude of learning and teaching processes and cannot be separated from everyday life. The three case studies I have discussed are unremarkable daily events that, when examined closely, show ways of being, learning and practices significant to those involved. The activities were shaped and determined by *Warrmarn* residents, they were embedded in the social world and they relied on different degrees of support from different people. *Lirrgarn* occurred in environments that were not necessarily organised for learning. The example given in Chapter Eight—the argument about the correct way to store the snake prop for the *Goorirr Goorirr*—is an example of *lirrgarn* and the importance of learning the 'right way'. But in this case, there was a breakdown in knowledge transference.

While the Western model of teacher-centric, classroom-orientated learning is often set as the template for learning and teaching—and was commonly used in the early years of the Ngalangangpum School—there are other types of teaching and learning. Here I have shown some examples of learning and teaching in the social environment through observation and open attention, as well as direct, verbal instruction. I have found that those participating in

the activities were in control of them, they were motivated to partake in them (mainly because they determined the activities), the activities are contextually relevant, the outcomes were clear and attainable and there was no the pressure to perform or reach any pre-determined outcomes. Thus the agency of those involved was manifest. In fact, these *lirrgarn* cases at the Art Centre demonstrate some of the attributes identified by Inge Kral and Jerry Schwab in their research on learning in the social spaces of Indigenous youth:

- The activity is situated and context relevant
- The reason/outcomes/purpose are clear and linked with local practices
- Aboriginal people are in control of the experience
- People can 'be' in the learning to varying degrees (eg. mucking around, silent absorption, observation)
- People can progress and grow into new roles and responsibilities
- It is a space where local language is practiced (Kral and Schwab 2012, 95)

This chapter has essentially shown Indigenous-led learning activities that the Art Centre supports and, at times, enables. The Art Centre supports the learning of a variety of knowledge and skill-sets across Western and Indigenous knowledge domains. In this way, it is truly Two Way. It does this by providing the physical space for activities to occur without interruption, staff to assist and support the activities and in-kind resources, such as cars, tools, camping equipment and petrol. Only an organisation with some degree of Indigenous agency over its direction and production is able to do this. Hence, this art centre takes on other functions, which state and federal structures and their development models and funding organisations need to be cognisant of, especially in the light of the 2015 Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

Finally, this chapter can be juxtaposed with peoples' inaction toward the Community Collection. Whilst the Collection is in the community and it was initially the outcome of people's agency, today its role and value has changed. Rusty's painting *Warndiwal* epitomises the shift in purpose, use and role of art today. Today, art objects serve as depictions of Country and containers of values and beliefs, but they are not actually used in the *lirrgarn* process itself.

Chapter 10

Conclusions

In London

A fighting club hangs off a translucent wall mount, floating

Mistake Creek Massacre ochres are contained on flatness, trauma is shared

Acrylics bounce off white walls

Unbalanced, imperfectly shaped wood rests on plinths

Context is absent

Objects are permanent

A curator introduces the British-owned artefacts

along with the recent bicornual basket from Girramay

All hanging

No touching

In Perth

Art Centre life is re-forged within white walls

Used ochre brushes sit in plastic take-away tubs

Enamel cups cluster, clean

A half finished canvas sits, waiting

Sounds of Art Centre life are re-played in the space

Freight boxes lie with packing tape undone

Nowhere is there chatter

No frustration, no camera flash click

No warm hands

No stories

In the Warmun Art Centre museum space

A security bracket nurses *Doomboony*

Spears hang high

Snakes are poised mid slither

Everything is still



Plate 10.1 George Mung Mung, *Ginyany Ngarranggarni* (WCC105) and *Doomboony* (WCC244) in the Warmun Art Centre museum space, February 2015.



Plate 10.2 Warmun Art Centre museum space for the Community Collection, February 2015.

Internationally, nationally and locally, objects of creative practice sit on walls. The British Museum's exhibition *Indigenous Australia: Enduring Civilisation* presented 'Indigenous Australia as living culture' in a display of significant historic and contemporary objects alongside each other (The British Museum 2015). The Berndt Museum of Anthropology's exhibition *Warmun Then and Now* filled its museum space with the Warmun Art Centre's everyday objects. Art Centre sounds were played as background noise. Artists Betty Carrington, Lorraine Daylight and Mabel Juli visited for the opening, giggled and left (Laurie 2015). Created in consultation with the artists, the replica space intended to help people understand what art centre life was like.

To recapitulate, this thesis pivoted off the Warmun Community Collection, with the aim of conducting a rigorous analysis of the objects and their makers. After the *Warrambany*, I began to document how individuals, both living within and outside *Warrmarn*, engaged with the Collection in the flood recovery. In tracking the engagement with the Collection, it became apparent that the objects were not only absent from the Warmun community, but also from people's priorities. I found that the Warmun Community Collection was not used to transfer information as it was originally at Ngalangangpum School. It was through people's inaction toward these objects—perhaps a form of agency in itself—that this research has been able to locate where agency is expressed, what the value and priorities of

Warmun community members are and how they attain them. The 2011 *Warrambany* gave me the opportunity to look beyond art objects, to engage beyond material culture and see the value in action and process.

