

Selling Utopia

Marketing the art of the women of Utopia

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FOREWORD

This thesis is principally a cultural history which analyses the role played by those involved in the marketing of 'fine' art created by the women of Utopia. It stems from a lifelong interest in art and more than 15 years practical experience in retail marketing. It is a cross-disciplinary thesis which draws from art and cultural history, anthropology and sociology. The author's primary discipline is literature, but includes some undergraduate studies in anthropology, Aboriginal studies and art.

The thesis traces the role of those involved in the marketing of the art from Utopia including the wholesale agents and retail galleries. It includes a brief market survey on reasons for buying Indigenous art, a discussion of the popularity of the artist Emily Kame Kngwarreye, a discussion of issues surrounding authenticity and the market and a brief history of the art movement within Utopia. It focuses on the place of Utopia art in the art market rather than its place in current Australian art practice.

Time Line of the Research

This research commences with the exhibition of work by Utopia artists held at the S.H.Ervin Gallery during the summer of 1988/89 and ends with the retrospective exhibition opening at the Queensland Art Gallery of the work of Emily Kame Kngwarreye in February 1998.

1989 *A Summer Project*, S.H.Ervin Gallery, Sydney. This was the exhibition which first aroused the interest of the writer in Indigenous art.

Between 1989 and the time of my enrolment at Macquarie University attending numerous exhibitions of Indigenous art, particularly art from Utopia. Two major books on Utopia were published.

1994 - Enrol in Masters by Research thesis at Macquarie University

Numerous exhibitions of Indigenous art, particularly art from Utopia

1995 - Survey of galleries marketing Indigenous art including interviews with gallery directors (see list of interviews)

1995 - Numerous visits to Canberra to Library of Institute of Aboriginal Studies; interviews with Director, Chapman Gallery, Canberra.

Numerous exhibitions of art from Utopia during 1995.

1996 - February and August - visits to Alice Springs, attending galleries, interviewing gallery directors, wholesale agents and other relevant people. Visit to Delmore Station. (See list of interviews).

1996 - March and November. Visits to Melbourne, attending galleries, interviewing gallery directors and other relevant people. (See list of interviews).

1996 - Visit to Adelaide - visits to galleries and interviews of gallery directors. (See list of interviews).

1996 - Death of Emily Kame Kngwarreye.

1996 - Kathleen Petyarre wins the Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award Prize.

1997 Survey of buyers of Indigenous art into their reasons for buying.

1997 - June. Sotheby's auction of Indigenous artworks.

1997 - November. Accusations of fraud by Kathleen Petyarre in the press.

1998 - Book published - *Emily Kngwarreye Paintings* - with contributions by J.Isaacs, T.Smith, J.Ryan, D. & J. Holt.

1998 - Book published by - *Emily Kame Kngwarreye - Alhalkere - Paintings from Utopia* - M.Neale with contributions by R.Benjamin, A.M. Brody, C.Hodges, P.Morrissey, J.Ryan.

20 February 1998 - Opening of *Emily Kame Kngwarreye - Alhalkere - Paintings from Utopia*, Queensland Art Gallery.

21 February 1998 - Seminar on Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Queensland Art Gallery

1998 - Writing up of research.

1999 - March - Thesis submitted.

Summary

The thesis focuses on marketing art from the Aboriginal community, Utopia, where the majority of artists, and the best known artists, are women. It documents methods by which the art moves from the community to retail art outlets; it includes detailed documentation of marketing in the retail sector and also includes research into the buying of indigenous art by private buyers.

Emily Kame Kngwarreye is the best known of the Utopia painters. The study proposes reasons for her success and points to further questions beyond the scope of this study. Problems inherent in criticism and editing of her work are raised and interpreted in the context of the marketplace.

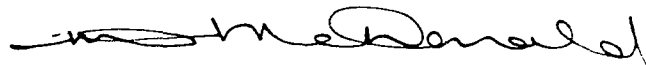
The original thesis plan did not include detailed discussion about authorship. However, in 1997 the media reported controversy about authorship of a prize-winning work. As such controversy must affect marketing, this topic (as it relates to this artist), was included.

Although possibilities for improvement in marketing methods have become apparent as a result of this research, areas where further research would be beneficial have also become apparent.

Master of Arts Thesis

Supervisors: Christine Stevenson and Dr Vivien Johnson
February 1999

This work has not been submitted for any other degree at Macquarie or any other university or institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michelle McDonald', is positioned above a solid horizontal line.

Michelle McDonald BA

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