

Aboriginal Art Circular

The Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, University of Virginia
Volume 5, Number 1

Winter 2002

Give Her a Hand

Kluge-Ruhe Associate Curator, Dr. Julia May, is responsible for the beautiful multimedia exhibition, *The Power of Presence: Human Hand Imagery in Aboriginal Art*, on display through May 25, 2002.

An art historian, May wrote her dissertation on the use of human hand imagery by indigenous groups in the American southwest. When she came to work at Kluge-Ruhe, she began exploring Australian hand images and comparing uses of the hand image among different groups. On Friday, April 12, Dr. May will give a lecture entitled *Hands Across the Water: Hand Imagery in the Aboriginal Australian and Puebloan Artistic Traditions*.



Aboriginal Art at the Flower Mart

Art from the Kluge-Ruhe Collection will be featured at the 63rd annual Flower Mart at Washington National Cathedral May 3 - 4, 2002. A fundraiser sponsored by All Hallows Guild, the Flower Mart consists of a two-day festival of music, entertainment, plants, foods and boutiques. An estimated 20,000 people attend the Flower Mart each year.

This year the Flower Mart honors Australia and will include Australian themed exhibits and programs. The Kluge-Ruhe Collection will display works from *Dreaming in Color* in the newly renovated Barrett Gallery at the top of the Cathedral tower. Dr. Margo Smith will give a preview lecture on Aboriginal art on Tuesday, April 30 in the Cathedral Auditorium. On Friday, May 3, she will speak on *The Dreaming Garden: Plant Use in Australian Aboriginal Art*. On Saturday, Dr. Julia May will speak on *Dreaming in Color: Aboriginal Art from Balgo*.

The Flower Mart is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Friday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday. In the event of rain, all programs are held inside the cathedral. For more information call (202) 537-3185 or see www.cathedral.org/cathedral/flowermart.

Current Exhibit

March 7 - May 25, 2002

The Power of Presence

Human Hand Imagery in Aboriginal Art

Upcoming Events

Lectures

Reservations required (434) 244-0234

Hands Across the Water: Hand Imagery in the Aboriginal Australian and Puebloan Artistic Traditions

Dr. Julia May

Friday, April 12 7:00 p.m.

A Biography of Narritjin Maymuru:

Artist and Cultural Mediator

Dr. Howard Morphy

Center for Cross Cultural Research
Australian National University

Friday, April 19 7:00 p.m.

Children's Program

Hands Down!

Hand casting and decorating program for children ages 6 - 12

Saturday, April 27

12:30 - 2:00 p.m.

Reservations required (434) 244-0234

Tucker Box Tours

Midday tours of the exhibit followed by lunch and a discussion in the gallery, 12:15 - 1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 17, 2002

Thursday, May 16, 2002

Reservations required (434) 244-0234

Director of South Australia Museum to Speak at Virginia Festival of the Book

Australian Tim Flannery, author of a best-seller about the evolutionary history of Australia called *The Future Eaters*, will be visiting Charlottesville for the Virginia Festival of the Book, March 20-24. Flannery is the director of the South Australia Museum in Adelaide and an expert on Australasian mammals. He has also written extensively on the history of exploration and settlement in Australia and has recently published a book on North America's prehistory entitled *The Eternal Frontier*.

On Friday, March 22 Flannery and Michael Pollen, author of *The Botany of Desire*, will read and discuss their works at 8 p.m. at the Culbreath Theatre. The event is free and open to the public.

Those who attended Flannery's 1999 lecture at UVA on his scientific travels in Irian Jaya and New Guinea, remember him as an engaging speaker who makes his discipline interesting and accessible to the non-academic reader.

At a time when many Virginians are focussing on the 300th anniversary of the Lewis and Clark expedition, *The Eternal Frontier* deals with the changes in the ecology of North America over the last 65 million years. Flannery covers everything from the demise of dinosaurs to the destruction of native buffalo herds. He deals with both natural and human forces, which have shaped the American environment over time. For information see www.vabook.org or call 924-6890.

Interview with Local Collector Steve Majewski

Most days Steve Majewski doesn't arrive at his office until after 2 pm. Steve keeps unusual hours because he is an astronomer at the University of Virginia where his research centers on the structure and evolution of our Milky Way galaxy and how it is likely to have been built up at least partly through the "cannibalism" of smaller galaxies. His other passion, besides the celestial realm, is Aboriginal art. Over the past ten years, Steve has collected paintings and sculpture from many areas of Australia. Even though astronomy and Aboriginal art seem divergent interests, Steve has found one point where the two intersect. Many of you may remember that in 1999, Steve and Astronomy department colleague and fellow Aboriginal art collector Richard Patterson, organized the joint exhibition with the Kluge-Ruhe Collection, *Under Southern Skies: Aboriginal and Western Scientific Perspectives on the Australian Night Sky* at the McCormick Observatory. Recently Associate Curator, Julia May spoke with Steve about his collection:

Would you briefly describe your first exposure to Aboriginal art?

