

LOUISE MARTIN-CHEW discusses a fruitful union of art and anthropology arranged by the University of Queensland.

ANOTHER TIME, ANOTHER PLACE

Before Time Today: Reinventing Tradition in Aurukun Aboriginal Art
The University of Queensland Art Museum
Brisbane
10 September–28 November 2010

Before Time Today unites historic sculptures acquired for the University of Queensland from Aurukun during the 1950s by missionaries J.B. McCarthy and William McKenzie with the area's contemporary art and sculpture. The earlier work held by the University of Queensland's Anthropology Museum dates from a decade before the carvings held by the National Museum of Australia (which were collected by Frederick McCarthy in 1962), and is a remarkable and rare resource.

Aurukun is on the western tip of Cape York, and, partly due to its isolation, the area has a distinctive and outstanding carving tradition. This ambitious exhibition, operative across six decades, includes a major publication by Queensland University Press, on the reinvention of the cultural traditions of the Wik and Kugu Aboriginal people of Aurukun. It is a major contribution and forms part of the celebration of the University of Queensland's centenary this year.

Even though Aurukun art has a long history, its interaction with European culture remains relatively unknown. In 2006, as an apology, Aurukun artists donated a group of law poles to the Netherlands. This is one chapter of the area's history which is detailed by Utrecht curator George Petitjean in the book edited by exhibition curator and University of Queensland's academic Sally Butler. Other stories told within the book and exhibition cover a gamut of disciplines – from art history to anthropology to Indigenous studies – adding considerable new material to Aurukun research. The success of the Wik native title claim is well known, as are the achievements of artists like Arthur Pambegan, whose work is widely celebrated.

In addition to the historical material from the University of Queensland Anthropology Museum, the exhibition includes works by twenty contemporary artists. Standout works include Leigh Namponan's *Pengiky (Freshwater shark)*, 2009, Horace Wikmunea's *Waaram (Dugong)*, 2008, Arthur Koo'Ekka Pambegan Jr's *Untitled XXII (Walkan-aw and Kalben designs)*, 2007 and Mavis Ngallametta's painting *Shells and twigs washed with the tide along the beach*, 2008.

The carving tradition has led to a new level of art production, diversely expressed in media from sculpture to innovative weaving practices. Works once made for ceremony are made for exhibition and the art market, and the art surveyed here focuses on the creativity involved in the process of the reinvention of traditional art practices for a new era.

Butler's examination of work from the past and its relationship with the present leads her to conclude, "Aboriginal culture evolves on its own terms ... This juxtaposition of artworks and ideas suggests that the flourishing art practice in Aurukun today is driven by artists who are reinventing their heritage of Wik visual traditions in response to life in the twenty-first century." □



Top Horace Wikmunea, *Waaram (Dugong)*, 2008, natural ochres with synthetic polymer binder on milkwood, 43 x 25 x 113cm. Collection The University of Queensland Photograph Mick Richards.

Above Arthur Koo'ekka Pambegan Jr, *Kalben [Flying-fox Story Place]*, 2007–08 (detail), ochres with acrylic binder and acrylic paint on wood with bush string, 188 x 190 x 35cm. Collection Andrew Baker Art Dealer. Photograph Mick Richards