USE OF THESES

This copy is supplied for purposes of private study and research only. Passages from the thesis may not be copied or closely paraphrased without the written consent of the author.
"Jacky Jacky Was a Smart Young Fella":
A study of art and Aboriginality
in south east Australia 1900-1980

Sylvia Kleinert

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of The Australian National University, April 1994.
I declare this thesis is entirely my own original research.

Signed: [Signature]
Acknowledgments

A thesis of this nature owes a considerable debt to many individuals and organisations who have assisted with my research. Present and former staff of the following institutions contributed through their sustained support: Australian Archives, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Gippsland Anglican Aboriginal Fellowships, Healesville Historical Society, Koorie Heritage Trust, Metropolitan Reception Prison, Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Museum of Victoria, National Gallery of Australia, National Gallery of Victoria, Police Historical Unit, State Library of Victoria, South Australian Museum, Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement, Swan Hill Public Library, Victorian Aborigines' Advancement League and the Wesleyan Central Mission.

This project could not have proceeded without the total support of Aboriginal leaders in those regions which became the focus of my research. In particular I wish to thank Jim Berg of the Koorie Heritage Trust who initially agreed to my research proposal. The difficulty of retrieving the history of south eastern Aboriginal art from a position of relative obscurity meant fieldwork had to be undertaken as a number of frequent visits. The three regions which form the structure for my thesis, Gippsland, the Murray river and Melbourne were each visited four times: in July-September 1991, March 1992, August-September 1992 and February-March 1993 to interview informants and document art objects. During this fieldwork leaders in each community allocated time from busy schedules to assist with my research. Their contribution played a key role in facilitating links with local communities and with members of the majority culture who supported Aborigines. My deep appreciation goes to Albert Mullett of the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative, Irene Mitchell of Coomealla and the Mildura Aboriginal Corporation, Nellie
Moore, Lucy Connelly and Doug Nicholls from the Swan Hill Aboriginal Co-operative and Lin Onus in Melbourne.

My study also relied upon those members of the wider community who have established close relationships with Aborigines acting as facilitators, collaborators, collectors and patrons in the production, exchange and response to Aboriginal art. I especially wish to thank James Davidson, Pauline Edmonds, Cora Gilsenan, Lorna Lanman, Alick Jackomos, Irene Mitchell of Melbourne, Paula O’ Dare, Hilda Rule and Peter Sparnaay. The families of Frances Derham, Allan Lowe and Harry Raynor were pleased to be of assistance. In practical terms, the transport and accommodation offered by John Rogers and Roz Dalzielle of the Mildura Aboriginal Co-operative, Nina Thomas of Mildura, Ilma Kanizeay and Pam Martin of Swan Hill and Ann Davis, then of Lakes Entrance was invaluable. Others who assisted my project have asked to remain anonymous.

The thesis owes a considerable debt to my supervisors and advisers who have, at all times provided untiring support and challenging debate. My first supervisor within the Art History Department of the Australian National University was Dr John Clark and subsequently Dr Erika Esau. My advisers were Dr Nicholas Thomas in the Anthropology Department of the Australian National University and Dr Luke Taylor of the National Museum of Australia. I also benefited from the input of Ranajit Guha, Dr David McNeill and Patrick Wolfe. Maps included within the thesis draw extensively upon the expertise and goodwill of Ian D. Clark. Arnold Williams, Matilda House and Joseph House assisted with Ngunnawal boundaries. Within the Australian National University, Professor Michael Greenhalgh and the staff of the Art History Department together with Dr David Parker of the Graduate School offered a
network of professional expertise and friendship. Funding for this study came from a very generous Australian National University scholarship.

Finally, I wish to thank my partner, Ingo and my sons, Jaime and Micah for their patience and total commitment to my research.

Sylvia Kleinert
Abstract

My study addresses the apparent gap which exists in the history of south eastern Aboriginal art, from the death of William Barak and Tommy McRae at the turn of the century, to the emergence of an urban Aboriginal art in the 1970s. An analysis of the patterns of inclusion and exclusion created by the 1929 exhibition of *Australian Aboriginal Art* establish the paradigm. Discourses of primitivism constructed Aborigines as a static, tradition-based society, distanced in time and space from the modern world. This selective response gave recognition to a south eastern Aboriginal heritage and the art produced in remote communities but elided evidence of a contemporary Aboriginal presence in settled Australia.

Operating within the uneven power relationships of a colonial context, south eastern Aborigines experienced oppression and discrimination, but they were not dominated. The world view of the south east Aborigines of this study does not reflect an assimilation of the colonising culture. The Aborigines considered here value autonomy and independence, they maintain relationships with kin and land and an exchange modality which governs their relationships with the majority culture. My research therefore suggests many more parallels between Aborigines in settled Australia and Aborigines in remote communities than formerly acknowledged.

