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The exhibition of Indigenous art as contemporary art, 1989-2015

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Wollongong

School of the Arts, English and Media

Abstract

Indigenous art first received widespread attention in the contemporary art world in the 1980s, when major institutions expanded their collections of it, and Indigenous curators were appointed at state museums and galleries. Ever since, Australian Indigenous art has been gradually accepted as a cultural practice in the public and institutionalised sphere. This shift bridged contemporary Indigenous and Western cultural domains, nonetheless, Indigenous art was a type of art that the West has been largely resistant to admitting as contemporary art. This thesis explores the relationship between the contemporary art world and Indigenous art from remote Australia. It argues that the field of contemporary art is sufficiently malleable to allow room for critiques of colonisation and patriarchy, nonetheless, there are challenges facing how Indigenous art is exhibited within that context, including de-contextualisation and a persisting Western art historical narrative, as demonstrated in the case studies considered in this thesis research.

The inclusion of Indigenous art in several influential exhibitions in the late 20th and early 21st centuries is investigated in this thesis. These exhibitions span *Magicians of the Earth*, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin in 1989 in Paris, to Okwui Enwezor's 2015 Venice Biennale *All the World's Futures*. This thesis critically examines these influential large-scale contemporary art exhibitions that featured the work of Indigenous artists, as well as discusses various approaches to exhibiting Indigenous art, cultivated by Indigenous and non-Western curators. This research indicates that the curatorial profession is still lacking in Indigenous voices and perspectives. Through discussion of the pioneering curatorial work of Djon Mundine, Hetti Perkins, Stephen Gilchrist and other Indigenous curators, this thesis demonstrates how their cultural knowledge and practice endows them with broader frames of reference for presenting Indigenous art to the public. A central argument is that Indigenous curators are vital for the exhibition of Indigenous art in a contemporary art context, as they are well placed to highlight the cultural, social and geographical contexts in which Indigenous art is made. This research also extends to analyse the novel theorisation and curation of non-Western and Australian Indigenous art in the work of Okwui Enwezor, a Nigerian-American curator, whose globalist standpoint offers new perspectives to exhibiting Indigenous art within and outside Australia.

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Declaration

I, Iris Bendor, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the conferral of the degree Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD), from the University of Wollongong is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Iris Bendor

23 August 2022

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As I worked on this project, I was grateful to have been adopted and welcomed at the Charles Darwin University (CDU) in Mparntwe Alice Springs. I was blessed to have obtained a comfortable desk space with desert views, and connections to local academics, to exchange ideas, knowledge, and perspectives. A special thanks to Dr. Judith Lovell who introduced me to the CDU and made time to assist me with refining the arguments presented in my PhD study and research as a whole.

From 2010 onwards I was fortunate to be employed at Iltja Ntjarra Art Centre in Mparntwe Alice Springs, and later work with the Directors of the organisation, including Mervyn Rubuntja, Hubert Pareroultja, Selma Coulthard, and Vanessa Inkamala. Apart from being able to acquire knowledge from, and exchange ideas with the Board of Directors, and being supported throughout my study, I recognise that the thesis was significantly enriched by my association with this Art Centre. It gave me a unique perspective on the lives and creations of Indigenous artists from Central Australia.

This project was slowed somewhat by the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, but due to the support of my family, fellow students, and friends I overcame this challenge. I would like to thank my parents Zehava and Itzhak Bendor without whom I would not have persevered to complete this thesis within this lifetime. I am also grateful to Fanny Bernstein and Margaret O'Dowd for reading through some chapters of my thesis, and fellow students Allison Gray and Emma Brown for frequently meeting with me for real life

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Indigenous art first received widespread attention in the contemporary art world in the 1980s, when art movements such as Papunya Tula enjoyed significant market success, major institutions expanded their collections of Indigenous art, and Indigenous curators were appointed at state museums and galleries. These developments contributed to the emergence of the historical phenomenon analysed in this thesis, namely, the exhibition of Indigenous art as contemporary art in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Contemporary art is global: as a field of cultural activity and engagement it is internationally dispersed, and routinely exhibits the work of Western, non-Western and Indigenous art side by side. The inclusivity and universality of contemporary art is nowhere more evident than in large temporary exhibitions and recurring events such as biennials, art fairs and *documenta*, in which since the 1980s Indigenous art has become commonplace. This thesis investigates the presentation of, and discourse on, remote Indigenous Australian art (from now on referred to as Indigenous Art) in several influential exhibitions ranging from *Magicians of the Earth*, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin in 1989 in Paris, to Okwui Enwezor's 2015 Venice Biennale *All the World's Futures*. It contends that large-scale contemporary art exhibitions are important sites of Indigenous expression, cross-cultural exchange and meaningful social, political or environmental critique.

However, the exhibition of Indigenous art in contemporary art institutions – which are still dominated by Western colonialist values – is itself open to critique. This thesis identifies the persistence of 'primitivism' and exoticism in the way that Indigenous art is exhibited in the contemporary art world, as well as the persistent tendency to present it within a modernist framework. Although the latter once helped to liberate Indigenous art from its earlier status presentation in ethnographic collections and other institutions dedicated to science rather than aesthetics, presenting Indigenous art as modernist in a contemporary art context wilfully ignores the unique aesthetic, cultural, political and historical contexts that determine the production of remote Indigenous art. A key factor in how remote Indigenous art has been exhibited over the last thirty years is the continued refusal of the specificity of Indigenous art, to the extent that contextual factors will differ depending on the region in which the art is produced, the very category 'Indigenous art' enacts homogenisation. I argue that this is

symptomatic of a lingering colonialist view that non-Western art can be assimilated unproblematically into existing cultural institutions and artistic categories.

As well as critically examining several influential large-scale contemporary art exhibitions that featured the work of Indigenous artists, this thesis also discusses various approaches to exhibiting Indigenous art cultivated by Indigenous and non-Western curators. Their contributions are significant because in contemporary art, the role of the curator has expanded to assume a position of authorial influence that rivals that traditionally reserved for the artist, and as my research indicates the curatorial profession is still lacking in Indigenous voices and perspectives. Through discussing the pioneering curatorial work of Djon Mundine, Hetti Perkins, Stephen Gilchrist and other Indigenous curators, I demonstrate how their cultural knowledge and practice endows them with unique insight for presenting Indigenous art to the public. One of my central arguments is that Indigenous curators – and collaborations between them and non-Indigenous art associates – are vital for the exhibition of Indigenous art in a contemporary art context, since they are well placed to highlight the cultural, social and geographical contexts in which Indigenous art is made. The research also extends to analyse the novel theorisation and curation of non-Western and Australian Indigenous art in the work of Enwezor, a Nigerian-American curator, whose globalist standpoint offers new perspectives to exhibiting Indigenous art within and outside Australia.

Existing scholarship

There is an abundance of literature on Indigenous art and indeed contemporary art, yet there remains scant analysis of exhibitions featuring Indigenous art in a contemporary art context. One of the few studies is art historian Vanessa Russ's dissertation *A study of the Art Gallery of New South Wales and Australian aboriginal art: aboriginal perspectives and representations in state art galleries* (2013), which surveys the exhibition of Indigenous art in the AGNSW from the origin of the institution to 2013; most relevant to this thesis is Russ's theorisation of the rise of Indigenous curators from 1973 to 1990, and the establishment of Indigenous art collections, exhibitions and curatorship from 1990 to 2013. Whereas Russ sometimes alludes to the national context in which her institutional history unfolds, this thesis takes a broader perspective and investigates the exhibition of Indigenous art in exhibitions both nationally and internationally.

In the absence of other systematic accounts of exhibitions of Indigenous art in a contemporary art context, this thesis critically engages with relevant literature on the relationship of Indigenous art to national and international contemporary art more broadly. Art historians who have made substantial contributions to this field – and thus with whom the theoretical framework for this dissertation is formed in critical discussion with – are Terry Smith, Ian McLean, and Okwui Enwezor.

This thesis critically engages with the work of McLean, who has written extensively about the relationship between Indigenous and contemporary art. In the edited book *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art* (2013), McLean grouped texts by key authors to trace the development of Indigenous art as recognised contemporary art. The book explores perspectives on Indigenous art from as early as 1945, and continues on with prospects on it written by local and international experts from diverse fields of study until 2006. Although McLean's book mentions numerous exhibitions of Indigenous art and approaches for its curation, these references are sporadic, depending on the various subjects discussed by the collected authors. Similar to McLean's book, this thesis investigates the status of Indigenous art in the contemporary art world; however, my research focuses on a select number of contemporary art events that feature Indigenous art, as well as curatorial approaches to exhibiting Indigenous art.

Central to this thesis is an idea that permeates McLean's writing: that Indigenous art is a transcultural phenomenon. Indigenous art and the industry around it, he argues, is created and managed in collaboration with non-Indigenous people, which results in the current art environment where ideas are shared and exchanged (McLean 2014a; McLean 2016; McLean 2013). This transcultural dimension is seen in many aspects of Indigenous art production and distribution: the use of Western materials by Indigenous artists; non-Indigenous art advisors are employed in Indigenous-owned art centres; non-Indigenous collectors and consumers acquire Indigenous art; Indigenous artists travel to non-Indigenous arts centres; and artistic collaborations happen between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists. McLean's argument reinforces my own experience working at an art centre for twelve years, and aligns with a central tenet of this thesis: that Indigenous art exhibitions in the contemporary art world take place through collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous art associates, institutions, and audiences. This thesis zooms in on case studies – specific exhibitions as well

as curators – to contribute to knowledge of the transcultural dynamics of such events and practices.

This thesis understands the transcultural dynamics of Indigenous contemporary art exhibitions against the historical backdrop of ‘multiple modernisms’, an expanded notion of the period that incorporates its non-Western and Indigenous manifestations. This idea has been explored by McLean and Enwezor – whose writing and curating is examined in Chapter 6 – alike. Citing Charles Taylor’s 1999 recognition that ‘modernity is not specifically Western’, McLean (2013a, pp. 48-49) asserts that a new narrative of multiple modernisms has had a profound impact on the notion of ‘world art’, recognising that “modernism was always global, multiple and divided, rather than Western and formalist”. This parallels Enwezor’s argument that modernism, long celebrated in the West as a manifestation of the Western cultural and intellectual progress, was contingent on the West’s colonial relation to its colonised others; that artists from the non-West operated during modernity but had no platform to gain exposure for their art (Enwezor 2010, p. 604). McLean (2013a, p. 167) argues that non-Western art is increasingly visible due to it being exhibited extensively on an international scale, leading to increased appreciation and familiarity, and the expansion of influence of non-Western artists and commentators on how contemporary art is defined by powerful institutions. That said, the concept of multiple modernisms has predominantly been discussed in the context of non-Western cultures in developing nations, but not in that of Indigenous cultures (McLean 2011). Indigenous art remains marginalised in the contemporary art environment, a phenomenon which this thesis seeks to understand.

Enwezor has expanded this background history to contemporary art through focusing on the relation between globalisation and colonisation (Enwezor et al. 2016). Enwezor explains that while globalisation is an effect of colonialism, it accelerated in the post-colonial period largely due to new technologies, and also due to the determination of Western world powers to establish a new political and economic order. A significant impact on this global order was the rapid extension of Western cultural imperialism around the world. These developments enabled worldwide participation in the contemporary art world, including participation by non-Western and Indigenous artists. Enwezor argues that the globalised art world motivates artists, theorists and institutions to uncover alternative cultural approaches to art; this includes understanding not only the impact of the West on the non-West, but also ways in which the non-West responded to and even influenced the West. My thesis aligns with the latter aspect

of Enwezor's project insofar as it examines alternative methods to curating Indigenous contemporary art that bring into focus the broader factors that impact the cultural, political and historical context of this art into view.

Contemporary art refers to Western art, but also to non-Western and Indigenous art. From the 1980s the contemporary art world, as a field of cultural activity and engagement, became an international forum, global and inclusive in its rhetoric. 'Contemporary' was no longer an adjective connoting newness or nowness, but an art category that announced the 'death' of modernism (Cuauhtémoc 2010; Meyer 2013). The idea of contemporary art as a global phenomenon runs throughout the work of McLean and Enwezor, but it is theorised extensively by Smith, whose theorisation of contemporary art offers an access point for Indigenous culture to participate in the discourse and the history of contemporary art. He argues that to make sense of what contemporary art is, we need first to question the notion of 'being contemporary', and of 'contemporaneity'. Being contemporary, he argues, is neither a nostalgic longing for the past, nor a view to an ideal future: it is the complex and meaningful state of operating in the present together with others (Smith 2008, 2011). Smith (2009, p. 6) regards contemporaneity as:

> manifesting itself not just in the unprecedented proliferation of art, or only in its seemingly infinite variegation, but above all in the emergence of, and contestation between, quite different ways of making art and communicating through it to others.

Smith's definition of contemporaneity indicates that there are many ways of being and these differences are communicated through art. Contemporary art has evolved in unique ways across the globe, in respect to the context and values of different societies, their cultural orientation, economic circumstances and governance, but according to Smith all people living in the present are contemporary (Smith 2008). Smith (2009, p. 6) refers to "togetherness" and "worldliness" as conditions for contemporary art. To illustrate that communities that live differently from the mainstream culture are also contemporary, Smith (2008) refers to this as "multeity, the parallel journey of difference". He acknowledges the differences between cultures, histories and identities, but locates those differences in the context of a single place and time, that is, the contemporary space, meaning 'right now'. It is this idea of global contemporary art that informs the exhibitions and curatorial strategies examined in this thesis.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is formed in dialogue with the art historical writings of McLean, Enwezor and Smith, but the work of social scientists is also fundamental to my research. Sociologist Laura Fisher's 2019 book *Aboriginal Art and Australian Society: Hope and Disenchantment*, investigates how the phenomenon of Indigenous art has influenced the social and political dynamics of Indigenous people in Australia. This thesis builds on Fisher's discussion of intercultural exchange, which she perceives as central to Indigenous art. However, Fisher's argument is limited to examining the impact of Indigenous art on Australian society and the ethical considerations for the Indigenous art 'project'. On the other hand, I extend the analysis to the international contemporary art world. In contrast to the sociological focus of Fisher, who aims at post-colonial critique, this research adopts an art historical approach, investigating the presentation of Indigenous art in the context of exhibitions of the last thirty years.

It is also worth noting the pioneering PhD thesis by Indigenous academic and curator Stephen Gilchrist, titled *Belonging and Unbelonging: Indigenous forms of Curation as Expressions of Sovereignty* (2020). Gilchrist's examines six major exhibitions curated by Indigenous curators. His study demonstrates just how significant Indigenous curators are to the exhibition of Indigenous art in the institutionalised environment in Australia and overseas. He argues that although Indigenous curators operate in Western dominated art institutions, they have successfully created a sovereign space for Indigenous art within them. Additionally, according to Gilchrist, the work of Indigenous curators has the potential to nourish the cultural practice, values and spirituality of the artists they exhibit. While I support Gilchrist's focus on the strength and importance of Indigenous curators, his case studies examine instances of groups of Indigenous artists exhibiting together. This thesis' focus in contrast is to analyse the status of Indigenous art, both grouped or independent, in a broader context of global contemporary art events.

Regarding additional scholarly publishing on fields relevant to this thesis, anthropologists have published extensively literature about Indigenous art. Fred Myers, an influential anthropologist in the field, has written extensively about the Western Desert art movement. Myers' recent writings are especially relevant to this thesis, in particular *Recalibrating the visual field: Indigenous curators and contemporary art* (2019, pp. 62-91) and *The Work of Art* (2020, pp. 211-222). Here, Myers specifically discusses the impact of Indigenous curators to Indigenous culture, highlighting the unique knowledge and insight of Indigenous curators.

To this extent his analysis aligns with this thesis. Unlike Myers, however, I position Indigenous art in the global contemporary art world, a space in which Indigenous art is routinely exhibited alongside the work of Western and non-Western artists with often vastly different cultural underpinnings.

My research thus fundamentally disagrees with Myers' argument that remote Indigenous art should seek to differentiate itself from contemporary art and seek to remain within a distinct cultural field (Myers 2019, pp. 70-86). Myers discusses this idea, which reflects Myers' anthropological view of Indigenous art as anchored in its cultural context, with reference to curators who operate across Western and Indigenous cultures, who author critical texts about Indigenous art (Myers 2020, p. 214). Through this curatorial discourse, Myers (2019, p. 84) argues, the Indigenous art field can operate beyond 'a hegemonic Western regime of value', which is anchored in local art history; instead, it can reside in a 'third space' outside contemporary art institutions. Myers' argument demands to be taken seriously, as it outlines a strategy for thinking about Indigenous art that would enlarge its autonomy. Certainly, the presentation of Indigenous art in contemporary art institutions, and the role of Indigenous curators within these institutions, is not without its challenges. Yet my research demonstrates that Indigenous curators already play a significant role in the existing landscape of contemporary art. The critical and commercial attention that Indigenous art receives in the contemporary art world – and the capacity for it to be exhibited alongside art from other cultural backgrounds – makes it a setting for the presentation of Indigenous art and culture that invites further analysis.

Aims and scope

There is a lack of understanding about how Indigenous art is exhibited in the contemporary art world, both in Australia and overseas. This thesis seeks to generate new knowledge on this topic by examining the curation of Indigenous art in significant exhibitions held in Australia and internationally between 1989 and 2015. The case studies are diverse in scale, context and function, and include Jean Hubert-Martin's *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989), Bernhard Lüthi's and Gary Foley's *Aratjara* (1993), Okwui Enwezor's 2002 *documenta11*, the 2008 Sydney Biennial *Revolutions – Forms That Turn*, the 2015 Venice Biennial *All the World's Futures*, and other events by Western, non-Western and Indigenous curators. In each case, I scrutinise the interplay of objects, texts and contexts in and around the exhibition, with

the goal of critically examining and considering what that exhibition communicates about the status of Indigenous art and the nature of its relationship to other forms of art from elsewhere. Before further outlining the aims of the present inquiry, I will explain its scope.

First, a word on the time period under consideration. 1989 is the year *Magiciens de la Terre* (*Magicians of the Earth)* featured at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle de la Villette. This ground-breaking exhibition of Western, non-Western and Indigenous art was the first show of its size to combine these artistic traditions. Martin's experimental and seemingly egalitarian treatment of the art on display, regardless of its origin, was conceived as a critical response to the perceived colonialism of other recent blockbuster exhibitions of Western alongside non-Western art (*"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York of 1984 the most famous among them). *Magiciens* was highly influential, anticipating experimental curatorial approaches to exhibiting non-Western and Indigenous art by subsequent curators such as Okwui Enwezor.

There are two further reasons why 1989 is the chronological starting point of my argument. Firstly, that year marks a turning point in the history of Indigenous art (McLean 2011; Myers 2002; Smith 2009). The 1980s saw rapid growth in public acquisitions and commissions; state funding reduced in the 1990s, and a local and international private market for Indigenous art was established. Due to the proximity of institutional and market forces, it is unsurprising that the 1990s witnessed the proliferation of Indigenous art exhibitions beyond Australia (Myers 2002). This thesis adds to the existing literature about the growth of Indigenous art during that and the subsequent decade by tracking several significant international events that cemented its newfound status as a valuable cultural commodity. The other reason for the nomination of 1989 as the starting point of this thesis is that it has been widely designated as the beginning of contemporary art (Danto & Goehr 1997). Periodisation of this kind is of course open to debate, but the coincidence of world political events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the globalisation of art via the intensification of a speculative market for art and expansion of the biennial circuit, which gave rise to an unprecedented cosmopolitan and spirit of experimentation in art, one manifestation of which was a non-Western openness to forms of non-Western and Indigenous art and post-colonial critique of mainstream art discourse, marking 1989 as a watershed moment. The starting point of this thesis, then, corresponds to the year contemporary art began, and the case studies analysed from the next 25 years are part of its unfolding. To this extent this thesis contributes to

existing scholarship on both the history of exhibition-making and the role of the curator in contemporary art, and enlarges understanding of the role of Indigenous art within the practice and discourse of contemporary art.

The diversity of my case studies is indicative of the heterogeneity of contemporary art itself. The culture of contemporary art is global in reach rather than fixed in a single location, but the way that Indigenous art is presented and theorised is contingent on place and institution. Therefore, in order to gain a broad overview of the general issue of how Indigenous art is shown in a contemporary art context, this thesis discusses exhibitions held not only in numerous towns and cities around Australia, but also internationally: North America and Western Europe primarily, but also Africa and Asia. The heterogeneity of exhibition locations is a counterpoint to the singular focus on art from remote communities. In opening this investigation to exhibitions from around the globe, my intention is to survey a myriad of curatorial approaches to exhibiting remote Indigenous art within the world of contemporary art to gain broad insight into this issue. As mentioned above in the literature survey, scholarly studies analysing how Indigenous art is exhibited in a contemporary art context are few. This thesis seeks to contribute new knowledge in this area – this is necessarily approached from a global perspective, since contemporary art is geographically dispersed. Furthermore, unless otherwise stated, when the term Indigenous art is used in this thesis, I refer to remote Indigenous art.

Within the extreme diversity of contemporary exhibition-making across the world, there are recurring tendencies in how Indigenous art is curated. For a culture that privileges novelty – avant-garde fashion and new media as well as progressive social and political agendas – there are numerous indications that colonial attitudes persist in today's contemporary art institutions. The latter continue to be dominated by Western values, and it has largely been assumed that non-Western art – a relatively recent inclusion in the contemporary art world – should assimilate to existing institutions and categories in order to prove their contemporaneity. An aim of this thesis is to critically examine these colonialist tendencies in contemporary art discourse and institutions. Through a close analysis of numerous case studies, my research reveals the lingering presence in recent exhibition-making of the West's historical prejudices against non-Western cultures, as manifest in practices of idealisation, romanticisation, and Othering. This research indicates, moreover, that primitivism and

exoticism still permeate contemporary curatorial practices. Accordingly, a goal of my work is to better understand the way that these prejudices constrain the exhibition of Indigenous art.

A related aim of this thesis is to analyse the disjuncture between the aesthetic conventions and cultural values that underpin contemporary art, which is still dominated by Western ideas, and the traditional knowledges and practices of Indigenous subjects – artists, curators, visitors and others – within the contemporary art world. The goal is to critically examine this disjuncture – and various responses to it by Western, non-Western and Indigenous curators – as it manifests in exhibitions of Indigenous art between 1989 and 2015. Undoubtedly, a reason for this disjuncture is the limited representation not only of Indigenous voices and perspectives in the contemporary art world. This thesis recognises that the curator – whose role expanded in contemporary art to assume a position of authorial influence that rivals that traditionally reserved for the artist – serves an important function as mediator between Western institutional frameworks and Indigenous culture. Insofar as curation make a difference in the world of contemporary art, then the identification of curatorial strategies that offer agency to Indigenous people, a stage for Indigenous voices, and a platform for learning about Indigenous culture and law is a worthwhile endeavour. This is a crucial motivation for this study.

A further aim of this thesis is to discuss major curatorial approaches to Indigenous art, pinpointing curators who have transformed their field such as Martin, for example, who was among the first to promote the contemporaneity of non-Western and Indigenous art in the West, and Enwezor, who critiqued the traditional centres of European and American art world power by prioritising the work of non-Western artists and reframing it as part of a global history of contemporary art, as reflected in his geographically decentralisation of *documenta11* in 2002. As well as assessing how these world-famous curators contributed to rethinking the curation of Indigenous art, an aim of this thesis is to examine the valuable work of Indigenous curators such as Djon Mundine and Margo Neale in the late 20th and early 21st century. In doing so, it is hoped that curatorial approaches that are unchartered in the broader discourse of prevailing accounts of exhibition histories in Australia and elsewhere will come to the fore. This research discusses general challenges facing Indigenous curators, which stem from their negotiations between Western cultural institutions and Indigenous art, and translating cultural and spiritual knowledge into the post-colonial narrative of Indigenous Australia. Indigenous curators thus have a difficult job: on the one hand, there is pressure to

preserve the integrity of the artworks on display, while simultaneously making it accessible to Western spectators and keeping abreast of developments in the global art industry. Finally, it is hoped that by enhancing knowledge of how Indigenous art is exhibited in the sphere of contemporary art, this thesis will contribute – even in a small way – to rethinking curatorial approaches to Indigenous art, and raise awareness about the innovative work performed by Indigenous curators today.

Chapter outline

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 (this chapter) has offered an introduction to the thesis, provided context, identified key issues, and outlined the aims and scope of this project.