The Warmun Community Collection is displayed in the Warmun Art Centre gallery (Plate 10.1 and 10.2) and stored in the Centre's media lab. During the research period, I observed low engagement with the Collection. This challenges the notion that objects, and their keeping places, are vital for Aboriginal communities to thrive, transfer knowledge and educate younger generations. Whilst the Collection is important to the community, it is not the central reference point that outside groups make it to be. There is much value placed on the process of transference, rather than the objects themselves. It seems that the community places greater emphasis on the intangible rather than tangible cultural heritage.

Through my study, I conclude that time should not only be given to safe-guarding art-objects and educating the public about the meanings of art-objects, but also to supporting the transference of information in new forms and in new contexts. In this way I am reminded of what Betty Carrington told me at the beginning of my research when I asked her how she felt about the damaged and lost artworks. She said to me: 'it doesn't matter, we will just make more.'

This research has shown that in *Warrmarn*, the Warmun Community Collection is associated with Western ideas and practices. The partial view that *Warrmarn* community members have of these frameworks, as I have discussed specifically in Chapter Eight, results in the continuation of a power dynamic where schools, museums, institutions and the people within them—art centre managers, Sisters, conservators, art workers—are the dominant discourse. And indeed, these issues resonate globally.

Of course, these institutions and the people within them are not impervious structures, which makes understanding these objects and their role not a straightforward task. Through detailed ethnography, I have been able to paint a picture that is more complicated, one that shows how lives interconnect and different perspectives meet. I have looked at life in-between the cracks to animate its complexities. Through a study of actions, I have attempted to understand the values and priorities of *Warrmarn* people and how they shape and are shaped by frameworks and power structures in their social world. I have used subjectivity to explore complex human experiences and behaviour that has been formed over generations, often 'within a world of wildly unequal power relations' (Ortner 2005,46). I have been particularly interested in the subtle and sometimes silent ways people have

contested and engaged with power structures in their lives, through *lirrgarn* and art. My focus on everyday life attempts to show that static and bound social totalities are obscuring and that people and their material culture have many trajectories, are involved with different processes and trigger different agencies that are both determined and determining, and many things in between.

In exploring the history of the region, I found numerous examples of situations where people expressed agency, when they maintained their values and aspirations, where they compromised and how they transferred information to younger generations. In the pastoral period, being mobile was one way to remain autonomous; continuing cultural practices was another. So it was that I began to develop a picture of how individuals compromised and adapted to their circumstances, resolving dichotomies between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of being and beliefs. In investigating the history of the Ngalangangpum School, I learnt how people tried to maximise their benefits to ensure their values and aspirations were met, such as accepting a Catholic school in order to have a Two Way curriculum and the Sisters they preferred, and accepting the limited time and resources given to Gija teaching in the curriculum. I discussed how people employed strategies to counter inappropriate or irrelevant content within the curriculum: by teaching with their own art and disguising Gija values in Catholic sermons. In tracking the history of the Warmun Community Collection, I found that objects were a method to transfer preferred and specific knowledge and values. Initially, the use of art-objects empowered people because it was on their own terms. Whilst the use of the Collection objects at Ngalangangpum School was led by the agency of the Aboriginal people involved, the school was not and is not an Aboriginal institution. Thus, people compromised and adapted to new cultural systems and practices.

Over time, Aboriginal teachers became less engaged with the school and the objects were used less. Over the span of a decade, the objects became a Western-style 'Art Collection' and had Western values placed on it. No longer used to teach, they stood alone, as containers of information and receptacles of the past. The physical shift of the objects from the Ngalangangpum School to the Warmun Art Centre was also symbolic of their move away from being pedagogic aids to being art objects. Step-by-step the Collection moved away from its original role and value. At the Art Centre, they are containers of information and remain as manifestations of agency and articulations of values and memories. Indeed, this is not to state that the Collection could not be used in analogous ways in both the Warmun Art Centre and the Ngalangangpum School, my point is that both contexts, to a

large extent, were externally defined, even if Indigenous agency was present at different times in both. This perhaps explains why and how knowledge transmission occurs in the everyday, which I have aimed to highlight.

The original imperative to 'save' the Collection after the *Warrambany* came from the Warmun Art Centre manager. The St. Josephite Sisters, Warmun Art Centre staff (including myself), Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation staff, ANKAAA staff and journalists generated great concern for items and their rescue. There was a cacophony of noise about the Collection from these groups. Although those involved were positively motivated, there was minimal interest from Warmun community members at this time. The difference between approaches was perplexing, so I began to dig deeper.

