

QUT Digital Repository:
<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/>



Fredericks, Bronwyn L. (2004) Making Country Come Alive: Artistic Representations of the Rockhampton Region, Rockhampton Women's Business Network, Chamber of Commerce, Rockhampton, 6th Nov. 2004, 7.00am .

© Copyright 2004 Text: Bronwyn Fredericks /Artwork: Pamela Croft

Author's version of paper presented at:

Fredericks, Bronwyn (2004). *Making Country Come Alive: Artistic Representations of the Rockhampton Region*, Rockhampton Women's Business Network, Chamber of Commerce, Rockhampton, 6th Nov. 2004, 7.00am

Making Country Come Alive: Artistic Representations of the Rockhampton Region

Bronwyn Fredericks

What do your eyes see?

People who observe urbanised and regional Aboriginal Australian people on the on-set may not see with their human eye anything different from themselves. Urban Aboriginal people dress like other people, live in houses like other people and work in jobs like other people. The viewer may be looking at urban Aboriginal people through distorted images of what they know or think to be Aboriginal. Ways that are learnt through schooling undertaken years ago, media images, and old stereotypes along with what are said to be our 'traditional' ways of being.

However, you may be looking at us through distorted images of what you know or think is Aboriginal. Ways of thinking that you learnt through school learning, media images, old stereotypes and what are said to be our 'traditional' ways of being. If we don't fit within these concepts that you hold, you may not perceive that we have culture, that we are in fact not even 'real' Aboriginal people. I will say that sadly even some Aboriginal people think and feel this about themselves and others.

What needs to be remembered is that we as Aboriginal people live in the contemporary world too. Culture is dynamic. Many of us have learnt to be bi-cultural and tri-cultural, and so on. We travel and weave in and out of two, three and even more worlds. We are now part of colonisation just as it is part of us. It is also now part of our continuous human story as Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal culture has needed to adapt, adjust and modify itself in order to survive within the contemporary world. You might have to look more closely and listen more closely but culture is there, always there in some form.

When I write listen in this context, I mean not just listening with your ears, but also listening with your eyes, heart and spirit. Pamela Croft's artworks need you to be listening for they contain many messages about the contemporary society in which we live. Her work does not reflect the familiar western desert style, or X-Ray imagery from other areas in Australia. Nor does her work reflect the tourist style of Aboriginal artwork which is used to capture the eye of the infatuated tourist in search of a piece of Aboriginal art or Australians who are seduced by their own perceptions of the 'exotic Indigene'. Most often these artworks are produced by non-Aboriginal people and not in Australia.

Nor are her works what people come to know as 'stereotypically Aboriginal'. If you look closely you will see that within Croft's works of art are indeed Aboriginal images set within the contemporary context.

Art Creation Stories

I know that in her creating, Pamela Croft has sat within and on the banks of the Pumpkin and Coorooman Creeks, Long Beach and other locations around Keppel Sands and the Central Queensland Region, Australia. She has watched and come to understand the gentle nomadic nature of the tides that result in delicate patterns left on the mud that change with each ebb and flow of the water. She has traced the tracks of animals and other people who at times dwell within the area. For example she traces and encapsulates crab imprints left behind after they foraged for food, and the marks of the Ibis and seagulls. We leave signs too as we forage for fish that ends up on our forks and crabs that become cooked in hot pots and eaten. The evidence of all of this life is left behind and is what becomes part of the story of these places and sometimes also becomes embedded in the stories told within Croft's art works (See Figure 1).



Figure 1. *Crab prints* (Pamela Croft, 2003, Mud Map Series, paper, mud, ochre)

Connections in Country

Pamela has painted canvases and prepared installation works of the Keppel Sands and Joskeleigh since she moved to the Capricorn Coast area in 1995. She knows the region well and moves from one set of images and ideas to the next in a progressive practice of moving to a greater understanding of this land and all that it entails. All of this is captured within her artworks centred within Keppel Sands, Capricorn Coast, Queensland, Australia, this place that is Darumbal country. In showing us this slice of Darumbal country as she sees

and knows it she has drawn on the rich ochre shades from the Capricorn Coast region - black, brown and red to symbolise the water's connection to the land, people, place, a sense of past, present and future. The colours and lines flow within the artwork around the contours of the life of the creeks and waterways as they criss-cross over and through the land. They are all tied within her artworks to a sense of place which binds water, land, animals and us as human beings within the landscape.

Sometimes Croft uses vibrant reds, oranges, greens and blues; the colours of the birds and plants and the natural environment (See Figures 2 & 3). While most of us who live within the region are a new presence within this Darumbal landscape, we are all now tied to this water and land, just as we are all tied to a sense of the past, present and future. It is this that she is now starting to share with the rest of the world.



Figure 2. *Landmarks* (Pamela Croft, 2003, Mud Map Series, paper, mud, ochre, acrylic, charcoal)



Figure 3. *Monoprint 288* (Pamela Croft, 2003, Mud Map Series, paper, mud, ochre, acrylic, charcoal)

Past, Present, Future

Pamela Croft has watched, observed, hunted and gathered in the ways of Aboriginal women, past, present and future. She does this within a contemporary context and incorporates the concepts of space, place and time within her artworks along with issues around identity and the questions she may have around society at the time. Pamela's artwork also often asks us questions about how do we know Country, how we understand Country and how will we contribute to the care of Country for now and the future. She sometimes also asks what we think about issues or presents issues in ways that challenge us to explore, touch or even walk over something we know to be something you shouldn't walk on, such as we might have learned not to walk on artworks. She makes funny what may have always been serious and makes serious what has been presented as funny. She inverts and turns concepts on their heads in an attempt to question rather than to be compliant with how things are; systems, concepts and society. She encourages all of us to do this too.