Chapter 2 offers a theoretical framework and historical background to the study. The phenomenon of Indigenous art and its development from the 19th century to date is explored. The chapter investigates how the discourse on Indigenous art has changed over time, examining the exoticisation of it and the impact of movements such as primitivism and modernism. The rise of Indigenous art exhibitions followed by the rise of Indigenous curation is then investigated. The chapter highlights breakthrough strategies led by Indigenous curators that assisted in shedding a new light on Indigenous art. Finally, the emergence of the contemporary art world from the 1960s to recent years, with its temporary exhibitions and recurring events is studied to position Indigenous art within this development.

Chapter 3 offers an analysis to the 1989 Paris exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* (Magiciens of the earth), defined by its lead curator Jean-Hubert Martin as the first global exhibition of contemporary art. According to the curatorial team of the exhibition, its purpose was to bring to the same place art that came from the entire world, of diverse cultures, regardless of the different artists' notions of what art is. Despite the novelty of the event, it was criticised for the minimal context that was provided to the works. This case study argues that the vision of art institutions in France has been focused on a single Western modernity; as such, in *Magiciens,* instead of highlighting the uniqueness of each artist it ignored their differences and portrayed an imagined universality.

Chapter 4 focuses on the 16th Biennale of Sydney, curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. It discusses the ways in which exhibitions of Indigenous art in the context of a global contemporary art event has changed since the late 20th century. This Sydney Biennial featured an unprecedented number of Australian artists; however, it included only one Indigenous artist from a remote area, Doreen Reid Nakamarra from the Western Desert. Christov-Bakargiev positioned Reid's work alongside installations by Western artists, it is argued, in order to legitimise her work as contemporary. This chapter questions the curator's success in featuring Indigenous art according to its unique cultural underpinnings, that is, in bringing Reid's culture to the forefront of the exhibition.

In Chapter 5 there is a shift in emphasis, rather than discussing the work of Western curators, it focuses on the work of Indigenous curator Djon Mundine and his peers. The role of Indigenous curators, and the possibilities and challenges this role entails are examined in this chapter. Indigenous curators, this chapter reveals, can foster Indigenous agency, portray the cultural motivation of Indigenous artists, and remove the 'outsider' label for Indigenous art. By analysing the motivations of Indigenous curators, this chapter argues that they perform important cultural, social and political responsibilities, which are entangled in the politics of contemporary art.

Chapter 6 examines the legacy of Nigerian-American curator Okwui Enwezor, and his historic inclusion of the artwork of renowned Indigenous artist Emily kame Kngwarreye in the 2015 Venice Biennale. Enwezor developed useful strategies to navigate issues such as limited awareness about cultural diversity or awareness based on stereotypes and stigmas. Enwezor's exhibition of Emily alongside artists Ellen Gallagher (born in Providence, USA) and Huma Bhabha (born in Karachi, Pakistan), pointed out to her identity as an activist Indigenous Elder. This curatorial approach positioned Emily in a global art discourse, which emphasised the political struggles of women of colour with a distinct cultural heritage. Enwezor's experience and success in securing a solid position for non-Western art are analysed in this chapter to draw conclusions about the potential for the exhibition of Indigenous art in the contemporary art world.

The 7th and concluding chapter focuses on how this thesis fulfilled its aim through the findings in its four case studies. It sharpens the core argument of this thesis: that Indigenous

art needs to be curated through specialised strategies. Chapter 7 also suggests necessary research for the future.

Chapter 2 - Theoretical Framework and Historical Context

There is a lack of critical literature that addresses the status of Indigenous art within the contemporary art world. Notable exceptions include art historians Ian McLean and Terry Smith, who have both written extensively about the topic; Indigenous curators have also contributed a substantial body of texts on this topic. This chapter will highlight significant existing texts by scholars and curators on the topic of the exhibition of Indigenous art within the broader field of contemporary art. It will contextualise the research undertaken in this thesis by framing it in relation to these texts, which together form the background for the scholarly inquiry undertaken in my research.

This is a multidisciplinary thesis in which the boundaries between several methodological frameworks are blurred. This hybrid approach is well-suited for critically engaging with contemporary art, which Terry Smith (2011) defines has an all-inclusive and all-encompassing category. A significant aim of this chapter is to trace a change of perspective over time towards Indigenous art from the 1950s until the present day. In Australia the lack of recognition of Indigenous art as art persisted until the mid-1950s, at which time anthropologists advocated for its presentation in art institutions (Thomas 1976, p. 281). The exhibition of Indigenous art in art institutions caused debate between anthropologists and art authorities about how it should be presented (Fisher 2012a, p. 177). Whereas anthropologists advocated for a focus on Indigenous culture when exhibiting Indigenous art, art authorities tended to focus on the aesthetic features of the works apart from social-scientific discourse. Art writers have generally been preoccupied with the links between Indigenous art and the Euro-American modernist tradition, an approach adopted in Australia and overseas (Fisher 2016, p. 131).

The debate between art historians and anthropologists concerning the status of Indigenous art within the contemporary art world is ongoing. Accordingly, this thesis is informed by both approaches to Indigenous art: art historians who enhance the inclusive environment in the art world, and examine art-historical frameworks such as ‘multiple modernisms’ and ‘multiple histories’, and anthropologists who discuss the cultural influences on the art but support the presentation of Indigenous art as fine art. This is in keeping with the approach offered by Indigenous curators who emphasise the lives of Indigenous people as intertwined with

modernity. As this thesis focuses on the relationships between Indigenous art and a broader contemporary art world, I therefore draw from a diverse array of social scientists, economists, cultural theorists, Indigenous studies experts and museologists. These disciplinary perspectives contribute to the complexity of the discourse on Indigenous art. Relevant materials from diverse disciplines are discussed in turn, and in relation to particular chapters.

This chapter first outlines different historical periods in the participation of Indigenous art in the contemporary art world, exploring the socio-political influences and perspectives that have shaped the Indigenous art movement. Commencing with events from the 19th century, as sketching a broad background to the case studies of exhibitions explored in the next chapters (starting with the 1989 *Magicians of the Earth*). It examines the 1970s and 1980s as important years in the development of Indigenous art; this period is foundational to the rise of the Indigenous art movement, when the Western Desert collective was established, and significant market activities started to take place in Australia and overseas. Following this, the engagement of Indigenous curators – a key development in the Australian art field at that time – is highlighted. The focus on Indigenous curation is fundamental to understanding theoretical approaches to Indigenous art curation since the late 20th century. Finally, the chapter highlights dominant characteristics of the contemporary art world since its rise, a development that largely coincides with the emergence of the Indigenous art movement. The primary focus here is on the development and definition of contemporary art, the rise of international art fairs and biennales, and the audiences that attend contemporary art events. A subsidiary topic in this chapter will be the endorsement of cultural diversity within the contemporary art world, and the challenges of Indigenous art exhibition within it despite that alleged endorsement.

A history of the primitive

Perspectives on Indigenous art have shifted substantially across different historical periods as well as between the disciplines of anthropology, art history and sociology. Art historian Susan Lowish's book *Rethinking Australia's Art History: The Challenge of Aboriginal Art* (2018) – a foundational work that fills in some of the historical background to my own research – provides a clear and insightful account of the historical period between 1789 and 1929 to trace the origins of Indigenous art history. As will be discussed later in this chapter, it is an 'art history' that is only recent; however, Lowish gives the earliest engagements with

Indigenous art a critical place in the European discourses around Indigenous art, underpinning what we might refer to as Indigenous art history. She demonstrates how the Indigenous art category that we take for granted today in fact emerged from texts written in the 19th century, when Indigenous art was largely referred to as a form of primitive art.

Lowish examines how 'Aboriginal art' was presented before the term emerged, where typically degrading terminology was used in systems of classification, underpinned by racist theories of biological and cultural evolution (Lowish 2011). Clearly the settler colonials in Australia were aware of the existence of Indigenous[1] people, however, the colonial project could not allow Indigenous people to be regarded on equal terms: the legal classification of Australia as *terra nullius* ('empty land', land owned by nobody), meant that equal recognition could imperil the legitimacy of colonisation. Recognising Indigenous art as art, would be an act of recognising the cultural equality of Indigenous people (Fisher 2012a, pp. 118-119). Moreover, as Indigenous art was largely related to ceremonial contexts and was essentially ephemeral, Europeans could not readily recognise it as 'art' as they understood the term. According to Lowish (2018, p. 28), as disciplinary insights and scientific theories developed, the 'artistic abilities' of Indigenous people were gradually recognised within the terms of the evolving ethnographic discourse.

Early European settlers to Australia were reluctant to credit Indigenous people for their creative and artistic talents (Lowish 2018, p. 34). In 1789 Governor Phillip regarded sandstone rock art carved into the cliffs around Sydney Harbour as "fairly good and satisfactory accomplishments" (cited in Lowish 2018, p. 28). In the explorer Allan Cunningham's expedition notes of 1818 to 1822, reference was made to Aboriginal art as "fine art" (Lowish 2018, p. 31). Around that time, explorer George Grey noticed that "a vast difference in skill exists between the execution of cave drawings in different parts of the country" (cited in Lowish 2018, p. 33). Although Grey is known for having argued in 1838 that rock art of the Kimberly region in northern Western Australia could not have been produced by Indigenous Australians due to the sophistication of the artwork and the apparent

[1] The term 'Indigenous' refers to people who identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both, and is commonly used by Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers in recent literature in this, or parallel fields of study (see for example Gilchrist 2020a, McLean 2020, Janke 2021). Throughout this thesis I will follow this usage of the term.

primitiveness of the people (he speculated that the art of the Wandjina was produced by earlier European travellers, possibly Greeks or Romans), Lowish (2018, p. 34) argues that Grey in fact was a religious man, passionate about the ‘civilisation’ of Indigenous people. This demonstrates that if Grey had ‘good intentions’, his aim was to draw attention to the commonalities between Indigenous and European art making as a ‘civilised’ practice, rather than legitimise Indigenous art making as an activity underpinned by particular Indigenous traditions. These examples of early engagement with Indigenous art by the coloniser demonstrate a critical development in the recognition of Indigenous art, from a non-existing practice, to a somewhat existing one. The explorers recorded early art-making practices that survey a range of strategic, intellectual and practical responses to the conditions of modernity as seen through European eyes, forming a foundation to an Indigenous art history.

Subsequent discourse on Indigenous art came from a predominantly anthropological perspective; an engagement with Indigenous art premised on its rarity and exoticism, which appealed to European aesthetic perusal (McLean 2011, p. 13). Walter Baldwin Spencer for example, was regarded as the ‘pioneer’ of Australian anthropology in relation to early 20th century Indigenous art, he had an international reputation which placed him in contact with leading international anthropologists. Spencer was an evolutionary botanist by training and an ethnologist, who, with Alice Spring postmaster Frank Gillen, undertook extensive research into the lives and beliefs of Arrernte people in Central Australia in the late 19th century. In 1896 Spencer and Gillen conducted thorough fieldwork together, unique of its kind in Australia at that time (Mulvaney 1990). The purpose for their publication, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899), was to inspire new knowledge about the social influences for art and spirituality, and how these have been interpreted and developed over time. Spencer was appointed the first ‘Protectors of Aboriginal People’ in the Northern Territory in 1911, when the Territory was ceded from the State of South Australia and placed under Commonwealth administration. Spencer’s initial task was to provide a report to the federal government on the ‘conditions of the aborigines’ in northern Australia and he provided advice to the newly established federal government of Australia about the segregation of remote Aboriginal people on to designated ‘reservations’, and assimilation of people of mixed Aboriginal and European heritage (Lowish 2018, p. 141); this was referred to at the time as attending to the ‘the Aborigine problem’.

Indigenous art and artefacts were appreciated in European circles for their exoticism and rarity, but excluded as a standalone art form from the existing art canon of the time (McLean 2011, p. 13). Spencer was convinced that Indigenous people would be extinct in the future, therefore, he recorded information about, and collected items of Indigenous material culture as evidence and testimonial to their cultural and creative practice. On an official assignment to Arnhem Land Spencer witnessed Aboriginal men painting in ochre on bark panels inside wet-weather shelters. Spencer commissioned fifty bark paintings in exchange for tobacco, appreciating the works for their aesthetic appeal, not just their anthropological interest (Thomas 2011, pp. 5-6). The collection was deemed to have artistic merit and was exhibited in 1912 at the Victorian Artists' Society in Melbourne in the context of Australian fine art. Indigenous art at the time was largely seen as a subject for ethnographic research, where 'artworks' and 'artefacts' were associated with what was regarded as 'primitive art' (Lowish 2009; Myers 2002).

In the 19th century explorers started to refer to art found in their expeditions as 'Aboriginal art' and to acknowledge the artists' abilities to create skilful 'art' despite their categorisation of it as 'primitive' (Lowish 2018). By the early 20th century the diversity, originality and creativity of Indigenous art was increasingly noticed, especially by those who came in contact with it. Spencer is a notable example (Lowish 2018, p. 146). His growing appreciation for Indigenous art was influenced by his developing relationships with Indigenous people and his accumulated knowledge of their culture. Likewise, some European settlers also observed the work of Indigenous artists with interest from differing perspectives including cultural, historical, and art studies (Thomas 2011, p. 8). The influence of Aboriginal art on European Australians was increasingly evident in the decades after the First World War and especially after the 1940s, and began having an impact in European circles. These early signs of appreciation were a starting point for the later reception of Indigenous art in the art world in the latter decades of the 20th century.

The roles that anthropologists played in Australia became more varied from the early 20th century in that, while they all championed Indigenous art as a vital form of contemporary cultural expression, some actively advocated for the recognition and inclusion of Indigenous art in the Australian art category in institutions and collections. The anthropological focus on Indigenous art between the 1930s and 1960s emphasised the uniqueness of Indigenous designs as stemming from a 'dying culture' (Fisher 2012a, pp. 47, 55). As anthropologists

increasingly engaged with Aboriginal communities and cultures, they realised that these were not dying out as was popularly believed. Hence, they often became the advocates for the reservation of Aboriginal cultures in the face of government assimilation programs. Both these approaches were then emblematic in a commercial market for Indigenous art and design, offering a connection between Indigenous art and modernity (Fisher 2012b, pp. 47, 55). Although anthropologists of the early 20th century showed keen interest in Indigenous culture and art, their way of intervention and underlying motivation were based on their agenda as Western scientists.

Despite the advocacy offered at the time by anthropologists to Indigenous people, academic Laura Fisher (2012b, pp. 55–58) names them 'arty anthropologists'. This alludes to the early interest in Indigenous art as an attempt to assimilate Indigenous peoples into Western society, that is, the assumption was that by demonstrating that Indigenous culture and interests (such as artmaking) resemble those in the West, as a universal form, Indigenous people would blend into Western culture. It was hoped, according to Fisher, that by pointing out those links, Indigenous people would be accepted by, and integrated into Western society (Fisher 2012b, pp. 55-58). For example, anthropologists A.P. Elkin and Leonhard Adam assisted missionary Reverend Edgar Wells to promote to art collectors and dealers from Sydney and Melbourne art from eastern Arnhem land (Morphy 2011, pp. 156-157). Nonetheless, Elkin was Australia's most enthusiastic advocate of Aboriginal assimilation (Fisher 2012b, p. 56). In his writings, he particularly emphasised the aesthetic qualities of the works rather than the culture and identity of their makers (Elkin 1950). Thus, Western attitudes towards Indigenous art at that time failed to recognise and embrace its unique context, and in that failed to either accept or bridge the cultural difference. Nonetheless, as we shall see later in this chapter, 20th century anthropologists held different approaches concerning Indigenous art, and some held strong opinions about the need to present Indigenous art in the context of its cultural narrative.

Modernity, modernism and primitivism

A prevalence of Eurocentric thought, underpinned by persisting impacts of colonisation and modernism in the West, Western perspectives on history and a residual 'primitivism' have continued to exert a significant influence on the discourse on Indigenous art. The degree of marginalisation of Indigenous art in the contemporary art world can be understood through an

exploration of the historical conditions of modernity. Indigenous people were marginalised from the early days of colonisation, the discriminatory ground had been laid, upon which subsequent generations reconfirmed and entrenched the marginalisation. During the aforementioned George Grey's expedition to the north-west and Western Australia of 1838–39 he questioned the source of the Kimberly paintings: "Whatever may be the age of these paintings, it is scarcely probable that they could have been executed by a self-taught savage. Their origin, therefore must still be open to conjecture" (Grey 1841). Grey's pronouncements on the existence and origins of Kimberly art in 1838 provided the grounds of racist speculation for over one hundred years (Morphy 1998).

While modernity "can refer to any period of radical change", for the purpose of this thesis it will be considered in terms of the modernisation of society and culture following on from the 1870s when new ways of thinking and acting were adopted in Europe (Buchanan 2016, p. 325). It relates to conventional manufacturing strategies in industrialised countries, where "the cultural condition in which the seemingly absolute necessity of innovation becomes a primary fact of life, work and thought" (Smith 1996, p. 777-78). However, the experience of *Modernity* was different in different places and to different people, different societies have experienced modernity differently, and this experience has impacted their position in the art world.

In the West, modernity brought advancement and livelihood while in other parts of the world it brought dependency and destruction. According to Enwezor's (2010, p. 611) theory, the 'first world' and the grand narrative of modernity, consisted of a dominant centre of highly 'advanced' development from which it derives its power. This is the centre of global modernity (and capitalism) from which all subsequent discourse of modernity 'must' be derived. Western secular notions of 'individual liberty', 'political sovereignty', 'democratic forms of governance', and 'capitalism', formed the basis of the European model of modernity, and underpinning the justification of global imperialism (Enwezor 2010, pp. 595-596). In contrast, Africa for instance, emerged from modernity to become a post-colonial continent. Modernity in Africa represented the state that followed on from the oppression brought on by colonialism (Enwezor 2010, p. 613).

The modernisation of Western society impacted the art world in such ways that several aesthetic movements, including Modernism and Primitivism, were on the rise during a period

in art history from the 1850s to the 1950s, movements that would later impact the reception of Indigenous art into the contemporary art world. The modernist movement was roughly concurrent with the era of industrialisation in the West and was a Western phenomenon corresponding with capitalism and colonisation (Smith 2009, p. 6). Formative events of that time included the expansion of metropolitan regions, the widespread secularisation of society and the emergence of nation states. Developments in the art world were driven by shifting values: from community values to individualism; from a preoccupation with history to experimentation and innovation (TATE 2021). Artists rejected the past and searched for new approaches and forms to create art (McLean 2014b; Sutton 1989). Modernist artists were determined to break the old order and express ideas that were responsive to the time, for instance through concepts such as ‘art for art’s sake’ which referred to artistic freedom, away from predefined political or intellectual requirements, and ‘secularism’ which deemphasised religion (Sooke 2014). Modernism was driven by a strong emphasis on aesthetics and emotional expression, aiming to erase the rational from the process of art making (Foster et al. 2004, pp. 617-618). Certain of these values, for example the movement away from valuing community, and the suppression of religion, would limit the inclusion of Indigenous art in the contemporary art world (Fisher 2016, p. 86).

Another modernist factor contributing to the marginalisation of Indigenous art is the rise of primitivism, an art movement critical to any discussion about Indigenous art, as its implications are still prevalent in the art world today. Primitivism was an art style that emerged during the modernist period, at the end of the 19th century, inspired by imagery and subjects from non-Western cultures on a superficial level, aiming to inform the creative practice of artists in the West (Goldwater 1986; McLean 2014b). The primitivist movement did not per se borrow ideas or attempt to properly understand non-Western cultures but rather, it provided early modernists with alternative influences to those emerging from their immediate vicinity, a newly-industrialised, largely urban world. Artists engaged with primitivism used ancient European art and artefacts from Africa and the South Pacific to inform their own creative research (TATE 2019). Since non-Western artists at this time lacked recognition in mainstream institutions, their art gained its initial exposure in Europe second-hand, through the primitivist art movement. Distant places, the homes of those artists, were romanticised by European artists as unspoiled, and even as prototypes of paradise (Goldwater 1986). The appeal of non-Western cultures to the primitivist movement derived from their exotic rarity; artists who produced artworks based on this source material include

Paul Sérusier, Pablo Picasso and Paul Gauguin. Modernists engaged with primitivism were seeking to recreate a 'primitive' experience through their art. Primitivism accentuated an imagined superiority of Western artists, and in contrast, suppressed aspects of non-Western and Indigenous cultures that fell outside their exoticising vision. This despite non-Western artists' influence on primitivist art. Chapter 3 discusses the enduring legacy of primitivism in relation to the exhibition *"Primitivism" in Twentieth Century Art. Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (Fig. 1), curated by William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe, and held in 1984 at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City. Although intended as a critical interrogation of the phenomenon, my chapter demonstrates how the exhibition reinforces existing stereotypes about non-Western cultures that modernists artists appropriated for their own ends.

The use of the term 'primitive' in the Western art world as a description of something or someone 'Other', exotic, less civilised and less developed, reveals its perspective on non-Western art. One notable example, the exhibition *"Primitivism"*, regarded all non-Western art, including Indigenous art, as primitive and abstract, dismissing the cultural meaning of the works (Lamoureux 2005, pp. 66-68). It appeared as though the only purpose for non-Western art to have been exhibited in this instance alongside the Western masters was to support them and their concepts of the artworks on display (Myers 2006, pp. 270-271). This colonial attitude explicates the challenge faced by Indigenous artists when exhibiting in the contemporary art world – stereotypes such as 'the primitive' have prevented an unprejudiced examination and assessment of their artworks.

In the 1950s, the term 'primitive', which underpinned the primitivist movement, was met with resistance by those regarded as such, followed by delegitimisation of the term (Leuli 2019; McLean 2011b; Myers 2006). At that time James Baldwin (1953, p. 45) wrote: "The black man insists, by whatever means he finds at his disposal, that the white man ceases to regard him as an exotic rarity and recognize (sic) him as a human being". Baldwin objects to the West's view of non-Western people as primitive; he insists that a shift must occur. By 2012, the American-Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor observed such a shift, which he named the "collapse of distance"; he dismissed the search for exotic places and people as no longer relevant; non-Western people have already been 'discovered', and exotic places have already been 'found' (Enwezor cited in Khazam 2012). The notion of the 'primitive' had been replaced by an understanding based on hybrid connections between the West and other

cultures, and the awareness that each culture carries a particular background and heritage (Enwezor cited in Khazam 2012). However, the idea that people and places that are not in the West are primitive, and the resulting class and race hierarchies, continued well into the late 20th century and are ingrained even today in Western society (Leuli 2019, p. 97).

The history of Indigenous art exhibition

Indigenous art started to be exhibited in museums for fine art once it had been recognised as 'art', but this recognition happened gradually. This is important because art exhibitions are the content that forms art history, and through them artists become known to curators and the broader public (Mendelssohn et al. 2018, p. 16). The combination of directing, curating and reviewing exhibitions professionally establishes the foundation for critical evaluations of artworks and other creations (Myers 2002). A shift towards a new type of assessment, evaluation and discourse about Indigenous art started in 1939, when the Art Gallery of South Australia acquired for the first time an artwork by an Indigenous artist from the Hermannsburg community, Albert Namatjira (Mackenzie 2000). Exceptional for this period, the work entitled *Illum-Baura (Haasts Bluff)* was hung alongside works by Western artists. Thereafter, from the late 1950s and especially the early 1970s, art curators, critics and historians began to develop their interest in Australian Indigenous art and took a more primary role in advocating that the exhibition of Indigenous art should take place in institutions for fine art, alongside modernist art, rather than in museums for natural history (Fisher 2012b; McLean 2011).

Ronald Berndt (1916-1990) and Catherine Berndt (1918-1994) supported the context and cultural significance of Indigenous art, while promoting its appreciation in modernist circles. They invested significant energy into increasing the popularity of Indigenous art, particularly in the context of fine art exhibitions, changing its earlier placement in an ethnographic context (Morphy 2001, p. 39). They were powerful art collectors, especially knowledgeable about the different meanings of art from Arnhem Land, and they published important texts about Indigenous art and instigated numerous exhibitions (Fisher 2012a, pp. 63 - 64). David Jones Art Gallery in Sydney, a gallery known for its exhibitions of modernist works, hosted an exceptional exhibition of Indigenous art in 1949, curated by the Berndts (Morphy 2001, 2011). They encouraged a distinct way of appreciating Indigenous art, removed from some

key European principles to assess art according to its modernist style and aesthetic form (Lowish 2018, p. 77).