If the Collection was not a high priority for community members, what was? Were artworks used *at all* to teach and transfer information? In seeking answers, I looked into what occurred at the Warmun Art Centre. I found that the Warmun Art Centre and the developments that occur there have contributed to local cultural production and reproduction, in ways that both confirm and reframe material culture. Art was not actively used for knowledge transference but actually the Art Centre facilitated knowledge transference in other ways. Although not without its shortcomings, the Warmun Art Centre provided resources, supported its members and engaged in reciprocal relationships. It was a space where individuals were able to voice their concerns about issues in their own way. The Centre supported cultural practices such as *mantha* and hunting for food; the practice of local language; the sharing of recent history and the learning of Western administrative and curatorial practices. These were *lirrgarn* situations where information was transmitted in ways where the participants were in control of the situation, the content transferred and the method of transference. Moreover, those people involved took up roles voluntarily and with motivation because the content was relevant to them. Finally, these *lirrgarn* situations allowed people to take up roles as teachers without being undermined, shaped or guided by other structures. They were situations where the participants did not have to appease their interlocutors. This may signify a change in historic patterns.

This thesis has presented the ongoing and multi-faceted interaction art as material culture has in *Warrmarn*, with its many complex relational effects. It has covered several overlapping matters: it has tracked the development of a museum in an Aboriginal community; it has brought to light the hidden roles of the Warmun Art Centre; it contributed to the knowledge of learning and teaching outside of school; it has revealed how people express

agency in daily life; it has unveiled the proprietorial relationship people have with objects; and finally, it has laid bare the purpose, use and interpretations of objects and essentially their dissonance, which has at times made *Warrmarn* residents, and their sites of cultural production, tangential to the objects they make. *Warrmarn* people live their heritage rather than curate their past. Indeed, this does not mean that people do not see value in the Warmun Community Collection or other art forms—it means that artworks (from the past and the present) are involved in an ongoing value creation process. This thesis marks a pause; a juncture: the Warmun community is still establishing its role and value of the Collection for the future.

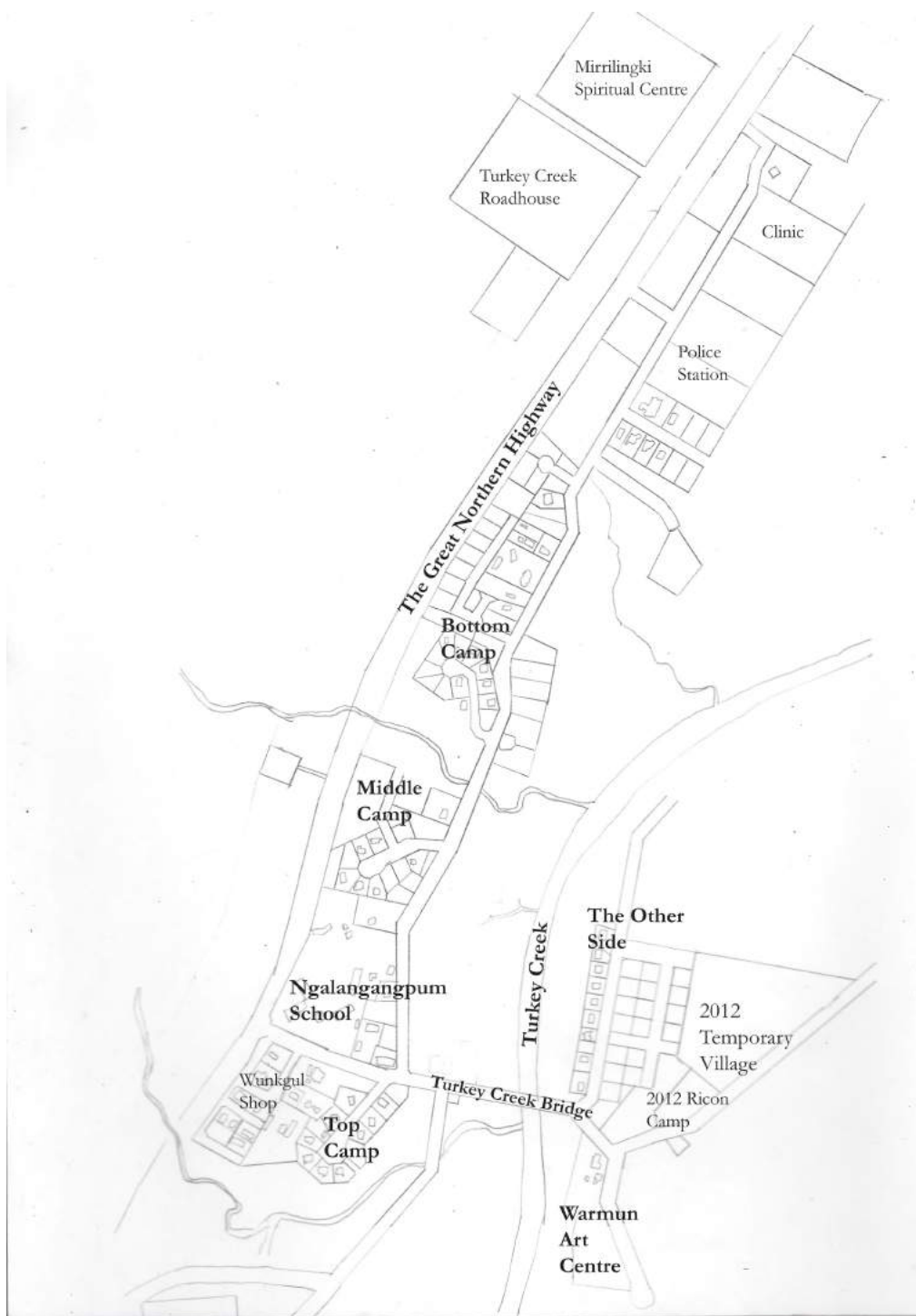
Interestingly, on the 27th of May 2015, children from the Purnululu School visited the Warmun Art Centre gallery to look at the art (Plate 10.3). Concurrent with a Gija lesson, and organised by the Warmun Art Centre, Peggy Patrick, Mabel Juli and Mary Thomas came in to teach students the stories behind some of their paintings. The children sat and listened, like the old days at Ngalangangpum School. This was an irregular occurrence. Yet it reveals the complexity of the research in so far as it is unproductive to make definitive statements about how and when *lirrgarn* and agency exactly occurs. This situation reminded me that *lirrgarn* is not spontaneous, serendipitous and dynamic. Most importantly, it cannot be forced.