The chronological element in my study establishes the continuity of south eastern Aboriginal art and traces the emergence of a more heightened expression of public Aboriginality in post-war Melbourne. Similarities and differences emerge within each chapter in the analysis of specific sets of art objects produced by men and women operating within particular local circumstances: in the pastoral and tourist industries, within institutions or
fringe camps, in the country and the city. This study explores how Aborigines produced art for exchange as a commodity within the constraints and opportunities presented by the new social, industrial and cultural spheres of the modern world. In hindsight, it is apparent that the general movement of Aborigines from rural regions to Melbourne from the late 1930s onwards allowed Aboriginal artists to gradually negotiate entry to the infrastructures of the professional art world. Nevertheless the structurally privileged position which the city maintains over the country as a site of progress in the modern world, in conjunction with artistic hierarchies which place a higher value on the fine arts than the crafts and popular culture have contributed to the hiatus surrounding south eastern Aboriginal art and obscured its heterogeneity.

The south eastern Aborigines of my study acted as historical agents and chose whether they wished to become involved in the production, marketing and response to Aboriginal art. Aborigines gained status in the process of cultural production and a more equitable entry into the capitalist economy. The exchange of art objects also acted as bridge between Aborigines and the wider community by changing prevailing attitudes. In a young settler colony primitivism fulfilled a multiplicity of ambiguous roles. There were many ways in which mainstream artists could express their fascination with Aboriginal culture through the appropriation of Aboriginal motifs and depiction of Aborigines—some of which were more constructive than others. My study focuses on several instances when south east Aborigines colonised the professional art world, intervening and collaborating to ensure their viewpoint was adequately represented. Over time, institutions adjusted their acquisition and exhibition policies to accord more closely with an Aboriginal viewpoint. Retrospectively Aborigines in the south east secured continuity with the past through their selective appropriations from mainstream Australian culture. By means of these adjustment processes Aborigines were able to exert some
control over the manner in which they were incorporated within the modern Australian nation state.
List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Map showing study area and key sites elsewhere in Australia</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Culture and language groups in the south east</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Location of stations and reserves formed after 1850, together with key towns</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abbreviations

AIATSIS  Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies until 1990, thereafter the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait and Islander Studies.

AA  Australian Archives.

ANU  The Australian National University.

BPA  The Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines.

MoV  In 1983 the National Museum of Victoria amalgamated with the Science Museum to become the Museum of Victoria.

NGA  The Australian National Gallery until 1993, thereafter the National Gallery of Australia.

NGV  National Gallery of Victoria.

Notes:
Throughout the thesis I have retained imperial measurements and currency to maintain accuracy with the historical era. Measurements for art objects are given in centimetres in the following order: height, width and depth.

Conversion rates:

£1 = $2.01
1 mile = 1.6093 km.

The names given to Aboriginal clans, languages and regions have been arbitrarily allocated since colonisation. There now exists considerable variation in this area of knowledge and this is exacerbated by the historical gap which surrounds Aborigines in the settled south east. The map of culture and language groups for the south east (Fig. 2) amalgamates primary evidence from my own fieldwork with recent scholarship in geography; linguistics and anthropology. Whilst every attempt has been made to document the contemporary viewpoint of south eastern Aborigines the
processes of cultural renewal currently underway mean that my findings are provisional. Within the thesis I maintain consistency with the spelling(s) suggested by AIATSIS except where authors have followed their own style. Alternative names for sites have also been indicated. To avoid confusion, this study adopts the name in common usage.

In some instances, I have taken the liberty of making slight changes to grammar, punctuation and spelling of oral transcriptions where this improves coherence and does not alter the meaning of the text. Square brackets [ ] indicate words or phrases inserted in the text by the author.

For reasons discussed elsewhere, the term Aborigines is used throughout. In addition, where possible, I identify individuals by their clan or associated community. When alternative nomenclature occurs within quotations, terms such as Koori(es) or blackfellows have been retained. Gubs or gabas is the term used by south eastern Aborigines for mainstream Australians.
# List of contents

**Volume I**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A note on the title</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Introduction**
   - Theoretical perspectives
   - Existing literature
   - Methodology
   - Thesis outline

2. **A paradigmatic response:**
   - the 1929 exhibition *Australian Aboriginal Art*
     - Introduction
     - Popular evolutionism
     - Central Australian visitors
     - A Victorian history: Tommy McRae and William Barak
     - Modernist affinities
     - Conclusion

3. **Anthropology or art?:**
   - Percy Leason and *The Last of Victorian Aborigines.*
     - Introduction
     - Aboriginal interventions
     - Gendered primitivism
     - Aboriginal responses
     - Distinctions of taste
     - Exclusions and inclusions

4. **Art for tourists**
   - Introduction
   - Artefacts as culture
   - Boomerangs: regional identity/national symbol
   - The critical response
   - The politics of tourist art
   - Conclusion

5. **A women's sphere**
   - Introduction
   - Weaving the past into the present
   - Flowers from the land
   - Skilled providers
   - The politics of embroidery
   - Conclusion

6. **Pastoral relationships**
   - Introduction
   - Pastoral artefacts
   - A Bagundji lifestyle
   - Illusions of reality
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Urban initiatives</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An Aboriginal Moomba</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'Aboriginal Enterprises'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appropriation in context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Market responses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sites of Aboriginality</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patterns of socialisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An Aboriginal audience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Painting the land</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Critical reactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>