In contrast to the anthropologists discussed so far, after the 1950s the Berndts were very significant to Indigenous art history, when they argued that Indigenous art needed to be presented in art exhibitions in the context of its cultural narrative (Lowish 2018, p. 77). However, their vision was never fully endorsed, even more so, attitudes rejecting it surfaced in the art world. Anthropologist A. P. Elkin for instance critiqued this approach, by citing the lack of attention the exhibition received from art critics (Fisher 2012b, p. 56). These differing approaches for the exhibition of Indigenous art, one that focuses on its cultural context, and the other on its modernist characteristic are critiqued in the following chapters of this thesis. The early and nuanced approach offered by the Berndts is used as a model for the curation of Indigenous art.

For the first time in 1957, the individual names and language groups of the artists, as well as the regions with which they were associated, were mentioned in the exhibition *Australian Aboriginal Art: Arnhem Land Paintings on Bark and Carved Human Forms* (Fisher 2012b, p. 64). This exhibition, held at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, was also instigated by the Berndts. It highlighted the identity, cultural background, and geographical context of the participating artists, while simultaneously supporting the relationship of Indigenous art to modernism; this was unusual for the conventional practice of that time. The contribution of the Berndts is noteworthy as they pioneered the notion that contextual information about Indigenous art needed to be exhibited alongside the works themselves.

The AGNSW adopted a new vision for its cultural diversity when the state of New South Wales requested that all government-funded institutions offer a stage for diverse cultures (Ang 2005; Thomas 2011). The objective of the AGNSW subsequently expanded to display art from around the world, as well as to provide a substantial exhibition platform to Indigenous artists (Thomas 2011). A further development in the discourse took place in 1947, when a major public art gallery, the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), acquired its first Indigenous artwork, a watercolour by Edwin Pareroultja from the Hermannsburg community, entitled *Amielda George* (Russ 2021). Before 1940 the gallery had not collected Indigenous art. There were pictures with Indigenous themes being collected but these were in the collections of other types of institutions, including the Australian Museum and the Macleay Museum, and by individual collectors (Russ 2021). The AGNSW's vision at that

time was still significantly impacted by conventional practices in France and England, and it did not have major financial capital for the acquisitions of art; the gallery was also unsupportive of Australian modernist artists (Johnson 1997). From the 1950s, the gallery became a leader in collecting Indigenous art from remote communities (Thomas 2011). These shifts represented a starting point for the formation of a relationship between Indigenous and contemporary art, given the novelty of their exhibition under the one roof of the art gallery.

Another significant event in the prehistory of the connection between Indigenous art and contemporary art is the AGNSW's acquisition, from the late 1950s, of Tiwi Island *tutini* (burial poles) and Yirrkala bark paintings. The purchase was initiated by Tony Tuckson, who had been appointed in 1947 as assistant director of the AGNSW and went on to become an important advocate for Indigenous art (Thomas 2011, p. 4). While at the time Indigenous art was categorised as 'primitive art', Tuckson, as an abstract painter, saw commonalities between his own practice (Fig. 2) and that of Indigenous artists – he perceived Indigenous art in a modernist spirit, as participating in an imagined universality (Fisher 2012b, p. 184). Following on from this perspective, from the 1970s, some art associates, critics, and agents – including Tuckson, figures such as art historian and former NGA curator Daniel Thomas and curator Terence Maloon – viewed the anthropological framing of Indigenous art as a barrier to the inclusion of Indigenous art in art institutions (Stewart 1974, p. 8). They shifted away from the anthropological approach as a tool to investigate society through anthropological categories, and instead used art to adopt a critical art-historical approach that focused on individual artists and their work (Fisher 2012a; Morphy 2001). This sentiment is repeatedly identified in the case studies for this thesis: formalism remains one of the dominant approaches to thinking about Indigenous visual culture in the contemporary art world.

It is against this backdrop that a market for Indigenous art emerged. Alongside developments in the Australian socio-political environment in the 1960s and 1970s, the establishment of Indigenous communities and policies and politics of self-determination, government interest and input into Indigenous art also emerged. The 1970s federal government push to support and promote Indigenous art coincided with the rise of a new art movement in the Papunya community in the Northern Territory of Australia. At that time, when schoolteacher Geoffrey Bardon spent eighteen months with the original Papunya painters, he saw "tribal men and elders painting depictions of their ceremonial lives onto scraps of discarded building material" (Bardon & Bardon 2018). His idea was to introduce Western materials to the

creative practice of Indigenous Australians [2]. Traditionally, Indigenous men painted in initiation ceremonies, when cultural knowledge was passed on from Elders to young men in the community. During ceremonies, collaborative painting occurred on the sand and on the human body. When Indigenous artists worked on canvas, they were more inclined to work alone, each individual artist painted one canvas. The ideas for the artworks produced by the Papunya men were fruits of their own cultural influences, imagination and creativity; their designs depicted Dreamings[3] and stories from the land (Morphy 1998; Myers 2002). The Papunya men became accustomed to transferring cultural knowledge including body painting and ceremony through art. They painted on modern materials that were later sold outside of their community (Bardon & Bardon 2018). Bardon understood how the market for modernist art could benefit Indigenous Australians (Bardon & Bardon 2018). However, as will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis, by focusing primarily on the resemblance of Indigenous art to the Western modernist tradition, the original cultural context for Indigenous art is overlooked.

In the 1970s and 1980s, when the contemporary art movement established its presence in the world, the Indigenous art movement simultaneously began to thrive. This is not a coincidence; developments in the world of the colonisers, such as the establishment of new art institutions and shifts in the curatorial practice, were felt in remote Indigenous Australia (Green 2001). The designs from the Papunya Tula company fitted the concurrent discourses of late modernism and neo-expressionism, the production of the paintings was influenced by trends from the Western art world and adhered to its criteria, as noted by Morphy (1998, p. 291), “they appealed to a modernist aesthetic”. The established contemporary art industry provided a platform for displaying and trading Papunya paintings, this included support and interest from the Australian Government. The Alice Springs *Caltex Art Award* was won by Kaapa Tjampitjinpa from the Papunya community in August 1971 after the district’s Patrol Officer Jack Cooke nominated his work for the exhibition (Kean 2023). After this initial milestone, unprecedented Indigenous art events were conducted internationally, with displays in Indonesia, Canada and Nigeria occurring in 1974. Thereafter, individual artworks and

[2] It should be noted that recent scholarship questions the context in which artists from Papunya first started to create paintings for trade and how this was marketed, see for instance John Kean’s publication ‘Dot Circle and Frame: The Making of Papunya Tula Art’ (2023).
[3] Tjukurpa (Dreaming) represent law and the creation of land and people. It provides a template for living in the ‘right way’. It was passed on through performance, ceremony and mark making, and it bound everyone to the land (Myers 2002).

entire bodies of work were donated by the Indigenous Art Board to governments overseas, including the Canadian and Korean governments, to promote the emerging Indigenous art movement and avoid excessive art production (Myers 2001). In the 1980s, significant Indigenous art movements developed in remote communities, supporting Indigenous artists in their practice and legitimating their status within the broader art world.

By the late 1980s – the chronological starting point of this thesis – the category of Indigenous art was fully recognised by Australian art museums, and art movements such as Papunya Tula were recognised in major Australian art events and contemporary art institutions. The National Gallery of Australia (NGA) purchased its first artwork from Papunya, Old Mick Tjakamarra's *Honey Ant Dreaming* (1973), in 1980. In that same year the Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA) acquired its first acrylic painting, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri's *Men's Love Story* (1978). This work was also exhibited at the AGSA's contemporary art section (Myers 2002). A significant milestone in 1981 was the display of three major artworks from the Western Desert alongside other Australian art at the inaugural Australian Perspecta (AGNSW) (Myers 2002; Russ 2021; Sturgeon 1982). A mosaic designed by Western Desert artist Michael Nelson Tjakamarra was unveiled in 1988 in the forecourt of the new Parliament House in Canberra. In that same year, Indigenous art and culture obtained significant exposure and promotion in the Bicentennial (Myers 2002). On November 9, 1994 the Yiribana Gallery, a dedicated exhibition space for Indigenous art at the AGNSW, was launched to the public, by which time the status of Indigenous art as a legitimate form of contemporary art was cemented. The AGNSW planned to increase its level of Indigenous art acquisitions and exhibitions , it had at the time the most comprehensive gallery in Australia for Indigenous art exhibition (Art Gallery of New South Wales 1997). It is the developments of curatorial approaches for Indigenous art from this turning point onwards that this thesis is concerned with, and the shifting status of this art in the contemporary art world.

Many exhibitions in a variety of cultural contexts followed the 1980s Indigenous art boom. A prominent institution within the landscape of Australian contemporary art, The Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in Sydney increased its collection and presentation of Indigenous art in the 1990s (Wallace 2000; Wells & Daniell 2012). From 1967 its collection was located at the University of Sydney, first known as the Power Gallery, where Indigenous art has been collected since the mid-1980s. With support from the local New South Wales government, the university's collection was relocated to the MCA building in Sydney's Circular Quay in

1989, and by 1991 the museum opened to the public (Wallace 2000, p. 33). John Wardell Power, a graduate of the University of Sydney, prompted the museum's relocation. The Power Bequest, which in 1968 established the Power Institute of Fine Art at the University of Sydney, included funds to establish a museum of contemporary art, with the aim of exposing Australians to global art trends. Mainly European contemporary art was collected in the 1970s, but during the 1980s the focus shifted to Australian contemporary art, including a significant collection of Indigenous art, largely from Arnhem Land. This thesis investigates what curatorial strategies were implemented for the presentation of Indigenous art in major institutions for contemporary art such as the MCA.

In response to the above-depicted developments in the Indigenous art field, art historian Ian McLean presents in his book *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art* (2011) an optimistic art-historical perspective. He states, for example, that Indigenous art from the Papunya community has become a 'legitimate' contemporary art movement. This marks a dramatic shift away from the way in which Papunya Tula was regarded in the early 1970s, at which time it was, McLean writes, widely seen as:

> an historical aberration lacking legitimacy because the paintings had seemingly arrived from outside rather than through any internal artworld prerogative. At this time the Australian artworld was adrift from its familiar moorings and anxiously learning to navigate the cross currents of postmodernism. Most considered the Papunya paintings a distraction, more an exotic curiosity than serious art business (McLean 2011a, p. 13).

McLean (2011, p. 13) asserts that in the 1980s the art world had embraced Papunya Tula paintings, alluding to the growing recognition of Indigenous art in that decade: "The artworld's hesitant curiosity about Papunya Tula painting quickly became an embrace. It grew into the most significant development of late-twentieth-century Australian art". Despite McLean's assertion that the art world had embraced Papunya Tula, Papunya and subsequent Indigenous movements were embraced in a limited manner, and predominantly within the late modernist discourse of the time. As will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the situation has shifted since the late 20th century, which has witnessed new approaches to exhibition of Indigenous art. This thesis critiques both modernist approaches to writing and curating

Indigenous art. In response, it examines alternative curatorial strategies for exhibiting this art, strategies that better highlight the cultural context of its production.

Other scholars have pointed to the shortfalls of assessing Indigenous art according to Western frameworks. Laura Fisher (2016, p. 131) claims that the contemporary art world continues to resist the cross-cultural meaning of Indigenous art. Fisher acknowledges the complex circumstances in which anthropological theories of Indigenous art has been branded as colonial and consequently disparaged. The consequence is that contemporary art appreciation has come to be abysmally superficial, and ultimately to do a disservice to contemporary Indigenous art:

> we seem to be facing a situation in which Aboriginal art must be denuded of many of its properties, even those that might be intrinsic to its meaning and its uniqueness, if it is to be enfranchised as contemporary art.

In the context of this thesis, this quote from Fisher suggests that the contemporary art world is conditioning Indigenous art to resemble to Western art, stripped from its meaning, as if its original intent and cultural underpinnings do not matter at all. From a Western point of view, Fisher argues, the translation of works to the contemporary art world denudes them of cultural significance; hence, Indigenous art and culture is interpreted in terms of the Eurocentric definitions for art, and it is denied a fuller recognition. That said, Fisher (2016, p. 131) sees reason for optimism in “the complexity of the cross-cultural encounter taking place, and the relative infancy of this field of art research”. This suggests there is potential for the significance of Indigenous art to increase in the eyes of art associates and audiences when they are made aware of the complexity and diversity of Indigenous culture. Art from diverse cultures has gained significant exposure in the international contemporary art world, however, Indigenous art has not enjoyed the same level of success, as for instance the limited inclusion of it in Okwui Enwezor’s leading international exhibitions and events (as will be discussed in Chapter 6) (McLean 2013b, 2014c). This indicates the challenge of curating Indigenous art in a contemporary art context, which the curators, discussed in following chapters, deal with in different ways.

A primary argument of this thesis is that Indigenous art can be curated in such a way as to emphasise its unique cultural context (apart from Western concepts and values) and for this to

occur within the field of contemporary art. Indigenous knowledge systems are complex and offer profound understandings of the world, physical and spiritual, which are maintained through story, song, dance, ceremony and law. At the time of the European occupation there were up to 250 known Indigenous language groups in Australia, each representing distinct Indigenous societies, culturally and politically; much like Europe consists of distinct language societies (Mundine 2010, p. 94). Moreover, Indigenous communities are spread over vast geographical areas, some significantly distant from each other. As a result of these differences, diverse mediums are used, and a variety of art styles have developed in remote Indigenous communities. Accordingly, this thesis insists on the necessity of focusing on regionally specific traits of Indigenous art and highlights its capacity to be exhibited so as to convey information about the context of its production.

My argument thus responds to various interwoven issues associated with the exhibition of Indigenous art that are often overlooked. This is illustrated in the Italian exhibition *Dreamings* (2014), held in the Museo Carlo Bilotti, Rome. The organisers of the exhibition pushed for the name ‘Dreamtime: Aboriginal art’ as a recognisable title for the exhibition, and endeavoured “to keep Aboriginal art apart, away from the canonised names in modern art” (The Australian curators’ more modern title ‘House of Dreams’ was declined) (Petitjean 2016, p. 74). The two titles reflect two conflicting approaches, one that exoticises and separates Indigenous art from the dominant art canon, and another that would appeal to this same canon but risks decontextualing the art. Furthermore, the subtitle for the exhibition – *Australian Aboriginal Art Meets de Chirico* – gives equal weight to Aboriginal art as it does an individual artist, Giorgio de Chirico, even though a long list of Indigenous artists, including leading artists such as Michael Nelson Tjakamarra and Paddy Sims, largely from the Western Desert but also from urban regions, participated in the show. Rome, a European art centre, presented Indigenous art to the public as an isolated and homogenous entity through its selected title, highlighting its difference from other art, but failing to highlight the substantial differences between the Indigenous artists themselves. This perception in turn undervalued the depth and breadth of Indigenous art. This thesis does not offer a single curatorial solution for the exhibition of Indigenous art, rather, it explores diverse possible solutions for its curatorial and discursive framing.

Indigenous curators

A successful strategy for promoting the complexity of Indigenous art in institutional settings has been the engagement of Indigenous curators (Myers 2019, 2020; Neale 2014). As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, the emergence of Indigenous curation must be understood historically, in the context of the changing role of the curator more broadly. The curatorial profession has expanded significantly since the 1950s in Europe, America and Australia, when temporary exhibitions rather than permanent collections became the norm in contemporary art (Fisher 2015, p. 804). Institutions increasingly recognised that the organisation of exhibitions required skill and knowledge instead of the organisers' personal favouritism of particular artists. From the 1970s onwards the role of the curator also changed from its historical focus on objectivity, to greater expressions of subjective attitude (Butler & Enwezor 2009, p. 18). While still a primary outlet for the exposure and viewing of art, the exhibition became a vehicle for critical examination of current domestic and world affairs. Curators were no longer simply art organisers or managers removed from the creative process, but creators of artistic value and cultural meaning. Exhibitions became a forum for the communication of current social ideas and political ideologies. There was a significant increase of international exhibitions from the 1990s in accordance with the expansion of the contemporary art field, and with that came a higher demand for curators. The art world was paying attention to what curators were doing and the decisions they were making, and scholarly articles and debates on the role of the curator also became prominent. Green and Gardner (2016, p. 186) observe that this situation was accentuated after *documenta11* (2002), when international curators came to hold unprecedented authority over the art field. International and group exhibitions, art fairs and biennales became the main exposure site for curators and their artists. In 1980s and 1990s Australia, several Indigenous curators were employed in public art institutions (Neale 2014, pp. 299-300), a development that – as I discuss in Chapter 5 in relation to Djon Mundine and others – has crucially informed subsequent institutional engagement with Indigenous art.

In Australian contemporary art, Indigenous curators operate as mediators between cultures. For instance, when Indigenous curator Hetti Perkins (cited in Bullock et al. 2018, p. 21) discusses Arnhem Land artist John Mawurndjul's practice in the catalogue text accompanying his 2018 touring exhibition *I Am the Old and the New*, she draws attention to the artist's culture and intricacies, and asserts his Indigenous ownership of Country. She

emphasises the political characteristics of his work and demonstrates that various works driven by traditional culture (depicting Country and culture, ancestral events, supernatural beings, using natural self-harvested f including bark, wood and ochre) are political acts, designed to be seen outside of the artists' community. Drawing on their own background, history and artistic framework, the curator's role is to provide a space for an artist such as Mawurndjul to meaningfully participate in the contemporary art world, a platform from which to express their ideas and beliefs (Florander 2017, p. 16). Western methodologies and modes of inquiry for art exhibition are not effective when attempting to include groups with differing underpinning frameworks (Mundine et al. 2001, p. 86). Non-Indigenous curators risk dominating the exhibition space with their own values and concepts, limiting the opportunity for cross-cultural exchange. Indigenous curators, by contrast, provide cultural context for Indigenous art and highlight each artist in their own right or in the context of their specific community. Indigenous curators and artists have a shared history and heritage which is accompanied by specific insight about the complexity and diversity of their culture. With this shared understanding they can navigate culturally safe practices and protocols. Nevertheless, there is no singular or homogenous Indigenous approach – indeed there are many contested positions within the Indigenous fraternity of curators and artists.

Australian art institutions started identifying a need to engage Indigenous curators in the early 1980s (Art Gallery of New South Wales 1983). Djon Mundine, whose work is discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis, was one of the first Indigenous curators to be engaged in major Australian art institutions, with his employment as an advisor in 1981 at the AGNSW, followed by his appointment at the MCA in Sydney in 1996 (Art Gallery of New South Wales 1983; McLean 2011, p. 57; Mundine 2007; Russ 2013, p. 192). It was becoming clear that Indigenous curators are best placed to balance both Indigenous and non-Indigenous values in the context of a contemporary art through their knowledge of both cultural systems (Myers 2020, p. 209; Neale 2014, p. 293). The agency of Indigenous people influenced the increased engagement of Indigenous curators, and in some circumstances, made governments partially responsive to the call for employment of Indigenous staff (Neale 2014, p. 291). As a result, Australia has been a pioneer in engaging Indigenous curators for the exhibition and collection of Indigenous art.

The Sydney Boomalli, an Aboriginal Artists Co-operative established in 1987, is also significant to the history of Indigenous curatorial engagement in the Australian art world.

Boomalli was founded by ten Indigenous artists, and initially directed by two of them, Brenda L Croft and Hetti Perkins (Croft 2013; Mundine 2013a). Hetti Perkins was nominated as the senior curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art at the AGNSW in 1989, Daphne Wallace and Margo Neale, also affiliated with Boomalli, were engaged at the Yiribana gallery at the AGNSW in the early 1990s, and Brenda Croft operated as senior curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art from 2002 at the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) (Neale 2014, pp. 290 - 291). The nomination of Indigenous curators assisted in portraying the cultural motivation of Indigenous artists by exercising agency in a contemporary art world that is predominantly non-Indigenous.

Indigenous curators have expressed strong views about the position of Indigenous art in the contemporary art world and are crucial to the delivery of Indigenous knowledge to non-Indigenous audiences. Anthropologist Marcia Langton supported this notion and was one of the earliest Indigenous commentators on contemporary Aboriginal art. In respect to Indigenous film, she argued that critical engagement is essential to shift the discussion away from questions about the authenticity of Indigenous art (Langton 1993, p. 23). Discussions about authenticity have been ongoing in respect to Indigenous visual art. Myers (1998, p. 30) for instance noticed that there was greater interest in Arnhem Land bark paintings compared to canvases from Papunya because audiences associate bark, a natural material, with authenticity and tradition, while they judge the canvas, a processed art material, as being 'produced for sale'. Historically, art workers have also differentiated between authentic and inauthentic Indigenous art according to the level of contact the artist has had with Western society: art produced before contact with Western society is considered authentic, while art produced post-contact is inauthentic. However, as wisely indicated by Langton (1998, p. 30), the value of an Indigenous artwork is related to the time and place of its production, and by getting to know the artist and their context, audiences may develop an appreciation of their art beyond existing fantasies about 'rare' and 'exotic' cultures. The cultural expertise and social connections of Indigenous curators help to ensure that Indigenous art is exhibited intelligently and sensitively.

The need to change common views about Indigenous art remains. The Eurocentric art world still holds in its collective memory references to primitivism and its implicitly racist perspectives on non-Western cultures. This is a challenge that has been taken up by Indigenous curators. For instance, Indigenous art is classified at times as 'traditional art', a

label implying that it is ‘Other’ and cannot be considered ‘contemporary’. This contrast is amplified in the title of the NGA exhibition *World of Dreamings. Traditional and Modern Art of Australia* (2000). The term ‘traditional’ is not suggestive of modernity or innovation, but rather associated with concepts such as ‘heritage’, ‘old-fashioned’, ‘conservative’, and ‘restricted’. Perkins (1993, pp. 24-25) argued that the classification traditional art is inappropriate for the type of art produced by Indigenous artists:

> It is naïve (and typical of modernist ideologies) to believe the distance between respective historical and cultural positions is too great to even make a useful contrast. What remains, fundamentally, is the shared context of post- and neo-colonial Australians and their responses, viewed simultaneously in the… privileged arena of contemporary art practice.

Although contemporary art is shared amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, there remains a tendency to emphasise a gap between the two in order to maintain a notion of superiority to Western art.

As a response to this type of marginalisation, a grounded approach is offered by Indigenous curators, who emphasise the lives of Indigenous people as intertwined with modernity. Perkins (cited in Bullock et al. 2018, p. 35), for instance, highlights that acclaimed artist John Mawurndjul lives between Milmilngkan outstation and Maningrida community in Arnhem Land, where he maintains ancient cultural protocols in a contemporary life context (which sees him utilise modern technologies such as a car and a phone,). Indigenous people who live in Arnhem Land outstations, Perkins outlines, cook and sleep outside while using four-wheel drives to travel and harvest their art materials (cited in Bullock et al. 2018, p. 35). Thus, Indigenous artists perpetuate a legacy as well as self-consciously create a new one. Indigenous curators honour the reality of Indigenous experience as taking place within an amalgamation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous influences, technologies and lifeways. Through this example it is argued here that Indigenous curators have a profound understanding of the reasons for the recognition of Indigenous art in the contemporary art world and are best-placed to influence further shifts in the art world towards greater inclusion.

The work of Indigenous curator Margo Neale (2008) is aimed at bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures closer to each other, as demonstrated in her exhibition *Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye,* which launched at the National Museum of Australia in 2008 before touring Japan. Neale (2017, p. 47) offers two approaches to critical interpreting Indigenous art: first, understand an artwork according to its circumstances of origin and production; second, adopt a perspective on the art that dynamically anticipates the circumstances of its reception, the time and place of its public exhibition. Even though Emily Kame Kngwarreye's work was hung on the walls of a major institution, Neale (2017, p. 47) acknowledges that "the idea of introducing Emily's works to outsiders through the cultural device of an exhibition is itself a modernist undertaking" insofar as it suggests that the work can be viewed independently of its maker. In light of this, the textual information accompanying the exhibition emphasised the relationship between the paintings and Emily's[4] cultural tradition. In so doing Neale honoured Emily's cultural background, while capitalising on the opportunities offered to the artist in the contemporary art world.