Plate 10.3 L-R: Peggy Patrick, Mabel Juli and Mary Thomas teach children in the Warmun Art Centre gallery, May 2015.

This research has wide implications for museums and how they interpret and preserve Aboriginal cultural material as well as for anthropological and sociological research. It has provided another way to consider material culture and new forms of cultural production. There is a necessity to move away from emphasising the importance of art objects in the transference process. Effective informal learning and teaching/*lirrgarn* situations are those that have come from the ground up and that have been led by those involved. It is in these situations that the values and priorities of locals will endure. *Lirrgarn* is taking place all day, every day in the cracks and crevices of everyday life at *Warrmarn*. Space and time for community and individual processes and priorities needs to be included in order for effective, deep learning to occur.

Appendix A: Mud map of Community



Appendix B: Warmun Community flood map

Source: (Gooding and Searle 2014, 42)





LOOKING AFTER THE OLD ART WORKS FROM WARMUN AND HOW WE CAN WORK TOGETHER TO MAKE THEM SAFE

TO: THE PEOPLE OF WARMUN

17 March 2011

THIS LETTER IS COMING FROM **ANKAAA**. YOU KNOW WHO WE ARE. WE ARE THE PEOPLE WHO HELP LOOK AFTER ALL THE ART CENTRES. GABRIELE NODEA IS OUR DEPUTY CHAIRMAN AND IN THE PAST PEOPLE FROM WARMUN LIKE MARIKA PATRICK HAVE ALSO BEEN ON OUR BOARD.

THE PEOPLE WHO ARE WORKING WITH WARMUN ART CENTRE TO HELP ARE:

- **ANKAAA**
- **ARGYLE DIAMONDS-** THEY ARE OFFERING TO HELP MOVE THINGS WITH HELECOPTERS AND TRUCKS
- **THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE-** THEY ARE THE ONES WHO KNOW HOW TO FIX BROKEN ART WORKS AND ARE SENDING TWO PEOPLE TO HELP PACK THEM PROPERLY AND MOVE THEM TO MELBOURNE TO FIX THEM

NO ONE IS TRYING TO TAKE THE ART WORK AWAY FOR GOOD.

WE ARE MAKING THIS PLAN TO LOOK AFTER THOSE OLD ART WORKS FROM PEOPLE WHO ARE GONE NOW THAT WERE AT THE SCHOOL.

WE NEED TO DO THIS BECAUSE ALL THE WORK IS WET AND DAMAGED.

2/

WE ALL UNDERSTAND THEY BELONG TO GIJA AND ALWAYS WILL FOREVER. IT HAS BEEN REALLY HARD FOR US TO TALK TO GIJA MOB PROPERLY BECAUSE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN MOVED AND THE ART CENTRE MANAGER HAS BEEN SEPERATED FROM THE PEOPLE.

WE KNOW HOW IMPORTANT THESE ART WORKS ARE TO YOU AND THAT IS WHY WE ARE WORRIED THAT THEY WILL BE BROKEN OR LOST. ALL OF US WANT THE ART WORKS TO LAST A LONG TIME FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

WHAT WE WANT TO DO IS SEND EXPERTS IN TO THE COMMUNITY TO LOOK AFTER THE WORK WHILE IT IS MOVED TO A SAFE PLACE WITH THE RIGHT BUILDING THE RIGHT AIR CONDITIONING AND PEOPLE WHO KNOW HOW TO FIX IT PROPERLY

FIXING THE ART WORKS MIGHT TAKE A FEW MONTHS BUT THE ART CENTRE WON'T HAVE TO PAY FOR IT. ANKAAA IS TALKING TO PEOPLE ABOUT GIVING MONEY TO HELP.