The first piece of Aboriginal art I remember seeing was a didjeridu decorated with natural ochre. Unfortunately, these pigments, not sealed with any protective lacquer, were not permanent and the piece already had a faded appearance when I first saw it, so it was not all that impressive. By happenstance, this piece is actually now in my possession. After that, I became familiar with the dot painting and rarrk styles through the decorations on other didjeridus.

What is it about Aboriginal art that interests you?

First, there is the extraordinarily long (tens of thousands of years) tradition backing up the art and music we are fortunate enough now to have preserved on barks and canvases and in modern recordings of Aboriginal musicians. I also love the nature themes that are typically the center of each artistic and musical piece. With regard to paintings specifically, I have always been intrigued by the Aboriginal traditions of representing stories and scenes as if they were seen "from above," and by the so-called "x-ray" style renderings of animals. As a scientist I find these sophisticated "analytical" perspectives appealing.

To what Aboriginal communities have you traveled and what artists have you met?

A few years ago some friends and I rented a jeep and drove from through the Northern Territory from Alice Springs to Darwin. The highlight of the trip was being able to meet several didjeridu makers. In Alice I met "Georgi G," a colorful character who specializes in particularly large and unusual instruments, including "double didjs" and large bellowed pipes. For these, George goes out of his way to seek out especially uniquely-shaped eucalyptus branches.

After meeting Georgi we drove into the Outback at Inverness to meet Bill Harney, one of the premier didjeridu makers. Bill is the son of Bill Harney, a well-known raconteur and storyteller in the Northern Territory during the 1930s and 1940s (and who is honored with a plaque in a public park in Darwin). Bill Harney Senior was a whitefella who married into an Aboriginal community with whom he lived for a good portion of his life and who authored several books on Aboriginal culture, including "Tales from the Aborigines," "Life Among the Aborigines" and "Brimmings and Billabongs." Bill Harney Junior graciously spent an afternoon showing us how he makes and decorates didjeridus. He also introduced us to his apprentice, a young boy, to whom he was teaching his art. I will never forget how in the course of his demonstrating his craft, Bill swept us into a wonderful Dreamtime story about Willy Wagtail, the Rainbow Serpent and how the local landforms were created. He followed this up with a mini didj performance. I wish I had brought a tape recorder!

What was the first piece of art you purchased and where? Why?

The first piece of art I purchased was a high quality didjeridu that I ordered from a broker for indigenous Australian makers. In truth, the purchase involved my stating over the phone that I wanted a didj from a so-called "Master craftsman" in a low key that was relatively easy to play. This narrowed it down to a particular piece that the broker discussed with me, and I was elated to be sent a didj made by Rex Mununggurr that fulfilled all my expectations. This piece was recently on display at the Kluge-Ruhe.

What types of things do you have in your collection?

Mainly central desert canvas paintings and bark paintings from Arnhem Land, several carvings including a bird by a Tiwi artist, as

well as a number of didjeridus. I also was excited to acquire some Maningrida prints, including one by Susan Marawarr, during her visit to the Kluge-Ruhe last year.

Do you have a favorite piece?

That's tough. I'm quite fond of two Jaxon Gittins paintings and have some especially dear didjeridus that "speak" to me, but I guess the first painting I ever acquired, by Gabriella Possum, Clifford Possum's daughter, holds a special place for me because the subject, a "Milky Way Dreaming," is the heart of my scientific research, and Gabriella's representation actually resembles a model for the formation and structure of the Milky Way that I have been working on for more than a decade! I included an image of her painting in one of my scientific publications.

-Julia May

Hours and tours

The Kluge-Ruhe Collection is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Free guided tours take place each Saturday at 10:30 a.m. No reservations are required.

The offices of the Kluge-Ruhe Collection are open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Study Center may be used by appointment during office hours.

Our Mission

The Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia promotes learning about Australian Aboriginal art and culture through an integrated program of collection management, exhibition, education, research and publication. We are committed to building mutually beneficial partnerships with Aboriginal artists and communities to better represent their art and knowledge in each aspect of our program.

Aboriginal Art Circular is a publication of the Kluge-Ruhe Collection, University of Virginia and is distributed free as a public service to those interested in Aboriginal art and culture. To be added to our mailing list call (434) 244-0234 or e-mail kluge-ruhe@virginia.edu.
Editor: Margo W. Smith
Header: Anajtari Tjakamarra
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