Indigenous curator Stephen Gilchrist has critically engaged with the role and unique contribution of Indigenous curators within contemporary art (Gilchrist 2020a). He perceives this role as transformative of space and context, insofar as Indigenous curators impose their own value systems on exhibitions they curate; in his words, "Indigenous curators are rewriting their own ways of belonging" (Gilchrist 2020a, p. i). The limited definition of art in the West, he argues, and the lack of understanding of what art means in Indigenous cultures demands that Indigenous curators fill this gap. To this extent, not only do audiences discover the value of Indigenous art and culture, but also artists themselves relive and restore their heritage, rituals, and connection to their culture. While Gilchrist argues that Indigenous curators have contributed immensely to a changing exhibition environment, he also recognises that art institutions determine the possibilities for art exhibitions; the case studies in his thesis relate to institutions "of high national and international value" (Gilchrist 2020a, p. i). As such, he acknowledges that diverse and unique curatorial approaches, in particular those of Indigenous curators such as himself who, for example, aimed at Indigenising the

[4] Emily Kame Kngwarreye is commonly known as 'Emily'. While in formal art historical practice it is usual to refer to artists by their last name much of the available literature about this artist refers to her with her first name (See for example Neale 2008 and McDonald 2015). I will adhere to this later informal practice throughout this thesis when referring to the artist.

exhibition space, are accepted and endorsed within the institutionalised environment of contemporary art.

Indigenous curation is a phenomenon that has its own dilemmas. For instance, Smith (2022) argues that while Indigenous curators provided relevant cultural knowledge from the 1980s (so too did non-Indigenous curators such Wally Caruana and Judith Ryan), they have steered away from entangling Indigenous art in the wider contemporary art scene and discourse, with a view to describing a specific Indigenous contemporary art that relates to Indigenous knowledge systems (see Gilchrist 2020a). The extent to which such art is transcultural or is related to contemporaneous non-Indigenous art tends to be avoided. Another issue is that while a significant portion of Indigenous artists live in remote areas in Australia according to traditional laws and customs, Indigenous curators are largely from urban centres. This gap presents cultural and geographical limitations to community consultations and knowledge. Despite these issues, Indigenous curators contribute to a lively national discourse on Indigenous art and have had significant influence on Australia's exhibition history.

Indigenous curators face particular challenges, including the expectation to prove their professional competency (Mundine 2017, pers. comm., 1 November). Audiences have greater expectations from Indigenous curators, for instance, they forget that the long history of Indigenous people, which was somewhat erased, is often fragmentary; to combat this, Indigenous artist and curator Julie Gough (2020, p. 282) explains that her messaging centres on colonisation as the major cultural event that impacted her and her family. However, when Indigenous curators do focus on their history and culture they are judged negatively. Mundine (2010, p. 93) remembers that he had been named a 'traditionalist' because he curatorially emphasised his history and traditions rather than popular stylistic trends, which are often based on today's media environment; non-Indigenous curators, on the other hand, repeatedly emphasise their cultural underpinnings through en vogue technology, abstraction and political statements. Indigenous curators also face pressures from their communities and families about their social and political concerns. Not only do Indigenous curators face pressures from the art world, but they also hold responsibility to their community, past present and future. This matter is discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis, in relation to Mundine and other socially-conscious Indigenous curators.

Contemporary art

Despite the efforts of Indigenous curators, the exhibition of Indigenous art remains largely shaped by Western values. That said, the literature surveyed below discusses shifts in the art world from the 1960s towards more cultural diversity. The increased interest of art authorities in global artmaking during the rise of contemporary art initiated a turn towards diversity. This promoted scholarly research on artistic practices beyond the West. A greater awareness of the plurality and interconnectedness of the history of modernism was discovered (Bruce et al., 1983). Through the recognition of these peripheral cultural histories, including those pertaining to Indigenous Australia, Canada, Africa, and South Asian, the dominant canon of European art history was revised to allow for a more multifaceted view of entangled cultural histories, demonstrating not singular but 'multiple modernisms' (see for example Enwezor et al. 2016; Smith 1993; Velthuis 2013). The discourse of multiple modernisms gained traction by the 1990s, drawing attention to the way that art history was conditioned by identities such as race, gender, age, sexual orientation and occupation. In particular, it emphasised but did not erase "binary constructs such as west/rest and white/black", creating a platform for discussion about cultural diversity and how diversity could best be represented in the contemporary art world (McLean 2017, p. 33). The scholarly debate around 'multiple modernisms', in turn, influenced the way Indigenous art was theorised and exhibited in the contemporary art world.

Okwui Enwezor (2002, p. 46), whose work forms the primary topic of Chapter 6, regards the (partial) transformation of contemporary art not as signifying the end of modernism as such, but reflecting the end of Western cultural hegemony more broadly, or what he refers to as the end of 'Westernism':

> that sphere of global totality that manifests itself through the political, social, economic, cultural, juridical, and spiritual integration achieved via institutions devised and maintained solely to perpetuate the influence of European and North American modes of being.

This Westernisation of the globe, which Enwezor (2002, p. 46) argues is underpinned by the wide-ranging social, cultural and economic effects of capitalism, as well as various interpretations of liberal democracy, is being resisted by non-Western societies aspiring to

maintain political and cultural sovereignty. Although largely a product of the West, rather than Eurocentric histories today contemporary art describes multiple histories and national perspectives (Wallace et al., 2010). In this context, Indigenous artists have gained traction to emphasise their own value systems and unique presence in the context of a contemporary art environment dominated by Western values.

The push for a wider representation of artists in the art world occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, coinciding with the rise of contemporary art. While the earlier modernist movement was concerned with revolutionary ideas in the West, the latter endorsed notions of cultural relativism, post-colonial inclusivity, and a negation of traditional hierarchies of artistic forms and materials. The modernist norm of medium-specificity was replaced by open-ended experimentation and innovation (Danto & Goehr 1997; Smith 2008). Aesthetic constraints gave way to a relaxed notion of what may be legitimately called ‘art’, for instance, conceptual art and performance art replaced abstract expressionism. Contemporary art was now not only questioning the concept of art itself and providing a space for self-expression, but playing an important societal role and offering a forum for political discussion – as it had previously done, albeit in a different way, in avant-garde art of the early 20th century. Topics in the arts now included socio-political events, globalisation, science, physiology, anatomy, time, memories, space, land, language, spirituality and gender (Art Gallery of New South Wales 2019). For example, Enwezor’s 2015 Venice Biennale exhibition *All the World’s Futures* (a primary focus of Chapter 6) was observed to be “political throughout”, addressing topics such as labour exploitation in developing countries and how capitalism as a world system impacts civilisation (Adamson 2015, p. 401).

The definition of the term contemporary art is complex due to the diversity of motivations and expressions in the field. It refers to the art of today; although it includes diverse mediums and subject matters, it is focused on an inquiry about the human condition in the present (Smith 2009). The boundaries of contemporary art are flexible, allowing for presentation of diverse media including sculpture, installation and performance (Meyer 2013). The field prides itself on the diversity of its artists, ideas and meaning and may address various issues, themes, and concepts, including political, controversial, and emotionally charged ideas. Contemporary art may be presented in diverse locations, in one country or multiple countries, indoors and outdoors, and in public or private settings (Enwezor 2014). No single work could encapsulate the diversity of contemporary art. The use of the term to describe a distinct

artistic category became a convention in the West from the mid-1980s, and according to theorists Arthur Danto and Lydia Goehr (1997, p. 5), the exact definition of contemporary art has remained open and not limited by the constraints of time, place or medium. Terry Smith (2009) has argued that the multifaceted nature of contemporary art gives insight into the circumstances of the present, and, importantly for this thesis, functioning as an open stage for any artist regardless of their cultural identity – Western or non-Western, centre or periphery, male or female or non-binary, encompassing folk, heritage and 'traditional' practices.

Smith's theory of the contemporary (2009) is useful here due to his focus on the international reach and transcultural effects of contemporary art. The arguments of this thesis are anchored in – and elaborate on – this definition of contemporary art. It is to this definition I turn for an inclusive view of Indigenous art. Smith acknowledges the differences between cultures, histories, and identities, but places those differences in the context of a single space and time, that is, the space of the present (Smith 2009, p. 6). Like Smith, Henry F. Skerritt (Gagosian Gallery 2019) understands contemporary art as a space that is shared by all people and things in the world. According to Skerritt, artists convey a myriad of aesthetic ideas but on closer inspection, common motivations and struggles are found in all art despite great differences in culture, geography, and belief. This thesis builds on ideas of contemporary art espoused by Smith and Skerrit, but it also examines what is excluded or sidelined from mainstream contemporary art critical and curatorial discourse. My case studies suggest various ways in which Indigenous art is still marginal within the supposedly anti-hierarchical cultural system of contemporary art. Chapter 3 for instances discusses the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* whereby the curator aimed to demonstrate universality while shying away from the complex context of the artists he was presenting and aiming at avoiding conflict and political discussion. Chapter 4 highlights that in the 2015 Biennale of Sydney only one Indigenous artist from a remote setting, Doreen Reid Nakamarra, has been exhibited in the event.

Indigenous art has obtained the status of contemporary art in Australia, but limited information is available about how this status was achieved in this country. This is another gap in knowledge addressed by my research into the curation of Indigenous art in a contemporary art context. Sibyl Fisher (2015, p. 803) argues that the transformation of Indigenous art into contemporary art has been overlooked, for instance, only a little has been written about *Fluent* (1997), the exhibition curated by Perkins and Croft for one of the world's most important contemporary art events, the Venice Biennale (this is discussed in

Chapter 6). Another theory of when Indigenous art was endorsed as contemporary art is made by anthropologist Peter Sutton, who argues that Indigenous art became contemporary art when it ceased to be Indigenous art. Sutton (1992, p. 29) pointed to the late Brisbane artist Gordon Bennett as an example of an Indigenous artist that "does not produce aboriginal art", considering the Western influences on his life and practice. From this perspective, Indigenous art ceased to be an exclusive art category when it became absorbed into the broader field of contemporary art. Anthropologist Philip Jones (1992) offers a similar theory, arguing that the transformation occurred when Indigenous artists "were moving to occupy the ground between two cultures", their own and that of the Europeans. The advantage of Sutton's and Jones's theory is that they avoid essentialist, exoticising definitions of Indigenous art. However, this thesis argues that Indigenous art did not 'transform' into contemporary art as such, but rather gradually started to be exhibited within its institutionalised realms until the sudden and significant acquisition of Indigenous art from the mid-1980s by state art museums. This shift occurred due to a complex constellation of artistic, social, and cultural developments.

The lack of understanding surrounding the status of Indigenous art within the broader discourse of contemporary art can be partly resolved through closely examining its exhibition history. This thesis addresses this challenge through close analysis of particular case studies, in which curatorial strategies for the exhibition of Indigenous art in a contemporary art context have been implemented.

How exhibitions of Indigenous art address their audience – and how curators conceive of their relationship to their audience – is a crucial factor in this thesis. The appraisal of Indigenous art is not only a result of its curatorial presentation; audiences also play an active role in the meaning-making process, for example, international audiences approach Indigenous art differently to local Australian audiences. Yet there is little research available about audiences' role as active participants in, and critics of the contemporary art world (Kester 2009, p. 7). During the rise of the Indigenous art movement in the 1970s, multiculturalism and values of diversity were in their infancy in Australia, but Australian culture has become more inclusive since then. Accordingly, this thesis seeks to trace how developments in the contemporary art world and its inclusive character have influenced the discourse on Indigenous art. More specifically, it examines what curatorial methods have been used to connect Indigenous art with contemporary art audiences.

How Indigenous art has been presented to the public in exhibitions of contemporary art from 1989 until today is the primary question of this thesis. For not only are contemporary art centres such as London, New York and Paris geographically located in the West, and professional positions are predominantly filled by Westerners: the audience that visits art museums and galleries is predominantly Western too. In 2010, a study conducted by Museums and Galleries NSW in 19 public galleries in the state revealed that most of the international tourists visiting the participating galleries in that research were from English-speaking countries, 85 percent amongst all visitors spoke English at home[5], and only two percent of the visitors were Indigenous (Mackenzie Steele & Huxley 2010, p. 28, 37). These statistics indicate the challenges faced by non-Western artists and curators, needing to address themselves to, and raise the interest of a largely Western audience. Hence Magnin et al. (1990), the curatorial team for the 1989 *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition, the first case study for this thesis, discusses the challenge to convince a Western audience of the modernity of non-Western art. The audience, which still holds in its collective memory references to primitivism and its attendant degradation of non-Western cultures, has limited and biased knowledge about cultures other than its own (Izett 2014). Indigenous curators have been making a concrete effort to familiarise their audiences with Indigenous art, however, there remains a lack of Indigenous curators in contemporary art (Janke 2018). At the very least, audiences require curators who are connected to Indigenous cultures and can entice them to demand Indigenous art as much as they demand Western art (Mundine 2017, pers. comm., 1 November).

In addition to analysing how exhibitions interact with their audiences, a method adopted in this thesis to gauge the position of Indigenous art within the contemporary art world through analysing global art events such as biennales and art fairs. The format of these exhibitions must be considered. Biennales and fairs are significant in scope and scale, and commonly dispersed across multiple locations, with museums often featured as major locations for such events (for example, the AGNSW functions as a key venue for the Biennale of Sydney). A range of specialists including artists, curators, agents, gallerists, academics, critics and

[5] Although not all of these visitors are necessarily of Western descent, it is fair to assume that they are influenced by Western underpinnings.

collectors follow these events from country to country and year to year, as key players in these events (Gardner and Green 2016, p. 183).

The historical institutionalisation of the format of major international exhibitions continues to shape how Indigenous art is perceived in contemporary art. While the Venice Biennale, established in 1895, is regarded as the model on which subsequent global art fairs were based, it was the circuit of international trade expositions and fairs (The Great Exhibition of Products of French Industry conducted in Paris from 1798 to 1849 was the precursor to the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London) that launched global art exhibitions. Although there were a number of biennales established early on, the main first four included The Bienal de São Paulo that followed Venice in 1951, the Biennale of Sydney in 1973, and the Bienal de La Habana in 1984. From then onwards an increasing number of Biennales emerged around the world culminating in the "biennial boom" of 2002, which created new opportunities for artists and curators (Green & Gardner 2016, pp. 183-201). In 2015 a minimum of 175 biennales operated in the world (Green & Gardner 2015, p. 15). This thesis traces the development of the discourse on Indigenous art through several major international events including *documenta11* (2002), the 2015 Venice Biennale, and the 2008 Biennale of Sydney.

Whilst the Indigenous art sector is similarly institutionalised and consists of overlapping actors and events to the contemporary art world, it is largely exclusive to Australia and to Indigenous artists (Fisher 2016; McLean 2013b). Sally Butler has observed that Indigenous art is "conventionally exhibited in a hermetic framework of Aboriginal culture specifically" (Butler in Volkenandt & Kaufmann 2009, p. 162). This may have been true in the past; these days, however, the inclusion of Indigenous art in international biennales indicates a reconfiguration of the relationship of Indigenous art and contemporary art. Interrogating this relationship reveals that a diverse range of approaches exist for exhibiting Indigenous art at major contemporary art exhibitions. My research identifies recurrent curatorial paradigms and discursive strategies employed in exhibitions including Indigenous art.

Conclusion

This chapter explored diverse approaches to the discourse on, and presentation of Indigenous art over time. It looked at early explorers to Australia who did not acknowledge Indigenous artists, anthropologists in the 19th century who recognised it only for its exotic characteristics,

and art associates who promoted it in modernist circles and assessed as it as such. From the mid 20th century a debate emerged about the type of institutions that should exhibit Indigenous art and the curatorial focus for it. This chapter then provided a short historical survey of the start of Indigenous art exhibition in Australian art institutions, a foundation to the developing Indigenous art market in the 1980s. This new market developments continued well into the 21st century and created new positions for Indigenous curators, who offered new insight about the presentation of Indigenous art. In summary, the discussion in this chapter explored different attitudes towards Indigenous art in the past, who influence more recent curatorial strategies for it. Developments in the contemporary art world more broadly, and how those have affected attitudes towards non-Western art and in turn towards Indigenous art, were also explored in this chapter.

To conclude this chapter, the research frameworks informing this thesis will briefly be outlined, and the gaps in discourse that my argument proposes to address recapped. This thesis supplements the existing ethnographic, anthropological and art historical accounts on Indigenous art by exclusively focusing on the context of contemporary art, and more specifically contemporary art exhibitions. My research develops knowledge about Indigenous art, but aims to address the boundaries of existing frameworks by highlighting the interrelation of Indigenous art with the exhibition of contemporary art in institutions and events. The ideas for this strategy are informed by multidisciplinary studies, and leading authorities in the field such as academics Terry Smith, Ian McLean and Fred Myers, as well as curators Okwui Enwezor, Djon Mundine and Hetti Perkins. New insight about curatorial approaches to Indigenous art will contribute to existing subject areas. In particular, this thesis critiques of modernist curation of Indigenous art, and discussion of new ways of approaching Indigenous art, will contribute to existing studies, including the need to curate it with a non-Western bias by engaging Indigenous curators, and promoting Indigenous agency for Indigenous projects. The critical position expressed in this thesis contributes to available discourse on Indigenous and contemporary art in the following manner: my focus on art exhibitions generates a new perspective on approaches for the curation of Indigenous art; and my emphasis on Indigenous curators challenges the dominating Western discourse of the contemporary art world.

Chapter 3 - *Magiciens de la Terre*

Paris, 1989

The 1989 French exhibition *Magiciens de le Terre* (Magicians of the Earth) was billed as the first truly global exhibition of planetary contemporary art (Lamoureux 2005, pp. 65-66). Considering that Australian Indigenous artists, contemporary to that moment, were participants in the program, and that it was the first time that they exhibited in a prominent event for modern art in Paris, it is highly suitable as the first case study for this inquiry. This chapter explores how non-Western art, and in particular Indigenous art developed in a rising contemporary art world, and how the presentation of Indigenous art at the time, in other parts of the world, and in particular in Australia influenced the exhibition.

It is widely recognised that *Magiciens de le Terre* (*Magiciens* from here on), was something of a cultural corrective to the earlier North American exhibition *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern,* which in some quarters was roundly condemned for its apparent failure to overcome the perpetuation of a colonial othering of non-Western peoples (Foster et al. 2004; Lamoureux 2005; McEvilley 1992; Myers 2006). Western cultural biases also underscored the *Magiciens* exhibition, manifesting '*Primitivisms'* despite its stated objective to do otherwise (McEvilley 1992, p. 153). The exhibition aspired to respond to the criticisms about *"Primitivism"*, however, its goal to emphasise modernism in Western and non-Western art through a cross-cultural dialogue of sorts was not achieved, due to its failure to address the colonial period and its impact on society. This chapter aims to investigate whether the curator for the exhibition, Jean-Hubert Martin, addressed cultural differences beyond his own cultural frameworks, and what type of collaborations (if at all) took place to inform the exhibition's curatorial practice. Concepts that Martin emphasised for the exhibition, such as the universality and spirituality of the artists, hinted at in the title of the exhibition, are analysed in respect to the curators' aim for "the first global exhibition of contemporary art" (Buddensieg 2013, p. 212).

Despite the controversies surrounding the *Magiciens* exhibition, it effectively assisted in raising significant questions regarding the conventions and categories ingrained in the contemporary art world at that time, enabling a space to emerge into which subsequent artists could establish a foothold as contemporary artists on the global stage (McEvilley 1992, p. 157). A discussion is presented here about the ramification of the *Magiciens* exhibition, the

change it endorsed, and the new curatorial approaches it promoted. *Magiciens* recognised the modernity of non-Western, and Indigenous artists, and offered a stage for their creations in an institutional context (Myers 1998, p. 23). It is argued in this chapter that despite its monumental failings, *Magiciens* was a unique post-colonial opportunity for the Australian Indigenous artists that participated, and more broadly for the Australian Indigenous art movement.

To achieve the aim for this case study, analysis of diverse components of the exhibition's background and outcome were conducted, including the director Jean-Hubert Martin's experience and productions in his career as a curator, the overall presentation of artists in the exhibition, the significance of the venues for the exhibition, and the participating Indigenous artists and their achievements in the art world. Primary sources such as the exhibition catalogue and available, interviews with, and quotes by Martin are drawn upon to deepen our understanding of the rationale for the exhibition. A second significant voice for the exhibition is of curators André Magnin and Aline Luque, whose views about the concept and ideas for the exhibition were presented in detail by Marc-Eric Gruénais in a French interview conducted in 1990 in the 'Bulletin de l'Association française des anthropologues' (Magnin et al. 1990). Literature that has recorded diverse perspectives including the views of some of the artists and critics, as well as theories about the reception of the exhibition in the public sphere are also used as source material for this case study's analysis.

Broad details of the exhibition

Magiciens de la Terre was without a doubt a ground-breaking exhibition, considering that contemporary art as a new cultural movement was still defining itself since its rise to prominence in the 1970s. *Magiciens* was held in two iconic venues in Paris: the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle de la Villette (Lewison 1989, p. 585). Uncharacteristically for the conservative French art world, and for trends at the time in contemporary art globally, this exhibition showcased artworks of an equal number of Western and non-Western artists, whose artworks were juxtaposed in two major French arts institutions under the umbrella of the exhibition: *Magiciens de la Terre*. The exhibition consisted of one hundred artists: fifty artists originated from the United States and Western Europe whereas the remaining fifty artists originated from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Australia (McEvilley 1992, pp. 154-155). The artists in the former were largely navigating

Western contemporary art circles and were educated in Western art schools (Murphy 2013, p. 4). A majority of the selected Western artists were known for addressing themes related to the topic of cultural diversity in their creative practice (Araeen 1989, pp. 8-9). The second group, consisted of artists who did not obtain a Western art education – this was an explicit choice by the curators (Magnin et al. 1990, p. 63). Only non-Western artists were selected for this group, and particularly artists with works relating to their cultural identity; one, according to the curators, that is different from Western culture (Magnin et al. 1990, p. 63). According to the curators, the purpose for the exhibition was to collate in a single space culturally diverse art from all corners of the world (Magnin et al. 1990, p. 61).

Alongside Jean-Hubert Martin, who had been the director of the MNAM (the Musée National d'Art Moderne / the French National Museum of Modern Art) since 1987, a team of three curators (Andre Magnin, Mark Francis, and Aline Luque) helped conceive the *Magiciens* exhibition. As the director, Martin was the main voice for the event, advocating for the exhibition and providing responses to criticism in academic papers or popular media. Martin is treated in this text and others as the key force behind the concept for the exhibition due to his experience in curating several leading global exhibitions, and his background as an art historian (Jaschke 2010).

It is truly extraordinary that Indigenous artists from remote Central and Northern Australia were presented in the *Magiciens* exhibition, considering that a commercial market for Indigenous art was still only nascent by the late 1980s. The start of intense market activities around Indigenous art in major metropolitan areas in Australia only started in the 1990s. In the international art scene Indigenous art was mostly overlooked prior to that time. Four Indigenous artworks were included in the *Magiciens* exhibition. First, the most praised artwork created by Indigenous Australian artists for *Magiciens* was the collaborative ground installation *Yarla* (Yam Dreaming), a work ten metres long, made from soil, ochre, paint and dried plants on clay (Martin 1989a). The work was created by a group of six celebrated leaders in traditional Warlpiri 'Men's Business', Frank Bronson Jakamarra Nelson, Paddy Japaljarri Sims, Paddy Japaljarri Stewart, Neville Japangardi Poulson, Francis Jupurrurla Kelly, and Towser Jakamarra Walker, associated with the Warlpiri language and clan from the community of Yuendumu in Central Australia, the Northern Territory (NT). Second, thirty small pieces of painted bark named *Barnumbirr Manikay* (Morning Star) by artist Jack Wunuwun (1930-1990), associated with the Murrungun language and Gangarl clan, from the

Gamardi outstation in Arnhem Land, NT. Third, twelve painted wood posts named Djalumbu (Hollow Logs) by artist Jimmy Wululu (1936-2005) associated with the Yolngu language and the Gupapuyngu clan, from the Ramingining community in Arnhem Land, NT. Fourth, six bark paintings named *Nawarramulmul* (Shooting Star Spirit) and *Ngalyod* (Female Rainbow Serpent), and four other bark paintings named Ngalyod (Female Rainbow Serpent), *Kumurken* (Freshwater Crocodile at Kabararbadi), *Ngalyod Lambalk* (Rainbow Serpent and Glider Possum) and *Wayarra* (Dangerous Spirit), all by John Mawurndjul (1952 -), associated with the Kunwinjku language and clan, from the Maningrida community, NT.