THIS PAPER YOU ARE LOOKING AT IS THE FIRST ONE. WE WILL KEEP SENDING MORE STORY SO YOU KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING.

YOU CAN CALL **ANKAAA** AND **CHRIS OR CHRISTINA** ANYTIME ON **8981 6134** IF YOU ARE WORRIED OR WANT TO GET MORE STORY ABOUT THE ART WORK.

WE WANT TO SAY AGAIN THAT WE UNDERSTAND THESE OLD ART WORKS BELONG TO GIJA AND ALWAYS WILL. WHILE WE TRY AND HELP WE ARE THINKING OF YOU WITH EVERY STEP

ANKAAA

Appendix D: CCMC letter dated 16th March, 2011

Warmun Art Centre
Locked Bag 24 Warmun via
Kununurra WA 6743



16 March 2011

To all Directors of Warmun Art Centre, Warmun artists, and Centre staff

PROTECTION AND TREATMENT OF THE WARMUN ART COLLECTION

This letter is to let all of you know how we will be working to look after the important Warmun Art Collection after the recent floods.

The staff at Warmun Art Centre and ANKAAA staff have decided that the best plan to look after the works in the Collection is to get them to a safe place where they can be looked after by conservation experts. They have asked the University of Melbourne Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation (CCMC) to provide support for this. The plan is for staff from the CCMC to come to Turkey Creek and pack the works. The aim is to take the works to Melbourne so that the artworks can be dried and conserved. Argyle Diamond Mine will fly them out of Turkey Creek and then they will be put in a truck, and taken to the CCMC's laboratories in Melbourne. The works will be treated so that they can be made as safe as possible.

Once the works are stable and in good condition and it is safe to return them to Warmun they will be sent back. We want this to happen as soon as possible so that the works are not away from the Warmun community for longer than is necessary. The relocation of the artworks is for conservation only and associated copyright remain the property of the artists. The works will not shown to anyone other than CCMC staff or other people authorised by Warmun Arts Centre.

The people who will be involved in this work are:

- Robyn Sloggett who is the Director of the CCMC and who was at the ANKAAA AGM last year. Robyn is the liaison person for this work.
- Marcelle Scott is the next in charge at CCMC and one of the most senior conservators in the country. She will come to Warmun and be in charge of the packing and transport of the works.
- Lyndon Ormond-Parker is a PhD student and has worked with Cathy Cummins at Waringarri looking after the Waringarri collection. He will catalogue and photograph the works before they are packed so that there is a proper record of what is going to Melbourne.
- Conservators at CCMC at the University of Melbourne.
- Argyle Diamond Mine is sending some staff to help and are providing transport and some materials and equipment.
- Staff at Warmun Art Centre and at ANKAAA are providing advice and making decisions about the best things to do.

If you have any questions you can call Christina Davidson at ANKAAA on 08 8981 6134 or Robyn Sloggett at CCMC on 03 8344 6455.

Yours sincerely

Robyn Sloggett
Director, Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation

Appendix E: Warmun Art Centre letter dated 12th April, 2011

Warmun Art Centre 12/4/11

We agree that the Melbourne University will look after the Warmun Community Collection. They will clean the paintings and the objects; Take away the mould & stabilise the surface of the artworks. Melbourne University will keep the paintings until the work is done & then return everything to Warmun.

PATRICK Betty

MADIGAN THOMMAS

Rosemary Daylight LENA
Lily Mabel
MABEL JULI
JANE YALUNGA ROSEMARY PETERS
Chairman: GABRIEL NODER

Appendix F: Fundraising press releases

FLOODS DON'T DISCRIMINATE: SAVING THE WARMUN COMMUNITY ART COLLECTION



The Warmun Community Art Collection holds some of the earliest art produced in the Kimberley. The Collection is of historic, spiritual, social, aesthetic, research, art historical and cultural significance. It is critical to our understanding of the Kimberley region, the contribution of the Catholic Church to culture, Australian art history and Gija history. These works have influenced art that is held in museums and galleries around the world. Its survival is in jeopardy and help is needed with its preservation.

On the 13 March 2011 after weeks of heavy rainfall from a monsoonal trough, the rivers and tributaries in the east Kimberley were already filled when a further deluge ran across the land forming a torrent of water throughout the region. Nestled tightly on Turkey Creek, the Warmun community was ravaged. All of its houses, offices and buildings were devastated by the deluge. Whitegoods were lodged in trees and cars turned upside down. Fortunately it claimed no lives. All basic services were cut to the area; water, sewerage, food, phone lines, electricity and road access. National emergency services, government and institutions swept into action. The community was declared a natural disaster zone and nearly everyone was airlifted from their homes to Kununurra, 200 kms away.