"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern

In the late 20th century, the dominant focus on visual aesthetics during the modernism era was shifting, and Western artists were seeking new purpose (Marsh 2004). The art world had romanticised primitivism in the first instance by imagining a possibility to reconnect with more profound human truths and meaning. The underpinning interest in primitivism seems to have become urgent again with the apparent demise of modernism. This connection was what the exhibition *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern,* 1984, directed by William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York attempted to document. The concept for the *Magiciens de le terre* exhibition emerged as a response to the exhibition *"Primitivism"*. This exhibition showcased non-Western art only to present the inspiration for the Western art exhibited in the show. According to American art critic and scholar Thomas McEvilley (1992, pp. 154-155) the underlying principles for the exhibition included suppositions of Enlightenment universalism, white European supremacy and a dominant culture centre - versus the 'margins'. The exhibition did not acknowledge that the participating Western artists have copied visual concepts from non-Western artists, rather, it justified the similarity of works by pointing to a perceived 'universality' of all artists in a modern era; a universality in which the non-Western artefacts were considered logically prior to the cultural achievements of the Western works of art. According to critic Thomas McEvilley modernists behave as though they hold the "highest criterion of evaluation" for art (cited in Myers 2006, p. 272). The exhibition reinforced the sense that history is primarily European, with non-Western cultures reliant on the contrast with European arts and science to understand their own spiritual evolution.

MoMA's exhibition *"Primitivism"* claimed that the West is leading the way to advancement, while *Magiciens* derived its principles from an obvious but unarticulated Enlightenment diversity. That is pointing to the diverse nations in the world without any nuance on their distinctions. Despite these differences, Martin's attempt to have *Magiciens* rectify the neo-colonialism of *"Primitivism"* failed. Martin wilfully set *Magiciens* in counterpoint to *"Primitivism";* for instance, by refraining from using the term 'primitive' to describe non-Western cultures. Rather, he wanted to highlight that non-Western cultures are alive and still exist. "*Primitivism"* on the other hand used terms such as 'tribal' with indifference, and without fully engaging in what the living circumstances of the artists were (Lamoureux 2005, p. 66). In "*Primitivism"* cultures other than Western were invisible; the objects produced by artists from non-Western cultures were of interest due to their aesthetic qualities, but the identity of the producers of these objects was stripped away. *"Primitivism"* presented its non-Western works of art as mere supports for its Western artists and their works, while Martin selected works for *Magiciens* based on what he perceived as their significance of meaning or purpose. Martin (1989a, p. 9) specifically aimed to 'reveal' invisible artists to the art world. However, there is no indication that Martin (1989b, p. 156) did not perceive these cultures to be 'out of date' considering his use of the term 'archaic' to replace the term 'primitive'. Martin's purpose was to distinguish *Magiciens* from "*Primitivism",* but he was unable to test his own Western value system against this of others.

The *Magiciens* show was a statement of the continued presence in the West of the familiar connection between modernism and primitivism, whereby an expectation was placed on non-Western artists to showcase a world beyond the physical modern reality and enrich the art world of the later 1980s with a lost depth. The *Magiciens* exhibition was similar to *"Primitivism"* in that Western and non-Western art were juxtaposed together in major international art institutions. However, while *"Primitivism"* presented the works hierarchically, constructing an overt temporal division between a dominant West and its colonial periphery, *Magiciens* attempted to eliminate these divisions. In *"Primitivism",* neither date of production nor artists' names were provided for the non-Western art, while in *Magiciens* the principle was to provide the same level of (minimal) information for the Western and the non-Western artworks (McEvilley 1992, pp. 155-156). To illustrate, in *"Primitivism"* Henri Matisse's *Portrait of Madame Matisse* (1913), was presented side by

side with a Gabon mask. The catalogue information about the works reads as follows, on the left of the page ("Primitivism" Catalog, Rubin 1984, p. 230):

> Henri Matisse, Portrait of Madame Matisse (detail), 1913. Oil on Canvas, 146,4 x 97,1 cm. State Hermitage Museum, Leningrad.

On the right of the page:

> Mask, Shira-Punu, Gabon, Painted wood, hight: 31 cm. Collection Ernst Winizki, Zurich.

The curator alluded to Matisse's canvas painting as the work of the 'modern' in contrast to the 'traditional,' 'age-old' Gabon Mask. In omitting the production year for the mask, the curator's intention was to highlight the 'new' versus the 'old'; transmitting the message that the Gabon work is so 'ancient' that its production year and artist name are beyond the modern system of year count, or its tracking had been lost or not recorded. In contrast, Matisse's work had a clear identity; the artist's name and the production year were clearly stated in the description for the work. It is also likely that the audience was familiar with Matisse and could independently add more details about the background of the artist such as his French nationality and his Western cultural tradition.

In contrast, in *Magiciens* the year of production was indicated for all artworks, eliminating doubt about the production period and in that alluding to the modernity of all artists, Western and non-Western. However, the six artists who created the collaborative ground painting *Yarla* were not identified in the exhibition display or its catalogue[6]. This omission points to a superficial engagement with the artists and their work. The Warlipiri men's work was positioned in front of British artist Richard Long's installation (Fig. 3). For Long's entry, the catalogue portrays two abstract images of earth over two pages, and the first page states his full name. On these two pages, no information at all is provided about the artist, which points out to the expectation that the audience is already familiar with Long's culture and biography. The catalogue title for the Warlpiri men reads as follows:

[6] They were however named in literature that discussed the work (See Harris 2011 and Hilty 2016).

6 artists from the Aboriginal community Yuendumu.

Australians

Live in Yuendumu, Alice Springs region, Australia

Thereafter, text is quoted by some members of the collaborative work, followed by the title for their work:

Yarla, 1989 (L'Igname)

Ground painting

Installation in situ

Collective artwork, ochre, earth, and diverse materials 400 x 1000 cm

(Translated from French, Martin 1989a, p. 267)

A number of additional flaws have been identified in the catalogue for *Magiciens*, in respect of the *Yarla* work. The catalogue names the Yuendumu artists as '6 artists from the Yuendumu community'. Their nationality is stated as 'Australians,' and their residence as 'live in Yuendumu, Alice Springs region, Australia' (translated from French) (Martin 1989a, p. 267). Western frameworks were used for the introduction of the artists of *Yarla*; Indigenous people from Central Australia refer to their 'region' in accordance with their language group. It is highly likely that the artists if consulted, would have described themselves through different criteria. The catalogue then goes on to quote a text written by Paddy Jupurrla Nelson. The text describes the kinship and family structure of Jupurrla, how this relates to the Yam (Yarla) Dreaming, the location for the Dreaming, and the customs and law practiced in relation to the Dreaming. Thereafter, an additional text is quoted by Towser Jakamarra Walker, who describes how the responsibilities for the Yam Dreaming are granted according to his cultural tradition. The authors of the catalogue then attempt to explain the meaning of 'Dreaming': "it is not dream, spirit, ancestral being, law (sic). This word includes all of these things, it is untranslatable" (Translated from French) (Martin 1989a, p. 267).

This catalogue text clearly demonstrates two knowledge systems, one Western and the other Warlpiri. Yet there is little attempt to bridge the two resources and facilitate a Warlpiri presentation that is clarified to a Western audience. The curators could have used a Warlpiri knowledge base for the presentation while better explaining this approach to their audience. That is, more background was needed to transfer the information and text the Warlpiri artists have shared to their non-Indigenous audience. Further, the catalogue for *Magiciens* does not

show the work of the Yeundumu men, rather it displays two images, one with a ceremonial object placed on the ground in the Australian desert, and a second portraying an Indigenous man dressed and painted for a ceremonial occasion. It is curious that the display of the actual artwork from the exhibition was not deemed essential. The catalogue therefore does not perform as an archival document for the exhibition, rather, it romanticises the origin of the artists.

Moreover, in *"Primitivism",* the curator's conceptual and interpretive framework was overt, while in *Magiciens* there was minimal explanation and information about its concept and artworks. *"Primitivism"* emphasised the 'Other' by portraying it as an old world phenomenon, while Martin in contrast emphasised 'sameness' by providing the same level of information about all artists. The solution offered in *Magiciens* to handle diversity was to avoid the provision of information all together. According to Jason Gaiger (2003, p. 226):

> Despite the diversity of the exhibited works [in *Magiciens*], and the fact that many of the non-western practices had had little previous exposure in the West, there were no long explanatory wall texts contextualising the pieces for visitors.

The curatorial strategy for the *Magiciens* exhibition was to showcase all the artists, Westerners and non-Westerners in the same level of proficiency and quality, to present and treat all artists, from all cultures, in an equal manner (Magnin et al. 1990). Martin thought to eliminate the notion that some people are foreigners and others are locals by demonstrating that all have a place in the world; however, he was oblivious to the fact that the exhibition had not provided any tools to interpret cultures other than Western culture. Although Martin focused on 'artists of our time,' specifically in respect to the art works' production period, they were not presented as truly familiar artworks. On the contrary, they were presented as unfamiliar and mysterious artworks (in accordance with the title *Magicians of the earth*), but no attempt was made to close the gap between those new works and those already common in the West.

Johanne Lamoureux (2005, p. 68) identified this gap in the exhibition space:

> Whereas *"Primitivism"* had posited the creativity of otherness as a phenomenon of the past, *Magiciens* situated it elsewhere. The time of otherness became the space of

> otherness, but the same safe distance was maintained and, more important, so were the very boundaries the exhibition pretended to shake.

Magiciens attempted to broaden the criteria for contemporary art beyond the narrow criteria MoMA had provided. If *"Primitivism"* legitimised art making as an activity generated through a narrow set of motivations, *Magiciens* legitimised art making in all its forms and for any motivations, however, the selection process, as will be discussed later in the chapter, was entirely biased and monotone. The criticism directed to the *"Primitivism"* exhibition was of a different kind to the criticism of *Magiciens*, but it was interrelated. *"Primitivism"* was criticised for presenting the West as superior to the rest of the world and for undermining non-Western cultures by presenting anonymous artworks.

The 'good intentions' for *Magiciens* to be a global exhibition were largely acknowledged, however, the event was criticised for not executing appropriately its aim to present a wide array of international art making. Although fifty non-Western artists were presented, the portrayed 'universality' had no real substance. Perhaps because Europe was not familiar with the *"Primitivism"* exhibition and thus unaware of its complete repercussions, European critics did not praise *Magiciens* for its efforts to highlight the artists' identity, and also avoided to regard it as failing to provide non-Western cultures a real platform in the art world (Lewison 1989; Magnin et al. 1990).

Despite this interpretation, it is evident that what "*Primitivism"* and *Magiciens* have in common is that they were both held in major world art centres. However, while *"Primitivism"* used its dominating position to undermine who was outside of its sphere, *Magiciens* took a more reserved approach, alluding to geographical and human equality rather than supremacy. Lamoureux (2005, p. 66) explains:

> However banal and predictable it has now become, the *Magiciens-"Primitivism"* connection is an important one to envisage. It situates Martin's ambition not only as it aimed to open up to the creative forces of the entire planet but also as it sought to challenge the conventions of exhibition-making within the narrow confines of the art world and, more to the point, within the structure of competing art capitals.

Martin's motivation might have been compromised, however *Magiciens* was held in two influential institutions in Paris: the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle de la Villette. Literature about the exhibition tends to focus on the Centre Georges Pompidou rather than on the Grande Halle de la Villette (Cohen-Solal 2014; Friedel 2016; Martin et al. 2014; Murphy 2013; Steeds 2013). This is because first, the Centre Georges Pompidou symbolises the heart of contemporary art in a global sense, and second because the two locations for the exhibition were managed during the event by Martin, the director of NMAN, a museum housed at the Centre Georges Pompidou. This venue, opened to the public in 1977, is one of the most powerful museums of this genre. McDonald (1999, p. 41) defined it as "the most prestigious official venue in Paris for displaying modern art," and considered it as the "West's ruling cultural tastemaker". The Centre Georges Pompidou is set to present a diversity of cultural and art experiences. It entails: the MNAM (the Musée National d'Art Moderne / the French National Museum of Modern Art), several spaces for temporary exhibitions, a stage for interactive art, and screening theatres. Established and popular artists hold exhibitions in this museum, which offers its audiences an immersive experience for interaction with art and society (Macdonald 2011, p. 233). In 2014 the centre was ranked eleven for the world's most visited museum (Enwezor & Craig-Martin 2016, "Tate Modern"; Pes & Sharpe 2015, p. 15).

In 1989 it was a significant achievement for non-Western artists to be associated with this world-renowned art institution. It is particularly an achievement for the Indigenous art movement to have been associated with this calibre of institution, considering that Indigenous art has rarely been presented since in equally established European institutions. Association with such a centre of art presents for the engaged artists an opportunity to be part of the most active and involved art world supply chain of art audiences, critics, agents, galleries and academics. To illustrate, artists that have had limited success in the marketplace may enjoy an enhanced artist profile after exposure in such high-profile art institution. *Magiciens* was far from an ideal way to enhance artists' profile, and much can be learned from the curatorial practice for the exhibition. Nevertheless, benefit has been gained for the participating artists, merely through the fact that most participating artists have proudly included in their artists' biographies their showcase in 1989 at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle de la Villette.

Western Cultural Hegemony

The *Magiciens* exhibition marked the bicentennial of the French Revolution and was initially designed for the Grande Halle de la Villette, an establishment converted from an old slaughterhouse to a museum for science and technology. The bicentennial was first celebrated at the Grande Halle de la Villette with an exhibition highlighting the “scientific achievements of the late eighteenth century in France” (Lamoureux 2005, p. 65). In the context of the bicentennial, Martin’s aim of the exhibition was to critique the mid-1790s collection in the Louvre museum, which at the time was considered revolutionary and innovative. The Grande Galerie in the Louvre had nationalist features, emphasising pride of French culture and its ‘human mind progress’. The collection was entirely dedicated to telling a history of Western progress. The exhibition was to present “the Italian, the Northern, and the French”, concluding that the French school of art was the global art leader. The museum’s messaging to the French and to outsiders was that to be part of the global art discourse you must be part of the French school of art.

Martin aimed to challenge the notion that the centre for art and its makers is per se in the West, however, while he focused on this goal he tended to act as the explorer himself rather than place a real focus on the artists he represented. Although Martin aimed for an historical shift in how museums and international exhibitions approach art, his strategy was individualistic rather than participatory. Martin (1989b, p. 153) admitted that as long as he, a ‘white’ man from a European heritage, was the curator of the exhibition the curatorial choices made would be subjective, in his words: “according to my own history and my own sensibility”. Martin (1989a, p. 5) acknowledged that although items may have much significance in a particular culture, if according to him, those items do not ‘resonate’ with a Western audience he will not select them for his exhibition. Martin also “avoided accommodating alternative aesthetics or curatorial perspectives” (Chandler 2009, p. 76), to resist the emphasis of cultural ritual in favour of highlighting Western definitions of aesthetic. Martin expected the audience of his exhibition to rely on Western frameworks for the definition of art. Although he aimed to offer ‘a global perspective of art’, he and his cultural knowledge determined what art is according to a mono-cultural view, rather than what could have been a collaborative approach, which considers multiple perspectives.

Martin's 'explorer' characteristics are highlighted in the atlas-like catalogue produced for the exhibition, which portrayed the artists as exotic only to promote the curator as the one who discovered them. In this context, Lamoureux (2005, pp. 65-66) points out the catalogue's features:

> its stamp-size maps locating the provenance of every artist over his or her statement, its profusion of geographic imagery from the artists of the exhibition, and its inclusion, still unusual at the time, of the floor plans of the exhibition display, as if some kind of map to an uncharted territory was needed and thereby offered to the reader.

Martin's background and role in the exhibition helps explain why *Magiciens* did not achieve its goals, and how an alternative curatorial team could have achieved a more equitable event. In the late 20th century, Western curators were once again becoming interested in aspects of non-Western art, however, while the motivations compelling this interest were not strictly the same as those underpinning earlier exhibitions such as "*Primtivism"*, there was still a lack of deep understanding on how to engage with art and culture that is different to one's own art and culture. How people from diverse cultures understand themselves, how they know what they know, their socio-cultural frameworks, geographical backgrounds, and meanings of art, are all different depending on the perspective taken. Curators were grappling with new ways to conceptualise contemporary art exhibitions considering that a cross-cultural context was yet to be practiced in the art world.

Magiciens' curatorial process and rationale

The following section will discuss the four artworks from Indigenous Australia that were included in the exhibition ('artworks' from here on) and establish an understanding for the context of the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* and its curatorial premise. The purpose of this discussion is to recognise why and how these particular works were chosen for the *Magiciens* exhibition, how they were presented to the public, and what impact their exhibition had on the future of the participating Indigenous artists and the Indigenous art movement as a whole. It is imperative to know how the general attitudes for the exhibition, including its Western management, and emphasis on Western modernist principles have affected the presentation and exposure of the Indigenous art on show. Through the gathering of this knowledge, I aim

to draw conclusions about the impact of *Magiciens* and such comparable exhibitions on the recognition of Indigenous art in the contemporary art world.

While researching curator Jean-Hubert Martin's selection of Indigenous artists for the show, it has become evident that his preferences were directly related to these artists' public exposure in several key Australian events prior to the *Magiciens* exhibitions. High quality art collections and exhibitions influence demand for certain artists; exhibitions are in fact the content that forms art history, and through them artists become known to curators and the broader public. Okwui Enwezor, who had directed countless exhibitions and art festivals around the world, argued that dedicated institutions in places where art is produced are pivotal to the success of the artist and those same local art institutions are visited by professionals from the art world (Enwezor in Stony Brook University Art History 2014). Curators draw on their experiences and meetings in local art institutions to plan and invite international artists to their events. This was the case for Martin's introduction to Indigenous art; Australian art events at the time made an impact on *Magiciens*' director.

A number of national and international art events influenced Martin's choices for *Magiciens*. First, the 4th Biennale of Sydney in 1982, titled *Vision of Disbelief* introduced Martin to the concept of ground paintings by Warlpiri men. Australia paved the way for Warlpiri artists to exhibit in Europe and later in *Magiciens* by showcasing their work in *Visions of Disbelief*. Key stakeholders from the art world visited this biennale, it was an important showcase and forum for reviewing recent developments in contemporary art both internationally and in Australia. The event featured a large sand painting and performance by the Warlpiri community from Lajamanu at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW). In personal communication between Vanessa Russ (scholar) and Bernice Murphy (curator of contemporary art at the AGNSW until 1983), Murphy testified that Martin was present with her at the venue for the Biennale of Sydney during the installation of the sand painting (Russ 2013, p. 183). Martin's experience in Sydney informed his selection of the Warlpiri group for the *Magiciens* exhibition.

A second exhibition that influenced Martin the following year (1983), *D'un autre continent: l'Australie, le rêve et le reel* (from now on referred to as *D'un autre continent)*, staged at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, featured the work of a different group of Warlpiri men. Indigenous curator Suzanne Page accompanied by Leon Paroissien and Bernice Murphy

(then co-curators of the Power Gallery, which thereafter became the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney) organised the show; it included work by non-Indigenous Australian artists Mike Parr, Jenny Watson, Bill Henson, Juan Davila, Peter Booth, Ken Unsworth, Dale Frank and Maria Kozic, amongst others (Page & Paroissien 1983). For *D'un autre continent*, twelve Warlpiri men from the Lajamanu community in the Northern Territory were commissioned to create a twelve by twelve metre ground painting (Myers 1998, p. 21). According to Myers "the main attraction for festival visitors seems to have been the Warlpiri ground painting" (1998, p. 21).

D'un autre continent emphasised the contemporaneity of the Warlpiri men and enhanced the legitimacy of their works to be part of the contemporary art world. Senior Walpiri men, supported by Lance Bennett, a representative from the Aboriginal Cultural Foundation, expressed the aim and position of the artwork in respect to its traditional meaning, addressing the 1983 display:

> We have brought this painting to Paris because we want to show that our traditional ceremony life, which has gone on since the beginning of time, is still living today. We, the Warlpiri tribe of the central Desert, want the outside world to know that our traditions have never collapsed. We want to show the people of Paris that our culture is as modern as today (Bennett 1983, p. 48).

The Warlpiri men's sentiments leave no longer doubt that it was only some individuals from the West that wanted to include non-Western art in their world, but the artists themselves were passionately fighting for their place in this art sector. *D'un autre continent* too, impressed Martin, and the Warlpiri were marked as a curatorial choice in his artist list (McLean 2014a, p. 4). These two earlier exhibitions of Warlpiri men in the Biennale of Sydney and later in Paris inspired Martin to include the Warlpiri artist's work in the *Magiciens* exhibition.

Third, the 7th Biennale of Sydney (1988), curated by Nick Waterlow OAM, titled *The Southern Cross: Views of World Art c. 1940-1988,* included the now widely renowned *Aboriginal Memorial*, an impressive sculptural installation consisting of two hundred painted hollow-log or 'bone' coffins from Ramingining in Central Arnhem Land; one for each year of European colonisation of the Australian continent since 1788. It is suggested that the

Aboriginal Memorial was also seen by Martin (Russ 2013, p. 183), who became enthused by the various Indigenous art installations he viewed in Sydney, in particular the sand painting at the AGNSW and the hollow logs. This course of events demonstrates that these biennales acted as curatorial agents for Australian Indigenous art by expanding its value to international institutions and audiences (Russ 2013, p. 185).

Finally, in 1987-1988, just prior to *Magiciens,* the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) commissioned two hollow log coffins – *Eel tailed catfish* and *Herringbone design* – by the prominent Yolngu artist Jimmy Wululu, effectively promoting the artist and his works (Mundine 2016). This exposure resulted in both Wululu and John Mawurndjul to exhibit artworks six months prior to *Magiciens* in the landmark 1988 touring exhibition *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia* (*Dreamings* from here on). Co-produced by New York's Asia Society in partnership with Adelaide's South Australian Museum, this exhibition played a crucial role in promoting the legitimacy of Indigenous art from remote communities as contemporary art, and fostering its achievements on a global scale. *Dreamings* quickly became the Asia Society's most highly regarded showcase, touring Chicago and Los Angeles (Skerritt 2018), while inspiring the curators for *Magiciens* to seek out Indigenous Australian art of a similar quality. As Wululu and Mawurndjul gained increasing international recognition in the contemporary art world, the curators took notice. Wululu was commissioned by the Holmes à Court collection in 1989 to produce a hollow-log coffin for La Grande Hall de la Villette as part of the *Magiciens* exhibition (Russ 2013, p. 183).

It is clear that trends in the Australian and International art worlds had significant influence on the curatorial preferences of curators such as Martin, with real impact in the contemporary art capitals. In addition to trends in the Australian art scene, international curators also rely on information and guidance from sources close to the origins of the work. For example, Martin invited an advisory committee to inform the curatorial choices for the *Magiciens* exhibition. Swiss activist and artist Bernhard Lüthi, alongside Gary Foley, Charles (Chicka) Dixon and Lin Onus from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board (ATSIAB) served on this committee, which was auspiced by Sydney's Power Gallery. Further, Russ (2013, p. 184) observes that the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) helped organise and prepare the text for the Warlpiri work exhibited in *Magiciens*. It can be assumed that the relationship between *Magiciens*' curators and the MCA was established through the connection of Leon Paroissien and Bernice Murphy to Martin. This indicates that overseas curators developed

exhibition ideas, particularly in regard to Indigenous art, with input from Australian institutions and their curators, and also relied on Indigenous authorities for their art selection.

The participants in *Magiciens:* Magicians or artists?

While exhibitions such as "*Primitivism"* were criticised for regarding all art as abstraction and ignoring the cultural meaning of works by non-Western artists, *Magiciens* was criticised for the same shortfalls but also for the opposite: it portrayed art as beyond reality, sacred, as an art of magic (Foster et al. 2004). The title *Magiciens de la Terre* (Magicians of the Earth) was criticised for devaluing the artists and their art, and effectively silencing any potential socio-political critique by asserting the spirituality of the artists as the over-riding thesis (Afterall 2014; Anderson 2015).

Western culture has privileged science over spirituality since the Enlightenment and continually underestimates what is spiritual (Gagliano & Simard 2018). Magic, as in the title for *Magiciens*, is perceived to be a supernatural power beyond reality and scientific definitions; therefore, rather than it being associated with rational thinking of 'modern civilisation' it is associated with children or communities that are perceived 'under-developed'. Spirituality, in this context appears to be a convenient appeal to the universal, existing 'beyond' defined geographies or singular cultural determination, which, when scrutinised, becomes vague rather than critical (Anderson 2015, p. 11). According to academic Lucy Steeds (2013, p. 110), when two civilisations come into contact the term 'magician' is generally associated with the weakest of the two. Hans Haacke (Tate Modern 2014), one of the Western artists participating in the exhibition, associated "magicians with imagined supernatural powers, wizardry, witchcraft, the occult, and also with trickery". Haacke ultimately criticised the exhibition's title, for what he regarded as a promotion of an exoticism, which negated the importance of the exhibition as post-colonial. By highlighting spirituality as the essence of the exhibition through its title, the otherness of its artists was emphasised. This had stigmatised the exhibition as 'not the same' as contemporary art.