The Warmun Art Centre, which held the Community Art Collection, sustained considerable damage to its buildings, equipment and its artworks. The waters indiscriminately washed away paintings by the very youngest artists to world famous artists like Rusty Peters and Lena Nyadbi. By grace of being in an enclosed space, the Warmun Community Art Collection (WCC) was damaged, but not lost. At least half of the items had been submerged in muddy flood waters and all sustained mould damage due to humid conditions over the following days. With generous probono support from all around, and in particular from Argyle Diamond Mine and the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation at the University of Melbourne, the Collection was helicoptered to an air-conditioned building and into the safe hands of conservators. Toll Holdings provided a truck to bring the artworks to Melbourne.

The Collection constitutes around 340 items that were specifically created by Gija elders in the 1970s until the 1980s to teach successive generations Gija language, law, history and culture. The Collection contains significant works by the first generation artists of the east Kimberley painting movement: Paddy Jaminji, Rover Thomas, Jack Britten, Henry Wambini, Hector Jandany, George Mung and Queenie McKenzie. For many years, elders would congregate under a bough shelter and use these items to teach. When the Warmun Ngalangangpum School was established in 1979, the items continued to be used in the curriculum. The children who were taught with these items are now adults and practicing artists themselves. They too, believe their children need to be educated in the same way. To ensure this collection is returned to its rightful place, your help is needed.

While some Federal government support has been received, there remains much specialized conservation work to be done on many of the items. We are seeking your support for the conservation of this important collection. From 19 to 21 October community elders will visit Melbourne to advise on the conservation program for the collection. During this visit a strategy for completing the conservation will be developed but there are, at present not funds to support this. A fundraising dinner will be held at University House at the University of Melbourne on 21 October 2011. Community elders and conservators will talk about the importance of this collection and about the conservation program that will see its safe return to Warmun. Tickets to the dinner are available at \$150 per ticket, including three courses and wine.

For bookings or information on how you can help support the conservation of this important collection please contact Associate Robyn Sloggett on 8344 6455 or email: rjslog@unimelb.edu.au.

Photos courtesy of the Warmun Art Centre

The Warmun Community Art Collection Conservation Dinner

The Gija artists, the Warmun Art Centre and the
Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation
are delighted to see you at the dinner to raise funds to support
the conservation of the Warmun Community Art Collection

Place: Main Dining Room, University House, University of Melbourne
Friday 21 October 2011
6.30 for 7.00 pm



Contact: Associate Professor Robyn Sloggett - rsloggett@unimelb.edu.au or 9348 5748
Parking is available at the University Square Underground Car Park (enter via Leicester Street)
For directions to University House see: <http://maps.unimelb.edu.au/parkville/building/112>

Appendix G: Invitation for the Warmun Community Collection return celebration



Warmun Art Centre & The University of Melbourne
Invite you to...

Big Joonba at Warmun Art Centre

Celebrating the return of the Warmun Community Art Collection
And launching the NEW 'Gija Two-Way Learning Partnership'
with the University of Melbourne

FRIDAY 14 JUNE 2013 @ SUNSET

Warmun Art Centre
Warmun via Kununurra, Western Australia
All Welcome, Free Entry, Camping, BBQ
Contact: gallery@warmunart.com OR 91587266

 **ARTS**

**WARMUN
ART CENTRE**
Gija Contemporary Art
Warmun Australia

Appendix H: Letter of support for the National Significance Assessment

**WARMUN
ART CENTRE**
Contemporary Aboriginal Art

PMB 24 Turkey Creek via Kununurra Western Australia 6743 Ph: +61 (8) 9168 7496 Fax: +61 (8) 9168 7444

As Community members involved with the preservation and management of the Community Collection we support this grant application. It is important that work is done here at the Community to find out the best way for the Collection to be preserved and displayed when the new building is completed.

It is very important that the Collection stays here in the Community for our children and grandchildren and that we all have a chance to sit together and decide what to write about the Collection and how to show it properly at the new Art Centre when it is built.

Patrick Mung Mung
Chairman Warmun Art Centre
PATRICK

Eileen Bray
Community Representative
Warmun Community Collection

Amellini

Appendix I: Flier for artworks to be moved to the Warmun Art Centre



The Warmun Community Collection is made up of the original works of the people, and from these efforts the Art Industry began. On Friday 24 October 2008, Ngalangangpum School Community will present to Warmun Art Centre for safekeeping the earliest works that make up the major part of the Collection.

You are invited to a ceremony to receive the gift from a group of individuals and organisations of the painting Stations of the Cross by Shirley Purdie as part of the Warmun Community Collection.