Paradoxically, the title that promised a show about spirituality didn't reflect the actual exhibition, considering that any spirituality that was present in artworks in it was not elaborated upon. According to Magnin et al. (1990, pp. 55-56) one of the essential aims for the exhibition was to bring together to one space objects (sculptures, paintings, etc.) made by

individuals from around the world and from different cultures, created by artists that are unfamiliar with the concept of art as it is understood in the West. However, the selection criteria were around objects that somewhat resemble the concept of art in the West. Magnin et al. (1990) stated that they were well aware of the ambiguities that the title would cause, however, the curators were comfortable stripping away the rituals and spirituality to adapt the works to their perspectives of what art is. The title ‘Magicians of the earth’ offered the curators the possibility to not exclude ‘ancient’ designs, which were vivid, enticing and representing a spirituality equal in its aesthetics to Western works of art. From the curators’ perspective they stated that they were not interested in nostalgia around the history of human evolution. By employing the term ‘Magicians’ in the exhibition, the curators encouraged a division between a ‘dominant and rational’ society, and a culture that believes in magic. This approach signified a Western sense of superiority, whereby it is the West that needs to teach the ‘Other’ ‘real’ wisdom, while not considering that it may be the West that needs to learn about concepts outside the realm of its own knowledge.

***Magiciens*' curators and informants**

Although the curatorial process is always subjective and specific to the curator’s background, *Magiciens* had a limited process in place to achieve its curatorial objectives and recognise, and attempt to overcome the subjectivity of its curators. That is, to achieve a genuinely global exhibition, which was the curators’ explicit aim, *Magiciens* would have needed to follow a process that avoids individual frameworks, for instance one that is based on collaborations with international curators. With that, the curators failed to transfer substantial knowledge to the exhibition’s audiences. The curators may not have been able to gather all the information needed about the artists and their culture due to their limited capacity, however, if this was a constraint it was up to the curators to seek partnerships that would supply the necessary information.

The curatorial team for the *Magiciens* exhibition hired researchers, ethnologists and anthropologists that had experience in the field, and familiarity with multiple cultures, languages, and personal connections to particular artists who were of interest to the exhibition. These appointed ‘experts’ departed on their international assignment independently or collaboratively with the curators to identify potential artists for the event. Through this practice the curators aimed to reach out to cultural groups who had limited

capacity to connect with the art world, with the aim of following an inclusive approach for the exhibition (Magnin et al. 1990, p. 56). According to Green and Gardner (2016, p. 126) the curators were aware of their lack of knowledge about art worlds outside of Europe. Their limited insight about countries distant from their own European origin meant that they depended on 'local informants'[7] who spoke the local language or knew the local community structure, to select artists for the exhibition. Each informant recommended between one to two "proteges" (Green & Gardner 2016, p. 126). The contribution of the local informants was marginalised and obtained an inferior status during the exhibition's curatorial process, considering that the event was entirely led by curators and 'experts' from the West, who based the process on subjective Western knowledge epistemologies.

Magiciens' curatorial team was constructed entirely of Western curators. Thus, failing to collaborate with curators whose nationalities correspond to the artists selected for the exhibition. Despite the curators' expectations from their advisors and informants to obtain reliable local information, the work of informants is highly influenced by their local politics, connections and customs. Those informants in turn had limitations such as lack of specific cultural information, language discrepancies in respect to a particular local language (for example a different dialect), and kinship relationship in the community. According to Maria Elena Garcia (2000, p. 97) who discusses the relationship between anthropologists and their 'informants', the latter are members of the community being 'researched' and often perform their duties as informants with a clear agenda, driven by their own political stance within their communities of origin, aiming to benefit their direct families or gain monetary profits. The informants' expectation from the anthropologist is for social contribution to their community. Informants come from a particular socio-economic background, often without privilege and one that affects their decisions and advice. They are also chosen not necessarily according to their skills, but according to criteria such as ethnic or national background, language proficiency, or place of residence.

The employment of local curators, as has been common in Australian galleries since the 1980s, would allow for different, and more credible perspectives, that is, perspectives generated by the source or by individuals that are more familiar with the source. This in lieu

[7] When anthropologists conduct their field work, they commonly engage local people known as 'informants' to gather local knowledge (Nielsen 1996).

of second hand information generated by curators who are not connected to the heritage they are trying to present. As Waanyi author Alexis Wright (2017) notes in an essay titled *What happens when you tell somebody else's story?* it is not for others to write one's own story. The aim to offer a clear and transparent narrative for artworks and art exhibitions can be achieved by working collectively. Lowish (2018, p. 18) proposes that dialogue between those parties involved can achieve acknowledgment of one's story rather than stories being told on behalf of someone. This suggested method highlights its absence in Martin's strategy of collaborative curatorial work across the relevant cultures.

Categorisation for *Magiciens*

The *Magiciens* exhibition's strategy, to break through rigid art categories and privileged Western points of view, was to select artworks according to their geographies. Martin justified this geographical approach in a 2010 panel discussion, explaining that the hierarchical structure in which contemporary art is valued and exhibited – according to art historical frameworks – must shift to a geographical construction (Afterall 2014). In other words, rather than focusing on the different Western historical art movements like cubism, surrealism and so on as categories for art exhibition, Martin suggested the origin of the art or this of its makers as a main curatorial focus (Jaschke 2010). Martin worked with a basic distinction of 'Western art' and 'non-Western art' because other distinctions such as 'developing' and 'developed countries' did not fit some countries that could not be defined in one such category (From the Centre Pompidou archive, in Nieuwenhove 2011). This geographical focus eliminated the traditional art historical category but created a new category that accentuated the non-Western's 'Otherness'. Although *Magiciens* defined itself as inclusive, it focused ultimately on a superficial and uncritical perpetuation of the 'Other'. Through Martin's geographical framework it is the curator himself who decides for the artist what concept to exhibit; this being by default the artist's identity, in lieu of according the artist freedom to highlight their individual ideas. The conceptual solution that Martin adopted, although aimed to provide equal opportunities to a wide population of artists, had yet again highlighted difference rather than a shared narrative amongst all artists.

Martin dismissed the idea of a single centre to the world and portrayed a visual image, in the catalogue for the *Magiciens* exhibition, of 'many centres'. Curator and writer Julia Friedel (2016) explained that:

> In the catalogue, a kind of atlas of this global art world, each artist's geographical background was marked on a folded out globe. Due to a shift in the display of the continents, the respective place was always located in the centre of the world – a metaphoric call for a new geography of art history.

Other maps however, were largely not available in the exhibition itself, which meant that the viewer could not locate the country of origin of the artist. This seemed to have been a strategy to avoid facing political issues prominent to many of those exhibiting in *Magiciens,* for instance, the legal recognition of Indigenous land rights in Australia (Anderson 2015, p. 11). The exhibition was criticised for ignoring the grim post-colonial reality some of the artists were enduring, considering the human consequences of the domination and exploitation of colonised peoples and their territories (Tate Modern 2014). For the participating Indigenous artists, by neglecting to feature the artists' places of residence, a discussion about their circumstances as colonised peoples was avoided. The curators of *Magiciens* were explicitly uninterested in social or cultural anthropology, however, due to this rejection they have denied the opportunity for their audiences in particular, and for the art historical narrative in general to appreciate for instance, Mawurndjul's perspectives and background.

Mawurndjul's work was exhibited at the Grande Halle de la Villette, neighbouring Wululu's installation. Mawurndjul's work explores "flora and fauna, ancestral events, supernatural beings, significant sites and encrypted ceremonial designs" (Bullock et al. 2018, p. 21). Art materials used by Mawurndjul for his practice include bark, wood and ochre. Mawurndjul was exposed as a young man to rock art and ceremonial designs, depicting element of Kuninjku cosmology. Yolngu people from Eastern Arnhem Land were already using these designs as themes for their bark painting, which they then traded for cash. They used bark painting as a source material for their art already in 1963, when they participated in the *Yirrkala Bark Petition* to fight for their land rights and recognition in the Australian legal system. The subsequent political action, *Gove and Rights Case* occurred in 1968 also led by bark painters. The practice of utilising an art movement to express a political stand, however, did not inspire the *Magiciens* curators to facilitate a discussion around the messages Yolngu people, and specifically, John Mawurndjul, had for the world. Mawurndjul is known for skilfully depicting his Kuninjku cultural practice in a contemporary and international

narrative. The artist also repeatedly succeeds to navigate a multicultural environment, mastering dialogues between his traditional culture and value system, and this of non-Indigenous people who follow him in his journey as an artist. However, the narrative around Mawurndjul's living circumstances and history was not mentioned in the *Magiciens* exhibition or its catalogue, except a mention of an external reference in the catalogue to Djon Mundine's text about Mawurndjul (Martin 1989a, p. 195). The curators for *Magiciens* were not interested to explore the challenges faced by Mawurndjul in his life in Arnhem Land, nor his ingenuity and drive to become an artist. The exhibition displayed Mawurndjul's final artistic output without hinting on the journey Mawurndjul had left behind.

The *Magiciens* exhibition proposed new models for cultural diversity and tried to breakthrough common art world categorisation, it challenged the primitive art category customed in Paris at that time. Non-Western art was commonly exhibited in museums for primitive art such as le Musée des Arts africains et océaniens (The museum for African and pacific art) or Musée de l'Homme (The Museum of Humans) (Magnin et al. 1990). The purpose of the museum of primitive art was to narrate the history and science of world cultures. The curators for the exhibition deliberately engaged with artworks and cultures that were usually selected for museums for primitive art and were outside of the realm of the contemporary art world. This was the underlying premise of the exhibition: to showcase art from around the world in a contemporary art context. Although Martin and his curatorial team consulted anthropologists and ethnologists during the curation of *Magiciens*, they did not offer space in the exhibition itself for anthropological 'discourse'. The argument for this strategy was that the works were to be represented as contemporary art, and that an ethnographic explanation or interpretation of such works was antithetical within the context of a contemporary art institution (Magnin et al. 1990, p. 59).

Magnin et al. (1990) identified selection criteria for items suitable for the primitive art museum, which were thoroughly different from the criteria used for the *Magiciens* exhibition. First, the creators of items displayed in museums for primitive art may or may not be professionals in their practice; second, their items are displayed to the public to introduce a certain cultural practice or tradition relevant to a specific time in history; third, the objects in these museums are not identified; and fourth, when a person or a group are exhibited, they are depicted as representatives of their culture. The aim for *Magiciens* in contrast was to distance itself from museums of primitive art through the choices made about the participating artists

and their presentation. One such critical measure for the exhibition was to showcase works of living artists and cultures. *Magiciens* engaged only contemporary artists, some of which created works specifically for the show in their homes or in Paris itself (Magnin et al. 1990). Further, all the artists were professionals in their art and craft, presented with their full names, and treated as individual people who hold a unique personality and set of values, they were not expected to be representatives of their country or culture (Magnin et al. 1990). This approach was in line with the conventions for contemporary art, aiming to engage with living artists, and narrating a history of art with the participation of the artists themselves (Meyer 2013).

In Magnin et al. (1990), the curators for the exhibition said that the exhibition aimed to provoke discussion about topics relevant to the time, and discuss the universality and purpose of art rather than the science of cultures. The curators of the *Magiciens* exhibition aimed to evoke discussion around the purpose of art, freed from censorship based on what may or may not be considered as 'art' (Magnin et al. 1990). Although the themes for the exhibition were criticised for not covering fundamental issues of the time – such as the notion of cultural identity, political struggle toward self-determination amongst colonised peoples, and wealth inequality – *Magiciens* made a clear distinction between its thematic focus and that of a museum of primitive art. By setting these criteria *Magiciens* succeeded to differentiate its exhibition from this in museums of 'ancient traditions,' and manifested its criticism against the basic concept of these institutions. However, this aim jeopardised the integrity of *Magiciens*; to avoid the narration of the history of world cultures meant in *Magiciens* to avoid the narration of the history of participating artists. Perhaps a collaborative approach with institutions and researchers that investigate the history of culture would have resulted a more complete art exhibition.

The presentation of Wunuwun's installation demonstrates a contradiction in the curatorial rationale; on the one hand the curators wanted to avoid anthropological and political discourses, but on the other hand they wanted to emphasise the connection of the participating artists to modernity, a connection demonstrated through a thorough examination of the artists' circumstances and culture. Alongside the body of works titled *Barnumbirr Manikay* (Morning Star), Wunuwun also exhibited a larger canvas (182 x 136 centimetre) composed with natural ochre, charcoal, and acrylic, describing the natural components that define the ancestries and traditions of the Murrungun clan, for whom Wunuwun was an

instrumental ceremonial leader. The additional smaller drawings depicted with detail these individual components (Martin 1989a; Walsh 2017). The curators could have worked with Wunuwun to explore and present information about the artist's life and culture and integrate an additional political and post-colonial layer to the work, if Wunuwun was interested in doing so. It would have been relevant to explain about Wunuwun's residence in the Gamardi outstation in Central Arnhem Land, elaborating about the rise of outstations as a response to government attempts to assimilate and concentrate Aboriginal people in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory in the 1960s. The governance model of Arnhem Land could also have been explored. These aspects of Wunuwun's life and circumstances would have offered an important perspective on his work, allowing a deeper understanding of Wunuwun's relationship with modernity, which seemingly the curators were interested to highlight. As demonstrated through this example, conventional art exhibitions in the West tend to be limited to a Western art historical narrative because non-Western artists' narrative and circumstances are being neglected.

The curators of *Magiciens* claimed that any approach they would have chosen would have been controversial as the debate around cultural diversity was politically heated at the time, beyond the art world (Afterall 2014). Herewith, the curators alluded to debate in the broader community around cultural diversity, racism and injustice, which is a common post-colonial debate. The curators wanted to draw a line between political debates and art, however, art represents the community and its socio-political layers, particulalary so in late 20th century, therefore, a separation between art and politics was not accepted by the critics of the exhibition. The curators themselves tried to avoid a political discussion drawn from the exhibition, however this avoidance resulted in disregard of issues and concerns of participating artists and for that matter, of the world as a whole. The exhibition disregarded matters that were burning to the particular artists exhibited in it, including discussion about the significance of diversity in society, Western domination in the world generally and in the art world particularly, post-colonial influences on colonised nations, and the injustice in the world. Instead *Magiciens* focused on the aesthetic features of the works leaving them stripped of their meaning. Although the curators for *Magiciens* aimed to change the reputation of non-Western artists from 'primitives' to 'artists' by including them in the exhibition, they failed in achieving this aim due to their single sided curatorial approach.

The nature of the relationship between exhibited works

Martin's curatoral choices reveal that conventions for the presentation of Indigenous art in the Australian art world has great influence on international exhibitions. In Nick Waterlow's 1988 Biennale of Sydney, European, American and Indigenous art were brought together in a kind of fraught dialogue. The exhibition focused on "world developments since the 1940s" (Russ 2013, p. 185). Waterlow divided the exhibition to categories including "landscape as metaphor, the figure and its psyche, the non-objective, myth and allegory, intervention and de-construction" (Waterlow & Cosgrove 1988, pp. 11-12), linking Indigenous artists with non-Indigenous artists through these concepts. Vanessa Russ (2013, p. 185) asserts that, "it is easy to see how with *Magicians* in Paris, Jean-Hubert Martins (sic) might have found the curatorial concept in the *Biennale of Sydney*". Russ is referring here to Martin's conceptual vision for *Magiciens* whereby he juxtaposed Western and non-Western artworks attempting to create dialogues between the artworks. Martin, it seems, obtained the courage to mix cultural principles together, such as art and objects based on Indigenous traditional knowledge with art originating from a Western art tradition, when he saw that this was being done in Australia. Circulation and exposure of Indigenous art nationally and internationally in leading institutions assists in creating new exhibition opportunities. The way the works are exhibited is also influential on the way the works would be exhibited in the future. Thus, it is crucial that Australian institutions lead the way towards an appropriate way to exhibit Indigenous art.

In *Magiciens*, Martin aimed to create similar connections. The *Yarla* artwork was curatorially located directly in front of a wall-based, colour-coordinated mud circle by British artist, Richard Long. Long's work, titled *Red Earth Circle,* consisted of mud, collected from the River Avon near his birthplace, then thrown directly onto a clay base adhering vertically to the gallery wall (Florander 2017; Heartney 1989; Lamoureux 2005; The Economist 2019). Both artworks were of a similar large size, visible and largely positioned in the same area. The two artworks represented the natural world, and both were handcrafted from natural materials with large circles as major features for the works (Hilty 2016). Perhaps the neighbouring artworks pointed in the same direction or they possibly reflected similar philosophies (The Economist 2019). Either way, the forms and spirals on the ground and Long's circle on the wall had an obvious visual resemblance and a conceptual relationship; however, this relationship was not organic but was fabricated by the curators, as clearly the

Warlpiri men had based their work on different frameworks to those that Long proclaimed. The connection that was formed between the two artworks was within a curatorial strategy for *Magiciens*, whereby the curators aimed to assert that Western and non-Western artists are equal in the context of a globalised world.

Critics of *Magiciens* doubted the extended and amplified meaning of Long's work, highlighting yet another Western invention. It was argued by Lamoureux (2005, pp. 71-73) that such a connection between the works was an artifice, forced upon audiences by the curators by simply placing the works side-by-side and then asserting commensurability between the two. This was problematic for both artworks: first, it offered Long's work a spiritual essence which Long himself did not, according to available documentation, intended to offer (The catalogue for the exhibition does not provide any statement at all for Long's work). Second, it reduced the profoundly spiritual and eternal Warlpiri ontology to a simplistic signifier of spiritualism within a modernist context (Harris 2011; Heartney 1989). According to Maureen Murphy (2013, p. 41) there was an issue not with concept of showcasing the "state of religious and popular art beyond the West" but with the concept of showing this art alongside Western art because of the comparison that was again reflecting on a Western framework for art. Martin only considers a local value-system rather than a commitment to values and beliefs different to his own, as if the cultural meanings of the artworks and objects to the societies from which they were drawn, did not matter as much.

It is important to acknowledge that Indigenous artists have common underpinning cultural traditions that differ from those in the West. Mundine (2000, p. 86) highlights that the framework used by Martin to discuss the essence of art is problematic when including art that is based on cultural principals that are fundamentally different from Western art practices. Mundine questions Martin's methodology and inquiry stating that these are not effective when attempting to include groups with differing underpinning frameworks:

> French project, under Jean-Herbert Martins (sic) curatorial oversight, sought to question notions of who is a (sic) artist and what is art in the world today, with the challenging concept that in fact most of the continuing, ancient art practices are pursued by artists who exits outside of the orbit of Western Europe and the United States of America (Mundine 2000, p. 86).

The curatorial rationale for the *Magiciens* exhibition was to exhibit Western art alongside non-Western art and demonstrate connections and cross-cultural dialogue between the artworks (Steeds 2013, p. 110). This was based on a certain universality imagined by the curators, whereby for example the spirituality and aspects of Western contemporary art are explored in both Western and non-Western art despite certain such identities being typical to art created in only one of those cultures. According to Martin, the type of globalisation in the form of art traditions collated together, provided opportunities for new links and connections (Martin in Asia Art Archive in America et al., 2014). The curator made a conscious effort to select works that relate to each other in a physical or spiritual form (Martin 1989b). Martin was the one who identified these relationships although at times they were his subjective interpretation.

The question of universality

While *Magiciens de le terre* succeeded, to a significant degree, in its ambition to present 'the first global exhibition of contemporary art', its uncritical pursuit of the 'universality' of all contemporary art was profoundly flawed. Anthropologist Sally Price (1989, p. 32) defined 'the universality principle' as "the proposition that art is a 'universal language' expressing the common joys and concerns of all humanity". Myers (2006, p. 271) argues that by applying the term 'universal', Western discourse refers to an art practice relevant to the interests of a selected group, which holds Western modernists' frameworks. The very definition of 'universality' is subjective, considering that each culture possesses a unique set of values which focus on dominant features, that according to that specific culture, are universal. It is a generalisation to perceive all artists as 'equal' due to their basic traits as humans and creators. Despite the point that all artists are living beings with similar fundamental needs and roles as creators, already by the mere fact that exhibiting artists operate under the title 'artists' demonstrates that they operate within the distinct framework of their role. Martin hinted on the multiple variations for the definition of the term 'artist' by referring to artists as 'magicians' in the title for the event. Through this analogy it can be understood that artists are not all the same, it is their context alongside their creation that demonstrates who they are, what they do, and why they do it.

Considering the long colonial associations such Western concepts of universalism hold, this rationale was broadly criticised for its failure to adequately address such contentious

underpinning. When speaking of universalism, there is a general neglect in distinguishing the differences between the artists from the West and those from the non-West. According to Martin (1989b, p. 211), the 'universality' of all artists was showcased through their visual language, however, Martin ignored such facts, for instance, that some of the works were not produced to communicate ideas but had a more practical purpose: Jimmy Wululu's funeral logs for example. The *Djalumbu* funeral posts were made in Ramingining and, like the works displayed in the *Aboriginal Memorial,* hold a traditional purpose to receive the bones of the dead, while the painted chevrons on the outer surface of the posts represent the edges of translucent catfish and recall the soul of the dead (National Gallery of Australia n.d.). This thesis argues that when non-Western art and in particular Indigenous art are presented to the public they must be accompanied by information about their origin and cultural underpinnings, to highlight their uniqueness rather than their 'Oherness'. With that, universality will entail an assortment of diverse cultures and backgrounds, each valued in its own right.

The discussion and existing knowledge in the broader community about cultural diversity could not be concealed from the exhibition without being criticised. The curators understood, and conveyed to their audience, that artists from around the world are influenced by modernism and industrial and technological progress. Magnin et al. (1990) justified their concept for the *Magiciens* exhibition by explaining that artists' traditional practice and concepts have transformed through changes in their lives in modern times. Not only do artists use Western art materials such as canvas and acrylic paints, but in their daily lives, artists are exposed to global developments and are for instance, using modern technologies just as is custom in the West. Herewith, the curators relied again on the notions of universalism defined by Western principals: "emphasizing the formal, material dimensions of art objects as their central quality" (Myers 2006, p. 271). The curators' justification for the limited description of the objects and installations in the exhibition was that some of the art did not have explanations and that the language barriers were limiting (Magnin et al. 1990). This approach eliminated 'difference' all together, however, it evoked the question: are we all the same? By ignoring cultural differences, the exhibition portrayed a dishonest narrative of the world, whereby one's background has no influence on one's being and practice. Herewith, individual histories are eliminated, crucial context hidden, and information lost.

Beyond the criticisms

Despite the criticism and the failure of *Magiciens* according to its aims, *Magiciens* is one such exhibition that challenged conventions about contemporary art and tested possibilities for intercultural dialogue and connections (although with limited success). Many have criticised the exhibition predominantly for its monocultural curation and inconsistencies, despite the curators' intention to evoke change in the art world. Martin had a clear desire to influence the art world and its rigid criteria (Afterall 2014). *Magiciens* not only shaped perceptions of the contemporary art domain, but also expanded the narrow criteria that were conventional to the then predominantly Western art world. The impact of the exhibition was not per se related to the aesthetic or cultural outputs and their appreciation, but rather the impact was on the changes brought to the narrative of the history of the art movement (McEvilley 1992, p. 157). As described by McEvilley (1992, p. 157) "the monumental fact [is] that this was the first major exhibition consciously to attempt to discover a post-colonialist way to exhibit objects together". This ground-breaking exhibition revealed globalisation seemingly ahead of its time (Murphy 2013, p. 41; Winking 2012, p. 622). Although the Western world was largely connected at the time, for instance exhibitions with both German and American artists were common, the world was not yet connected like it is today, and considering its global reach, the *Magiciens* exhibition was a unique event. *Magiciens* led the way for non-Western artists in providing new opportunities in the art world such as international exhibitions and exposure, for instance, through *Magiciens,* Western curators obtained opportunities to visit remote locations, and artists from around the world visited Paris, a major centre for the arts.