2pm A procession departs from Ngalangangpum School towards Warmun Art Centre

4pm The painting Stations of the Cross is presented to Warmun Art Centre

Light refreshments will be served



warmun
ART contemporary
aboriginal art

RSVP Eliza 08-9168 7496 gallery@warmunart.com

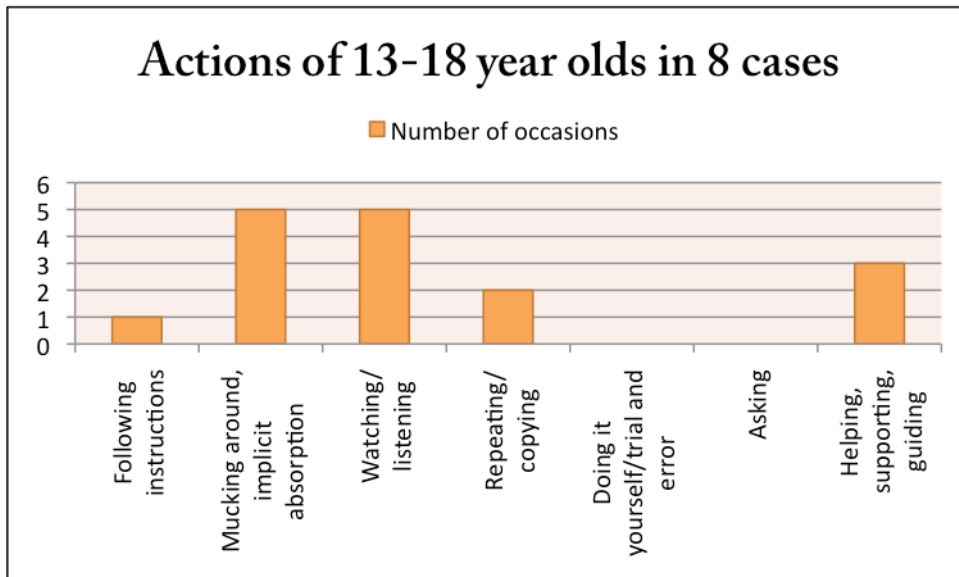
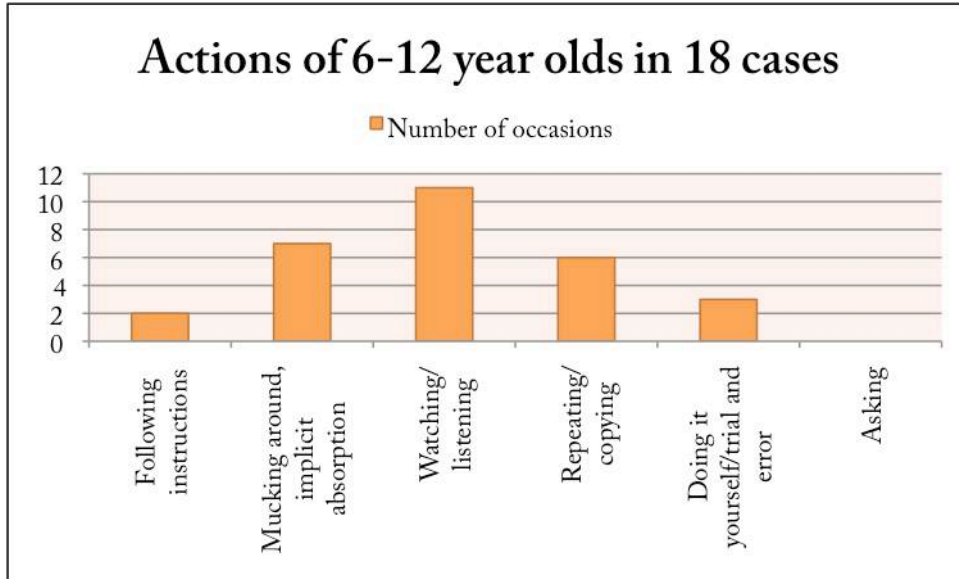
Stations of the Cross, 2002 by Shirley Purdie (213 x 152 cm, natural ochres and pigment on canvas. Winner of the 2001 Blake Prize for Religious Art)

Appendix J: Occasions of learning through art and creative practice at the Warmun Art Centre

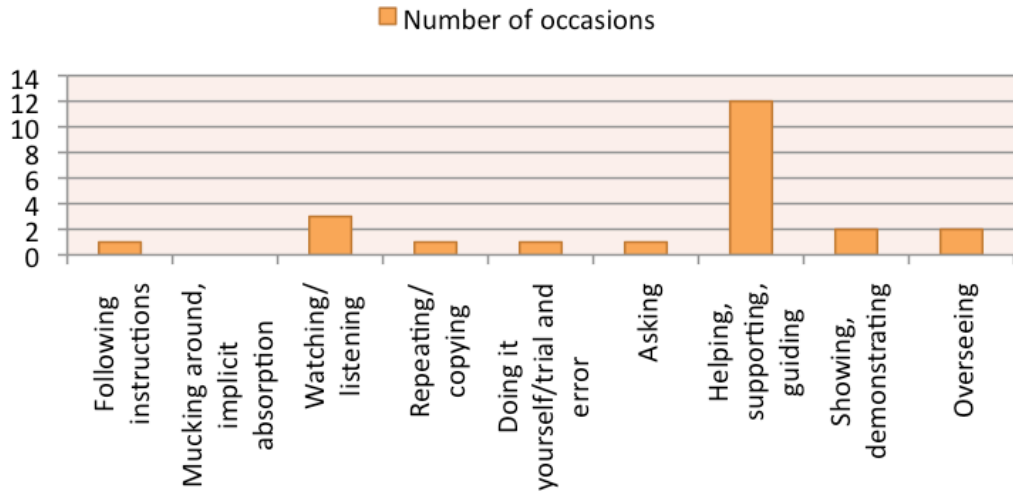
Date	Learning through painting
18.1.12	B. C. painting and C.N. watching. M.J. painting and T.P. watching.
19.1.12	T.P. and K.C. sat with L.N. while she painted. L.N. painted some barramundi scales on her board for them to copy from.
20.1.12	G.B.'s wife's grandchildren watched him paint.
30.1.12	H. J hung around and watched M.J. and R.P. paint.
31.1.12	T.P, K.C. and one other child watched L.N. paint. Four girls came in and began painting on their own. S.P. and another boy watched M.J. paint, then they watched G.B. paint. K.C. crushed ochre with J.Y.
1.2.12	H.J. watched M.J. paint. B.B. painted with her mum and her mum's husband.
2.2.12	B.B. watched S.P. and G.B.
13.6.12	Z.M. sat with and watched J.Y. paint.
14.6.12	Z.M. sat with and watched J.Y. paint.
20.6.12	M.M. and N.D. came and crushed their own ochre and printed off paintings from the computer their dad and grandfather made.
25.7.12	Z.M.'s daughter watched her paint.
04.09.12	Wakikirri filming in the community and the children watched older people speak about their paintings.

12 times in 154 days

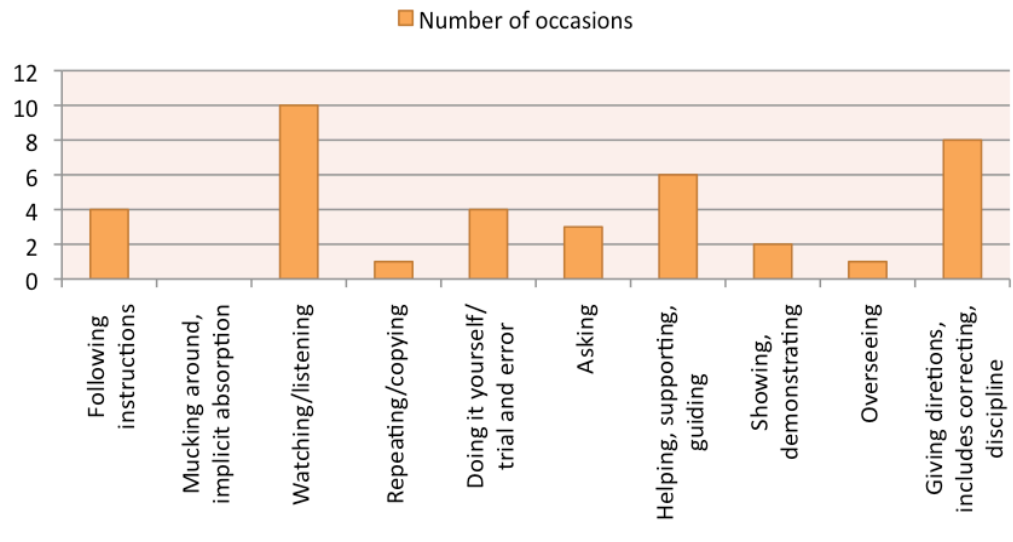
Appendix K: Actions from different age groups in learning contexts



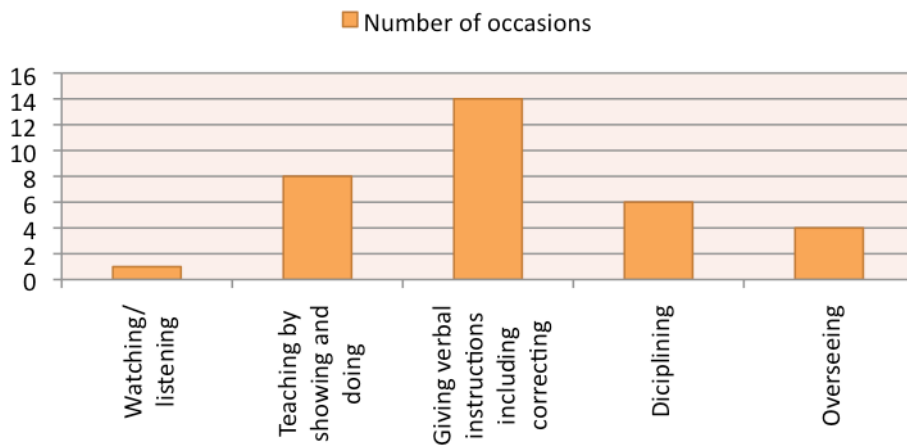
Actions of 19-34 year olds in 21 cases



Actions of 35-50 year olds in 20 cases



Actions of 51 + year olds in 21 cases



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