There were a number of positive outcomes for artists through the *Magiciens* exhibition, which I will outline here. First, *Magiciens* provided the occasion for participating artists to meet and be exposed to other contemporary artists and artworks from around the world. Artists valued the opportunity to be and exhibit in Paris, an international centre for the arts. To illustrate how some artists have experienced their participation in *Magiciens,* South African artist Esther Mahlangu shares her feelings of admiration and appreciation, alongside being overwhelmed and displaced, during her trip to Paris for *Magiciens de la Terre*:

> To see all the different works from all the artists was very inspiring to me. As this was my first experience with this kind of formal setting for my work it made me feel very

> special. I am not an academic, as I never went to school and therefore it is not for me to give judgment about the exhibition and how it was done. I thought it was very beautiful and well presented… It was a difficult time, when not many artists from South Africa had the opportunity to travel. The exhibition opened up many doors for me as an artist (28 February 2009) (Tate Modern 2014).

Exhibitions interstate and overseas generate travel invitations for artists and provide occasions for exchange of skills and knowledge, in addition to potential valuable encounters with art world stakeholders, and opportunities for interviews and exposure. A trip to an international exhibition has the potential to provide network opportunities with artists from around the world, and with art world professionals and audiences (Frost 2013). *Magiciens* offered such opportunities, for instance, to some of many Indigenous artists that are disconnected from the art world due to their remote living, until they are presented with the opportunity to travel outside of their community and directly engage with art events. Some Indigenous artists, John Mawurndjul included, have travelled extensively throughout their career and by doing so have become familiar and comfortable with this practice (Jefferson 2018; Perkins 2015; Wright & Mundine 1998). Like Mawurndjul who made his decision to pursue an artist career after his initial exposure to the art world, more Indigenous artists may benefit from the opportunity to travel to international exhibitions.

A second positive outcome is that *Magiciens* not only offered a stage for Mawurndjul's craft, but also promoted interest in other artists from Arnhem Land. At the same time, Mawurndjul's career revealed to other Indigenous people the opportunity that lies in an artist career, and many artists followed in his footsteps. The profile of Arnhem Land artists developed somewhat due to Mawurndjul's success and international career. Mawurndjul developed as a renowned international artist through wide-ranging exposure, which in turn assisted in promoting other artists from his area. The opportunity to generate interest, both amongst the audience in a particular art style, and amongst community members in starting an artist career can be assumed in other international art events that include particular Indigenous artists, but operate as agents for the Indigenous art movement as a whole.

Third, the participating artists valued the opportunity to exhibit in *Magiciens* and be acknowledged for their works. The Warlpiri men from Yuendumu travelled to Paris in May 1989 for the *Magiciens* exhibition, a trip followed by worldwide acclaim for their work (McKenzie 1990). Myers (cited in Gagosian Gallery 2019) explained that the success of the Indigenous art movement and display of its art in high calibre institutions provides great pride to the artists and their community. Indigenous people have fought for recognition for more than two hundred years, during which their culture was dismissed, and people oppressed. Exhibitions interstate and overseas symbolise the long-awaited respect, and recognition aspired for.

After *Magiciens*

Less than 300,000 people visited the *Magiciens* exhibition over the two locations; this is considered low exhibition visitation in France (Cohen-Solal 2014). However, the exhibition received much attention internationally, followed by extensive literature and analyses that discuss the event from 1989 to the present date (Friedel 2016; Greenberg 2005; Lewison 1989; Magnin et al. 1990; Martin et al. 2014; Murphy 2013). The interest developed progressively and within a multidisciplinary perspective. Scholars and students researched the event from sociological, artistic, anthropologic and historical perspectives. This outcome promoted further discussion about the criteria for contemporary art and how those may need to shift. *Magiciens* evoked awareness about the complexity of multiculturalism and its public display. The fact that numerous thinkers around the world reacted to *Magiciens* demonstrates that the exhibition was and is relevant to debates around contemporary art. This thought-provoking exhibition and the reactions to it highlighted the desire of many art world Globalists (e.g. Okwui Enwezor, Terry Smith, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev) to rectify the narrow perspectives of the contemporary art world to transform it to a more inclusive space. The response to the exhibition promoted critical thinking about what globalisation means and what approaches may be developed to highlight personal or group histories within a globalised world. While *Magiciens* represents a beginning to this new narrative, there is much more work to be done to ensure that the art world offers a genuinely inclusive space for artists from around the world and that this inclusion remains in place despite any world imbalances the future may hold.

Continuing on from *Magiciens*' curatorial premise, a number of exhibition opportunities in Europe arose for Indigenous artists in the years after the event. There has been a trend since *Magiciens*, especially in France, to choose one focus or another rather than finding a real bridge between anthropology and the arts (Myers 1998). Crossman and Barou (1990), curators of the 1990 Montpellier exhibition *L'Été Australien,* rejected the presentation of the cultural background of the Indigenous artists featuring in their exhibition in favour of a focus on aesthetics. This exhibition too displayed Indigenous art alongside both non-Indigenous Australian and non-Australian contemporary artists. The catalogue for the exhibition consulted Australian and international art experts, but omitted any anthropological point of view (Myers 1998). Nevertheless, this exhibition was a milestone for Indigenous art representation in Europe, alongside the 1993-1994 exhibition *Aratjara: art of the first Australians* (from now on referred to as *Aratjara*), who "toured three 'cutting edge' contemporary art venues in Europe, the Kunstsammlung in Düsseldorf, the Hayward Gallery in London, and the Louisiana Museum in Denmark" (Mundine 2013b, p. 52).

Aratjara was fundamentally different from *Magiciens*; it exhibited only Indigenous art. Over one hundred artists with roughly 150 new and old artworks featured in this exhibition (Mundine 2013, p. 52). It is fair to assume that the exposure Indigenous artists gained in France in 1989 – 1990 assisted with elevating the movement's profile and finding patrons for *Aratjara*. The organiser of the exhibition, Bernhard Lüthi used *Magiciens* as a platform to meet art directors and stakeholders that could support the planned *Aratjara* exhibition. A further legacy from *Magiciens* was an Indigenous and non-Indigenous advisory committee of artists and artworkers that was formed in the late 1980s, hosted by the Power Gallery at the University of Sydney, which was originally in response to Martin's invitation to the *Magiciens* exhibition (as revealed earlier in this chapter). Lüthi operated locally in Europe and collaborated from the start with the Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Arts Board of the Australia Council (ATSIAB) and later with the formed advisory committee. It can be understood from the literature that this committee was consulted far more broadly for *Aratjara* compared with consultations for *Magiciens.* This explains why Mundine argued that "Aratjara may well be the only exhibition of its kind initiated and controlled by Aboriginal people" (Mundine 2013b, p. 52).

Although the exhibition was controlled by Indigenous people, a modernist curatorial practice to provide minimal information for each work onsite was used for *Aratjara*. The information

included: “name of work, artist, date, country and materials – just as would be the case with any other contemporary art” (Mundine 2013b, p. 52). The exhibition of Indigenous art in a white cube, context free, was a strategy employed by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous curators to inscribe Indigenous art into contemporary art and widen its canon beyond the Western-centric history inherited from mainstream notions of modernism. The lack of onsite provision of context was critiqued, although differently from *Magiciens* the catalogue for *Aratjara* included in-depth information about the artists and their background. Mundine criticised the expectation for Indigenous art to have detailed explanation onsite, when there is no such expectation for other art. Myers (1998, p. 33) in contrast argued that when Europeans are looking at their own art, they already know its context, however, when they look at Indigenous art they lack information. Myers (1998, p. 33) added that it is precisely when the viewer ‘experiences the art’ at the time of their visit, that they require to be informed about the work for the purpose of critical discussion and review. The practice to provide information about the works onsite relates to trends dominating the art world at the time of the exhibition more so than disinterest or disrespect by the exhibition’s organisers. It is a fine line, that Martin for instance had to navigate, between institutional expectations, and breaking art world conventions to achieve greater depth and integrity for the works. The catalogue for *Aratjara* sold out, which is evidence of the interest the public had about the art presented. Additionally, *Aratjara*’s extensive visitation (over 250,000 visitors), almost as high as the number of visitors to *Magiciens,* demonstrated a European interest in Indigenous art. *Aratjara* was an improved and successful model for Indigenous art representation in Europe, utilising a truly collaborative and informative approach.

Myers (1998, p. 7) brings another perspective to the question of how Indigenous art is perceived in Europe. Rather than focusing on the European perspective, Myers is concerned with the way Indigenous art presentation overseas helps correct and enhance the largely negative reputation of Indigenous cultures in Australia. The anthropologist suggests that the negative perspectives on Indigenous culture in Australia may be influenced for the better by international exposure and praise. To test this claim Myers (1998) analyses an additional important exhibition in France, taking place largely at the same time as *Aratjara,* that is, *La peinture des Aborigènes d'Australie* (referred to as *La peinture)* at the Musée National des Arts d’Afrique et d'Océanie (MNAAO). Eighty-one acrylic and bark paintings were exhibited in this 1993 show. The exhibition’s curatorial premise was informed by this of *Magiciens* and *L'Été Australien,* perhaps as a contradicting response to the claim of *Magiciens*’s curators:

that institutions that research culture hold the duty to provide Anthropological perspectives for their exhibited works. Although *La peinture* was held in an institution for 'cultural diversity', it had provided minimum information about the art exhibited (Myers 1998, p. 33). At MNAAO, the institution was not interested in this role. Mundine, who was present at the opening of the exhibition, perceived the exhibition's role as letting the French audience know that Indigenous culture has survived and is alive, with post-colonial repercussions (Mundine in Myers 1998, p. 30). The Australian Embassy wanted, through this exhibition, to shift the French view about the exotic and ancient Indigenous culture, to an understanding that Indigenous culture is contemporary. It is worth noting that Jean-Hubert Martin was nominated in June 1994, a month after the launch of *La peinture* as the director of MNAAO. In 1995 David Malangi, a respected Arnhem Land bark painter, exhibited in Martin's *Galerie des cinq continents*. Also in 1995, a wide range of artworks were selected from the Robert Holmes à Court Collection and exhibited in four iconic urban centres in Germany (Mundine 2013b, p. 53). The interest in exhibiting more Indigenous art in Europe after 1989 confirms the significant role *Magiciens* played in the exhibition of Indigenous art in Europe.

In Germany, *Magiciens* was followed by notable art events such as *documenta*[8] *X* (1997) and *documenta11* (2002), which adopted an international and inclusive approach like in *Magiciens*. *documenta X* was the first *documenta* to include non-Western artists (Bhagwati et al.). Unlike the diversity of artists in *Magiciens*, Okwui Enwezor, the curator of *documenta11*, was criticised for choosing diaspora artists rather than making the effort to familiarise himself with artists that live in diverse geographies (Ogbechie 2010). These *documenta* events did not also include Indigenous art. However, if *Magiciens* failed to highlight the socioeconomic inequality between the West and the rest of the world, and hid the problems of colonisation and the unequal distribution of wealth in the world, *documenta11* emphasised those political messages (Greenberg 2005).

Several international exhibitions and events that respond to *Magiciens* directly have emerged in recent years. These include: *Magiciens de la Terre: Reconsidered (2013)* at the Tate Modern, and *Magiciens de la terre. Retour sur une exposition légendaire* (2014) at the Centre

[8] The capitalisation and spacing of the names of *documenta* events vary across different exhibitions in different years.

Georges Pompidou. Not only do these events uncover past and emerging perspectives on the *Magiciens* exhibition, but they also highlight the significance of the event to the history and development of contemporary art. With the legacy of the *Magiciens* exhibition, these contemporary events continue to keep the art world in check, in respect to its frameworks and openness to a diversity of perspectives, outputs and appreciation. The critique of *Magiciens* helps to monitor whether the art world has become a more collaborative space.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* as an event that followed on from the contested event *"Primitivism"* held in 1984 in New York. It first examined how the art world changed during the rise of the contemporary art era, and then how the Indigenous art movement developed alongside the broader exhibition of non-Western art in the contemporary art world. Although *Magiciens* was set to rectify the undermining approach of *"Primitivism"* towards non-Western artists, it had based its exhibition attitudes on similar propositions and stigmas about the 'Other.' This chapter investigated the criticism and discussion about the event, for instance, how the impact of longstanding Western domination on the art world, such as the categorisation of the art, influenced decisions made for *Magiciens*. The exhibition was profoundly reliant on Western principles despite its engagement with ideas such as decentralisation and equality, which were defined through Western interests.

This chapter investigated what drove the curator for *Magiciens,* Jean-Hubert Martin to undertake his particular curatorial approach for the event, and what were the underlying motivations and rationale for it. The significance of the venues for *Magiciens* was explored and the impact of the audience and social norms in France at the time were debated in this chapter. Martin assumed that to please his audience and adhere to institutional expectations he had to adapt to the existing art environment of the time. However, the curator failed to collaborate with non-Western partners to deliver real knowledge and an alternative method for art presentation, and in that his audience was deceived. Even if Martin wanted to shift away from his cultural values towards values of other cultures, he would have difficulty doing so because of his identity and ongoing exposure to Western definitions. However, greater collaboration would have been a possible solution. If Martin wanted to demonstrate a degree of cross-cultural awareness and appreciation, he could have searched beyond his

particular ethnocentricity as the foundation for his curatorial strategies. This base didn't prohibit him from developing a more sophisticated level of engagement. Martin aspired to exhibit a global exhibition, however, failed to provide fundamental political and cultural contexts for the exhibited work.

This chapter analysed the Indigenous art presented in *Magiciens* to understand what considerations were made in selecting the particular Indigenous artists for the exhibition. It revealed that Australian and international exhibitions of those same artists had significant impact on Martin's choices for his show, and that the Australian art world influenced the style of presentation and accompanying information for the Indigenous art on display. The Indigenous artworks were presented without their particular context, and placed in the *Magiciens* venues alongside other works, supposedly engaged in a dialogue. Martin tried to juxtaposed the Indigenous artworks with artworks with differing origins, in particular, he positioned a collaborative work by Warlipiri artists near the work of British artist Richard Long, alluding to a spiritual connection between the works. This connection was shown to be fraught, considering that the artists themselves did not initiate or endorse it.

In turn, this chapter also highlighted the positive contribution *Magiciens* made to the art world, impacting its selection criteria and categorisation approaches. *Magiciens* pioneered a globalised art environment and put it to the test. It explored a post-colonial approach to art exhibition and in that changed the historical narrative of art. The categorisation for the event was further explored, both concerning the customary category of Indigenous art, and the presentation of art in the *Magiciens* exhibition in contrast to the then typical clustering of non-Western art in museums of 'ancient traditions'. The *Magiciens* exhibition was found to be ground-breaking in its attempt to progress traditional categorisations and offer an alternative approach to art exhibitions. This chapter resumed by surveying later exhibitions that were influenced by *Magiciens*. It was noted that the exhibition had paved the way for its artists to obtain new opportunities for international exhibitions, although it was also acknowledged that later exhibitions were still struggling with adopting the collaborative and transparent approaches needed to really bring the perspectives of Indigenous artists to the world.

A major limitation for the chapter was that I did not attend the *Magiciens* exhibition. As such, all the available facts, impressions and analyses relied on second-hand information available

in the literature and the catalogue for the exhibition. Also, specific information about the Indigenous art presented in *Magiciens* was limited, especially in respect to the positioning of the artworks in the venues and the motivations for this positioning. To obtain firm understanding of the environment and repercussions of *Magiciens,* additional in-depth research about French culture and history in the 1980s and 90s is needed. Furthermore, this chapter concentrated on one exhibition that occurred in France in 1989, and used this case study as a representative sample for non-Western art presentation in a period of time in Europe, however, to obtain a firm grasp of the European attitude towards non-Western art more research is needed about the art environment in other European countries at the time. From here, the following chapter will investigate Indigenous art presentation in a later period of time, and in Australia.

Chapter 4 – *Revolutions – Forms That Turn*

The 16th Biennale of Sydney, 2008

Revolutions – Forms That Turn (Revolutions from here on), the title exhibition for the 16th Biennale of Sydney, has been selected as a case study for this thesis because it reflected significant changes in the contemporary art world. In the late 20th century, biennales were occurring in over one hundred locations in the world and were largely inclusive of an international pool of artists (Christov-Bakargiev 2008). Contemporary art exhibitions were curated in an objective historical register, presenting art chronologically to document the evolution and diversity of Western art movements (Pogrebin 2015). From the early 21st century, with the increasing prominence of biennales and the rising impact of international curators, art exhibitions increasingly became expressions of individual curators, whose work in certain respects usurped the authorial role previously served by artists. The focus of art exhibitions shifted to be based on the individual ideology of selected curators. Contemporary art exhibitions also expanded geographically to multiple locations for each event, which increased their impact and reach. The 16th Biennale took place during the peak period of the contemporary art era, considering that by 2008 contemporary art featured broadly as public art, in art fairs and biennales, beyond centralised institutions for the arts.

Compared to the situation in 1989, during the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*, the early 2000s were marked by enhanced diversity; while *Magiciens* was taking baby steps and a visionary approach towards a multicultural art world, nineteen years later, the 16th Biennale of Sydney occurred in a milieu that was already committed to cultural diversity. Martin was a visionary and directed the *Magiciens* exhibition with an unprecedented approach, in contrast, the art director for the 16th Biennale of Sydney, curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev had a clear idea of what it was she was expected to present in such event. Operating in Sydney, Christov-Bakargiev was challenged by art world associates to exhibit global diversity, and operate with sensitivity in the locality of the exhibition. Lessons had clearly been learnt from exhibitions such as *Magiciens*, among the shortcomings of which were that non-Western artists were decontextualised and framed within the globalising vision of the Western curator. Instead, *Revolutions* allowed for non-Western artists to be represented more sensitively with regard to their differences. However, this accommodation of difference was nevertheless an accommodation of the ‘Other’ within what was ultimately an Australian-based Western art exhibition. Rather than engaging with the real and profound changes underway globally

(socially, culturally and politically), or even within the Asia-Pacific region more immediately, *Revolutions* appeared set on re-asserting Australian artists, and by extension the Australian nation, within a Western art historical narrative, as though the 'provincialism' debate[9], pointing to those living on the periphery and who suffer from a negative reputation of being 'provincialists', had never occurred (ArtAsiaPacific 2008, p. 182).

Revolutions, in essence, held little difference to other global contemporary art events of the moment, despite being presented at a time when the art world more broadly was becoming fundamentally decentralised. While prominent art fairs were emerging across South and East Asia such as the Shanghai Biennale (1996) and the Singapore Biennale (2006), as well as South and Central America (The Brazilian Mercosul Biennial since 1997 and the Honduras Biennial since 2006), *Revolutions,* as with previous major Western contemporary art events in the wake of *Magiciens*, was constrained by an institutional conservatism bound to a narrow range of themes limited by an endemic national/cultural myopia. In *Revolutions,* Christov-Bakargiev emphasised Western frameworks for contemporary art, largely concerned with political events of the day as reported in Western media. This narrow emphasis limited the inclusion of topics not addressed in mass-media; that is, topics relevant to cultures outside of urban and Western spheres. Aesthetically - like other such events in the 21st century - the exhibition dedicated itself to 'innovation' and prioritised temporary objects such as installation, performance and mixed media in lieu of traditional paintings or sculptures (Enwezor 2009, p. 37; Saatchi 2009, p. 58). These boundaries limited what may have been possible in a truly broad and inclusive contemporary art exhibition.

This chapter will analyse the status of Indigenous art in the 21st century in the contemporary art world through the example of Christov-Bakargiev's *Revolutions – Forms that Turn* (2008), and particularly its curatorial approach to its one contemporary Indigenous artist from a remote community, Doreen Reid Nakamarra. The chapter will investigate whether Indigenous art and its presentation have benefited from 21st century shifts in the art world, and specifically the position Indigenous art has gained in the Australian contemporary art scene. In the early 21st century it was commonplace for Indigenous art to be shown in a

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[9] Smith (1974) argues that the international art system itself is provincialist. Further, in his 1999 book chapter titled 'Peripheries in Motion: Conceptualism and Conceptual Art in Australia and New Zealand' he challenges the assumption that there is a population of artists seen as 'provincialists', and therefore out of touch with modern fashion and trends in the metropolis (Smith 1999, pp. 86-95).

contemporary art context, although in other respects acknowledgment and cultural understanding of it remained limited. While cultural shifts throughout the art world have facilitated the circulation of Indigenous art nationally and internationally, this broader circulation has not been accompanied by an equivalent degree of meaningful institutional contextualisation of the artists or their works. Instead, Indigenous art has been presented in a way that corresponds to trends in the contemporary art world in lieu of the principles rooted in Indigenous art.

Revolutions – Forms That Turn: Background to the event

Some major global art events enjoy extensive advertisement and exposure; for instance 12,500 journalists visited the 2012 *dOCUMENTA (13)* in Kassel, which influenced the quantity of coverage of the event and its visitation numbers (Wolbert 2014). The 2008 Biennale of Sydney had a significantly smaller budget. The low budget influenced the quality of the event – it only displayed sixty-five new artworks - and most likely its international exposure and recognition (Patrick 2008; Radok 2008). The limited information available about the event compared to other international events may indicate that Australian art exhibitions are less visible internationally than events that take place in major art capitals in Europe. Thus, the exposure of Indigenous art is likely to be limited as well. In the scarce literature about the event - Australian art magazines including *Artlink* and *Art Monthly*, and foreign publications such as *ArtAsiaPacific* - Doreen Reid Nakamarra's work is rarely mentioned. Academic papers about the event are rare. This chapter significantly relies therefore on the exhibition catalogue (Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008) as a key source, and argues that the contemporary art field in Australia, the Biennale of Sydney included, has little influence on the reception of Indigenous art overseas. The contrary may indeed be true, that the exhibition and reception of Indigenous art in Australia is significantly influenced by the way it is presented in the international contemporary art world (Myers 2020, p. 216).

Revolutions of 2008, differing from *Magiciens*, was not just another ad hoc exhibition in the repertoire of contemporary art exhibitions, it was the title exhibition of the 16th Biennale of Sydney, in the context of a longstanding tradition in the history of Australian biennials. Already during the launch of the first Biennale of Sydney in 1973, titled simply the Inaugural Biennale of Sydney, the vision for the event was international, with a view to collaborate with other global events such as the Venice and Sao Paolo biennales, as well as *documenta* in

Kassel, Germany (Russ 2013, p. 176). The Inaugural Biennale of Sydney was a small display supported by private philanthropy and the Australia Council for the Arts timed to correspond with the opening of the Sydney Opera House, which was in itself an international event. Up to that point, governing bodies and public institutions perceived art to be an educational tool in the raising of a national consciousness, or for the purpose of aesthetic enjoyment, but with that event a shift of perspective occurred whereby art obtained a different goal, entailing a new academic input and an art historical focus (Gardner & Green 2013, p. 102, Russ 2013, p. 162). Forty-six paintings and sculptures by thirty-six artists were exhibited (Thomas 1973, p. 18). The artists were largely "Australians, with two from New Zealand, seven from the East Asia region, one from Mexico, the United States, England, West Germany and Italy" (Russ 2013, p. 162). This early vision could have inspired real interest in cultural diversity, however, the curatorial approach for the event remained traditionalist.

The Australian Indigenous art movement at this stage was in its infancy; this clarifies why Indigenous artists were yet to be included in the Inaugural Biennale. Nonetheless, the period was influenced by the politics of the Australian Labour Government under Gough Whitlam, whose policy platform was to empower Indigenous people through self-determination and equal rights (Myers 2001, p. 178). The following Biennales of Sydney were effective in becoming increasingly major events across the city, and with the much sought after international exposure, aiding in the promotion of tourism and the Australian economy at large. Such objectives certainly influenced the perceived usefulness of art exhibited in biennales and the conception of the biennale itself with regard to broader national economic interests; art was no longer conceived of in terms of its educational utility alone, it had economic value as well, a value which would influence the entire global supply chain of art (Gardner & Green 2013, pp. 100-104). From the second Biennale of Sydney in 1976 and onwards, the curatorial vision shifted from funding Australian artists to conduct international trips to inviting artists from around the world to Australia. This effort certainly achieved increased exposure for Australian art globally (Thomas 1988). Moreover, rather than the Biennale operating as an agent for Australian artists, the different art authorities who visited the exhibition started to promote and exhibit Australian art overseas (Russ 2013, p. 178).

Despite the Biennale of Sydney's purpose to become an international event ever since it first launched, its exhibition of Indigenous art remained limited in quantity and meaning. In the Biennale's third iteration in 1979, titled *European Dialogue*, Indigenous art was for the first

time showcased at the AGNSW. Under the curatorial direction of Nick Waterlow, a prominent Sydney-based art historian and curator, three bark paintings from north-east Arnhem land by artists David Malangi, Johnny Bungawuy and George Milpurrurru were included (Russ 2013, p. 179). The catalogue text accompanying the works stated that "The painters' only wish is that the Europeans who view their work will look far enough into the dreaming to find a starting point for real dialogue" (Yates 1979). Already in those early days there was a search for cultural connection, and a quest to find a 'right way' to present Indigenous artworks in a non-Indigenous context. As discussed in Chapter 3, the 4th Biennale of Sydney (1982), *Vision of Disbelief* presented a sand painting and performance by Walrlpiri men from the Lajamanu community. This Biennale also exhibited works by Maurice Luther Jupurrula from that same group. From then onwards the Biennale of Sydney regularly exhibited Indigenous art in its events, however, the cultural connection and dialogue continued to be emphasised through Western points of reference, even in the 16th Biennale of Sydney.

Revolutions was distributed across various locations around the city, as is customary for biennales and similar large-scale events around the world. It was a typical biennale in so far as it was held in several locations, including new and old venues, as well as the regular exhibition spaces for the Biennale. Participating exhibition areas included iconic Sydney Harbour sites such as Pier 2/3, Walsh Bay, Cockatoo Island, as well as a pioneering online exhibition space. *Revolutions* had a leading international curator engaged for the event; a curator known for her emphasis on diversity. The event involved almost double the number of artists compared to the 2006 Biennale of Sydney and an exceptional number of Australian artists. Of over 180 artists from 45 countries that featured in the exhibition, there were six Indigenous Australian artists, of which Doreen Reid Nakamarra, from the Western Australian community of Kiwirrkurra, was the only artist from a remote Indigenous community context[10].

The number of participating artists outlined above is approximate because the curator opened up platforms for artists' participation at a later stage (Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008, p. 31). This approach may represent a less institutionalised and more 'organic' level of engagement,

[10] See appendix 1, information about the gender and ethnicity of the participating artists drawn from the 16th Biennale of Sydney guide (2008).

as though the Biennale was a flexible platform that allowed the present time to be above formal selection criteria. Christov-Bakargiev et al. (2008, p. 31) explained that "people can appear and disappear, and artists can be included temporarily". With this the curator aspired to a sense of liberty and lightness to her curatorial strategy for the Biennale. In this 'temporary' 'list' of artists (with limited available records for the Biennale), a historical work from the 19th century by Tommy McRae's as well as a contemporary work by Balang KubarrKu's were included. Both artists were from remote regions in Australia and not listed as 'core' artists for the exhibition; as such these artists' works are not investigated in this chapter. Although the Biennale took place in Sydney Doreen Reid Nakamarra was the only formally participating contemporary Australian artist from a remote Indigenous community.

The dominance of the metropolis in the art world

A prevailing assumption is that because the power of the West has decreased, the opportunity for Indigenous art exhibition has increased. At the turn of the 21st century, the grip of Western metropolitan art centres on art world fashions diminished with the rise of new and global art centres. If, in the past, the centre of contemporary art was based in several locations, by 2008 this centre had shifted from being exclusively in the West to other global centres. Enwezor (2010, pp. 597-598) perceived, for instance, inputs from East Asia as pivotal to the novel dispersal of contemporary art. Nonetheless, contemporary art remained focused on urban culture and trends with more countries involved in it, such as China, Hong Kong and Japan, following Western ideas about contemporary art. In Australia of the 21st century for instance, contemporary art became of interest to a wider population, the audience for contemporary art expanded, and extended opportunities became available for Australian artists, however, the popularity of Indigenous art within it did not (Bennett et al. 2020, p. 3). The success of Indigenous art as a standalone art movement in Australia increased in the 1980s, and later it was recognised as contemporary art, however, its exposure did not increase in the contemporary art world as it is framed in this thesis, neither in Australia nor overseas. Therefore, as will be discussed later in the chapter, despite the decentralisation of the art world, its drives remained similar, and Indigenous art continued to be alienated from it.

Both local and global platforms for the exhibition of contemporary art are limited, and there is a hierarchy for each of these platforms ranging from highly prestigious venues to obscure self-funded platforms (Velthuis 2013, pp. 298-299). To have any chance of showing work

commercially in the global contemporary art world, Indigenous artists need to navigate a hierarchy of significant cultural events and exhibitions, which Terry Smith (2020, p. 19) refers to as 'the hierarchy of cultural power'. Each art specialisation has developed its unique exhibition outlet, including museums for national collections, for contemporary art and for modern art, museums for city histories, cultures, and nature, regional galleries and university galleries, not-for-profit art spaces and spaces for emerging artists, and finally private galleries. Traditional museums established in the modern period, for instance during periods of monarchy, hold a primary position. Following these, in the hierarchy of exhibition displays, are urban museums founded to exhibit national aesthetic traditions, including museums for modern art. Finally, the era of biennales have come to occupy a primary space in the art exhibition realm (Green & Gardner 2016). Despite the ongoing decentralisation of the art world, some institutions and events remain prestigious (Velthuis 2013, p. 293). This is due to their geographical position in the Western capitals and their secured status in the global art world due to their historical merit, holding major long-standing collections, and funded and supported by their national governments. For instance, globally, MoMA and the Venice Biennale and locally, in Australia, the AGNSW and the Biennale of Sydney are included in this category. Although diverse exhibition outlets exist, there are still more exhibiting artists and art practitioners than there are exhibition opportunities. To be considered in the high-end range in the contemporary art world and benefit from increased exposure and consequent income, Indigenous artists must exhibit in institutions and events that are positioned in the top of the 'art exhibition hierarchy' (Velthuis 2013, p. 293).

The commercial capital focus of exhibitions in popular art events and venues also presents a challenge for Indigenous artists. Non-commercial values, critical to Indigenous art and artists, such as cultural, social and educational gains are largely treated as secondary in those venues. Institutions, which in the past served as informative platforms, shifted their purpose to serve as tools for communication with the mass public; communication that had become an object of consumerism. This, alongside the increased importance of the internet and information networking tools such as Google and Wikipedia, helped inform the transfer of knowledge online. The knowledge transmitted through art in the West, it is argued, became increasingly commodified and superficial (Christov-Bakargiev 2008). In a critique of the 2015 blockbuster exhibition *Andy Warhol Ai Weiwei* (AWAW) at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), Rex Butler asserted that this was "an exemplary exhibition of our times, telling us everything we need to know about our current museological condition"; an ideologically free zone with "no

cultural capital, and no intellectual respectability” (cited in McLean 2020, p. 232). Those who determine what will be communicated to the public rely on what is popular at the time; this popularity is measured in terms of museum visitation numbers and social media engagement. This prioritisation conflicts with Indigenous political and cultural aims such as rights and interests in relation to land, and participation in, and maintenance of, traditional culture and law.

Despite the decentralisation of the art world and its valorisation of cultural diversity, global art centres and the criteria they apply for contemporary art remain largely grounded in principles from the past, entangled with Western philosophies and values, which limit opportunities for Indigenous art. For instance, until recently MoMA (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) organised its collection in a chronological order, or according to Western art history, with conventional categories such as ‘Painting and Sculpture’, ‘Drawings and Prints’ and ‘Architecture and Design’ (Pogrebin 2015). Contemporary art commonly addresses commonplace themes such as ecological disasters, immigration, and post-colonialism, whereas Indigenous artists largely focus on other themes in their artworks such as Indigenous mythology, ceremony and law. Only in recent years have international institutions taken on board criticism of their Eurocentric approach and adjusted to a more diverse art world (Pogrebin 2015). Despite the image of contemporary art as a global art category, major art institutions remain tied to traditional art trends and influences. Therefore, much still needs to be done to exhibit Indigenous art according to criteria that correspond to Indigenous beliefs and values.

Many Indigenous artists live in regional and remote Australia, arguably their world views differ from values that anchor urban populations: Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The movement of large populations of migrants from rural areas to urban settings has significantly shaped the cultural make-up of contemporary art, which is almost exclusively an urban culture. In the early 2000s, with the rapid progression of globalisation and increased co-dependency amongst countries, new cultures were formed in metropolitan areas (Anastasiou & Schäler 2010; Fairley 2011; Wiegerling 2004). By 2008 more than fifty percent of the world’s population lived in large cities; metropolitan centres became multicultural constructs (Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008, p. 35). Sydney, for instance, transformed into a culturally diverse city, so much so that in 2016 fifty percent of its citizens had both parents born outside of Australia (ABS 2016). Urban centres now have a composite

of populations with mixed cultural heritage, and with this a multiplicity of distinct sub-cultural groupings have been created. This, in turn, has flowed into the art world. However, due to the remote and traditional living circumstances of remote Indigenous artists, they have not been part of this network.

Considering that museums and art events were traditionally built and conducted in metropolitan areas, artists that reside in urban centres benefit from broad art world networks. Moreover, these artists speak the 'urban language', that is, they have an awareness of issues and trends that concern and motivate urban populations (Velthuis 2013). The influence of urban culture on the art world is significant because it signals a gap between artists residing in metropolitan areas and those who do not; already in 1974 Smith identified this as "the provincialism problem", pointing to the distance between 'periphery' and 'centre'. According to academic Deborah Stevenson, in Australia,

> State government cultural strategies have implications for arts practice in rural, regional and urban areas but often attention has focused on those of elite metropolitan-based artists, cultural workers and arts organisations rather than the countless cultural practices of residents and arts workers in non-metropolitan towns and regions across the states (Bennett et al. 2020, p. 121).

Indigenous artists who live remotely are affected by this and have less opportunities to interact with art world authorities and to feature in mainstream art events. Additionally, they are unlikely to address topics that are prevalent in cities, and are more likely to adopt styles and mediums distinct to their locality (Myers 2019; Throsby & Petetskaya 2017). As a result, Indigenous artists and their cultural foundations inhabit a marginalised position in an art world dominated by metropolitan trends.

The remarkable changes in the contemporary art field that we associate with contemporaneity and with the era of globalisation are reflected in the shift from traditional museum displays to large-scale events, international biennales, and art fairs; these shifts evolve from localities to international operations (Smith 2020, p. 17). Key nodes in the contemporary art network include metropolitan museums according to traditional European aesthetic norms, medium sized public museums that display local art specialisations, commercial operations entailing for instance galleries and auctions, and smaller art initiatives such as artists-run spaces and

online exhibitions. From here, biennales have developed as international events that connect arts agencies such as artists, curators, agents and academics together (Velthuis 2013, pp. 298-299). As the discussion about contemporary art has shifted from its confined Western frameworks, the exhibition of contemporary art has replaced localities with a targeted global participation. Indigenous artists have been, in a limited manner, part of this shift, as participants in global art events such as the Biennale of Sydney.

The kinds of events emblematic of the contemporary art world, such as biennales and art fairs are a suitable focus for understanding the status of Indigenous art in the broader field of contemporary art. In this chapter I focus on the 16th Biennale of Sydney, a major event for contemporary art that encouraged a notion of rarity through its limited inclusion of Indigenous art. Only one artwork by an Indigenous artist from a remote community was presented in the event. This is not surprising considering that in the *Revolutions* exhibition, according to the *ArtAsiaPacific* magazine "critics also note the lack of Asian - particularly Chinese – participants" (ArtAsiaPacific 2008, p. 182). This demonstrates that despite the vision to create a 'global exhibition', the 16th Biennale of Sydney remained attached to its confined foundations and desire to appeal to the mass public.

Although *Revolutions* featured more Australian art than any previous Sydney Biennale, less than nine percent of the artists in the exhibition were Australian (these figures take into account only permanent installations and exclude later inclusions). Of these, 31 percent were Indigenous artists who commonly work and live in Australian metropolitan centres. Additionally, Indigenous curator Hetti Perkins was engaged as a collaborating curator for the exhibition (Alexander 2008; Biennale of Sydney 2008a). Among the Indigenous participants, the Western Desert artist Doreen Reid Nakamarra was the only artist from a remote community.

To understand how the work of Indigenous Australians is framed in a high-calibre contemporary art event such as the Biennale of Sydney, it is necessary to grasp the character of the work alongside which it is shown. For this purpose, the work of three artists selected for *Revolutions*, Shaun Gladwell, Tracey Moffatt, and Michael Rakowitz, will be discussed, highlighting the commonalities between them. These three artists in some respects are thoroughly different from each other; they use diverse mediums and forms of expression, have different ethnic and cultural origins, and Michael Rakowitz is of a different nationality

to the two other artists. Additionally, Moffatt is of Indigenous descent, however, her work did not address Indigenous topics per se, in contrast, Rakowitz isn't Indigenous, but his work was concerned with contemporary Indigenous politics. Despite these major variations, it is argued here that the artists' installations for *Revolutions* fitted the aesthetic and conceptual trends of contemporary art at this time. Although each of these artists has a unique practice, the current discussion focuses on the similar characteristics of their installations, and the reasons why they might have been included in the event in lieu of remote Indigenous artists.

First, I will briefly examine the work of Shaun Gladwell, a white Australian artist born in Sydney who lives and works in Melbourne (National Gallery of Australia 2014). The built environment in Gladwell's life is very familiar to him; his lifestyle, movements, and being are in direct relation with the urban space. Cities, skateboarding, wave surfing, and bicycle riding regularly feature in his artworks and he is known for creating intriguing relationships between the past and the present. Gladwell's artworks reference art by other artists through his chosen titles, or through recognisable motives from their works. For instance, in his still image *Approach to Mundi Mundi* (2007) Gladwell rides his motorbike with arms raised to the sky and positioned parallel to the horizon to reference Leonardo da Vinci's 15th century *Vitruvian Man*. At the 16th Biennale of Sydney, Gladwell's work titled *Ghost Rider* – a mixed-media installation – was shown at Cockatoo Island in an old warehouse. It included eight individual bicycles installed in the space as a centre piece, held both from the ground and from the ceiling. A soundscape was linked to each of these bicycle-sculptures. On the wall near the sculptures a large screen projection depicted "bike-riding through Sydney streets at night" (Biennale of Sydney 2008b, p. 16). According to the curator, Gladwell's work "refers to skateboarding and rolling through his videos, while exploring the inversions, rewinding and other movements that video technology offer" (Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008, p. 30). Gladwell presents the bicycle not just as an object but as an actual sculpture, and bicycle riding as a performance. These two components together address the theme for the Biennale, 'Forms That Turn', and offer Gladwell a creative space to inspire his work. His creative process extends to the bicycle and its response to movements of the body, he points to a conceptual relation between power and freedom, and the possibility to circulate and travel far and wide with just a simple bicycle.

In his work, Gladwell was concerned with human beings and their relationships with their urban and natural environments. This work satisfied the criteria for contemporary art in that it

addressed the environmental crisis theme, which obtains widespread coverage in mainstream media. It also combined diverse art mediums, exhibited both image and sound, and focused on the aesthetics and composition of the installation. It is fair to assume that Gladwell's references, for instance, to Sydney and its bicycles (a Western invention) resonated with visitors to the Biennale, and that the sophisticated use of technology excited them (advanced technology is commonly praised in the West), and therefore his art was perceived by the curator as fitting for the largely Western or Westernised audience for the show. This is in contrast to Indigenous art which largely employs traditional art materials or symbolism, and discusses distinct cultural topics that are, more often than not, unfamiliar to contemporary art audiences. The exhibition of Indigenous art, thus, is more challenging for the curator, and may not conform to contemporary art trends.

The second *Revolutions* artist I will discuss is Tracey Moffatt, an Indigenous Australian visual artist from Sydney. Moffatt, an innovative and prolific artist has participated in over one hundred solo shows locally and internationally (Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008, Art Gallery of New South Wales 2014). Her work has been screened at the Cannes Film Festival with the short films *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* in 1989 and *beDevil* in 1993, and she was the first and only Indigenous artist to represent Australia in the Venice Biennale in 2017 with her solo show *My Horizon*. Moffatt works between the mediums of film and photography and is celebrated as a unique female storyteller, focusing on themes such as love, horror, racial stereotypes and revolution. Her video art offers to viewers a complex interweaving of these contemporary mediums while exploring her personal and political experiences. Oftentimes her personal biography is entangled with Australia's disturbing history of racial discrimination, nonetheless, Moffatt recognises the universality of issues concerning colonialism and land rights. At the Biennale of Sydney Moffatt and Australian collaborator Gary Hillberg exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art a commissioned video work titled *REVOLUTION.* This work combined classic films with B grade movies to explore the 'revolutions' theme. The work was described as:

> a study of the stereotypes associated with revolution in historical and contemporary movies. It explores constructions of those stereotypes, both by showing the glory and drama of the depiction of revolutions on the widescreen and also by portraying the presumed disastrous after-effects of revolutions (Phillips 2008, p. 25).

The work montaged various snippets from historical Hollywood films creating a new narrative which alludes to critical problems in the world. The quick cuts and focus on specific recontextualised moments mimicked the effects of social media, where one's attention is quickly consumed and exhausted, and was typical of global contemporary art.

At the AGNSW American/Iraqi artist Michael Rakowitz was commissioned to exhibit a mixed media installation titled *White Man Got No Dreaming*. Rakowitz who lives and works in Chicago, USA, is well known for using recycled food packaging to create artefacts, addressing issues concerning history, legacy, and identity (Rakowitz 2008). Throughout his career Rakowitz participated in many international art events including *dOCUMENTA (13)* and the 10th and 14th Istanbul Biennials, and exhibited in major institutions such as MoMA, Palais de Tokyo, and Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea. Rakowitz's artwork for the 2008 Biennale was a tower built from brown thin and recycled strips assembled on a round white plinth, with a small Indigenous flag positioned at the top of the tower. It was "an impressively solid model of Tatlin's Tower built from weathered materials from houses being pulled down in Redfern" (Radok 2008, p. 82). The tower was constructed from supplies sourced from recycled housing materials originally from Redfern's Aboriginal Housing Company, and people from the Redfern community helped build it (Epp 2008). The work melded the history of the post-industrial economy with Indigenous ancestry (Radok 2008). The recreation of the tower in Rakowitz's work addressed the theme for the Biennale 'Revolutions - Forms That Turn' conceptually and physically, with rotating forms inside the tower and a spinning sensation. The artist aimed to discuss "contemporary Indigenous life in Australia", pointing to desired developments in Redfern, in the form of a 'revolution' that was to occur, but only hope remained (Rakowitz 2008).

The title for the work *White Man Got No Dreaming* alluded to the views of Indigenous people about the Australian settlers. Rakowitz referred to politicians who hold the decision power but 'have no dreams', suggesting that they have no past and solely focus on innovation and capitalist values. There was an implicit criticism of Australia's colonial history that hasn't been dealt with. Tatlin's tower – a reference to the Russian communist artist's revolutionary socialist vision was supposed to stimulate a hopeful future and equality. In a similar vein, Rakowitz wanted to send a message of hope for the future while recognising that as a first step Australia must stop discriminating its Indigenous peoples. The work was an 'Indigenous story' told by a non-Indigenous, non-Australian person. The selection of

Rakowitz is particularly interesting because, on the one hand, it demonstrates that his practice was deemed fitting for a contemporary art event due to the use of recycled materials, the inspiration by Vladimir Tatlin, an icon for modernism, and the political focus; on the other hand his interest in Australian-Indigenous politics indicates a global interest in Indigenous affairs so far recognised in only a limited way.

The themes discussed through Indigenous art do not fit neatly into the contemporary art world, however, these three artworks clearly fit the contemporary art paradigm. First, the mediums used for these three examples – mixed media, recycled materials, sound and video – are in line with trends common in contemporary art at that time. Second, the topics addressed through those artworks, ranging from post-colonialism and social justice to urban cultures and modern history, responded to the theme for the exhibition, 'revolutions'. These topics dominate Western media, literature, film, theatre, art and public discussion. Curators and artists are expected to operate within this realm; when they deviate from these subject-matters some art is rejected from the contemporary art sphere. Although the contemporary art world insists on its open character and willingness to address diverse social and political subjects, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, it struggles to do so in respect to Indigenous art. There is a lack of appropriate language and knowledge in the contemporary art world that can relay clear messages delivered by Indigenous artists. Due to an ill-informed art world, Indigenous art is often misunderstood and thus rejected.

Indigenous art might be unassimilable to the demands of the new globalist paradigm, where contemporary art became increasingly institutionalised. With a certain degree of arrogance, as discussed in the previous chapter, the French curators claimed *Magiciens* to be the first truly global exhibition of contemporary art (Lamoureux 2005, pp. 65-66). From this moment on, museums for contemporary art were rapidly established in the art capitals around the world (Smith 2019, p. 28). McLean (2013a, p. 47) argues that by 1990 the influence of global capital had contributed to the emergence of "a completely deterritorialised contemporary art practice", in which Indigenous art first came to be regarded as contemporary, if only by a few. Nevertheless, McLean (2013, p. 55) concedes that:

> Indigenous contemporary art largely waits in the wings while other non-Western contemporary art slowly but surely finds a place in art museums and a discourse once reserved for European modernists as the new face of multicultural cosmopolitanism.

This 'waiting in the wings' is unfortunately not a self-assigned location but one imposed through the lack of acknowledgement. However, McLean's reference to 'the new face of multicultural cosmopolitanism' alludes to the possibility that Indigenous art might be disadvantaged in this realm.

This being said, contemporary art is inspired by contexts of the present but influenced by the past, with the possibilities and challenges this past may present. It is related to the current time, where artists "cannot overlook the fact that they make art within cultures of modernity and postmodernity that are predominantly visual, that are driven by image, spectacle, attraction, and celebrity, on a scale far beyond what their predecessors faced" (Smith 2019, p. 29). Indigenous art, writes Smith (2019, p. 45), is emerging out of simultaneous time periods. Artists have long strived to merge modernity with other cultural beliefs; however, although the attempts have failed, the desire to achieve this has been a contemporary goal. What makes Indigenous art current, according to Smith, is that it focuses on communication between cultures.

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's curatorial rationale

To analyse the exhibition of Indigenous art in the 16th Biennale of Sydney it is fundamental to first understand the curator's background, motives, and principles. These can be broken into Christov-Bakargiev's perspectives on biennale events, her general curatorial rationale and her specific rationale for *Revolutions*, her known strengths as a curator, and her particular views about Indigenous art. Greater knowledge of the curator provides greater insight about the motivation (or lack thereof) to include Indigenous art in global contemporary art exhibitions. The elected art director for the 16th Biennale of Sydney was American-Italian curator/ art director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev born and raised in the USA. She was Senior Curator at MoMA PS1 in New York between 1999-2001 and is an accomplished academic and writer (Toscano 2017). Christov-Bakargiev is "one of the world's most influential curators" (Toscano 2017, p. 48). In 2012 Christov-Bakargiev was ranked first out of a hundred most influential persons in the contemporary art world (ArtReview 2012). In 2016 she was appointed as the director of the museum of contemporary art of Turin, the Castello di Rivoli.

Similar to Enwezor – whose work will form the focus of Chapter 6 – Christov-Bakargiev too values art's capacity to effect social and political change. The curator's views on art thus align with Smith (2019, pp. 49-50) that contemporary art is open, diverse and drives relationships between cultures despite its complexity. But Christov-Bakargiev believes that artists from around the world are not only participants in the art world through their creativity, but also their engagement in significant political debates. She regards biennales as a platform for conversation and engagement with such political discussions and therefore emphasises the inclusion of diverse nationals and cultures in her exhibitions. Christov-Bakargiev perceives art as an important political tool for social change. She asserts (cited in Thea & Micchelli 2009, p. 70):

> I'm interested in how knowledge is constructed – to observe art on the micro level of a single artwork and see how it's negotiated in the world. At the same time, everything we do, including art, is political, one way or another.

Due to the multiple and rich functions of contemporary art Christov-Bakargiev defines the *contemporary* as a broad term: "Anything that exists in the world is philosophically contemporary, because it exists" (Clement & Christov-Bakargiev 2008, p. 84). This definition has allowed her to narrow down her responsibilities as an individual curator. She regards the virtue of biennales (versus art fairs) as a single curator platform, whereby curators can deeply focus on their individual and specific point of view (Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008, p. 32).

Christov-Bakargiev perceives the curator's role as one that partly generates knowledge, but also emphasises the relationship between the artworks selected for display. She acknowledges the power that is held by curators (cited in Thea & Micchelli 2009, p. 77):

> Taking over the creative side too much, the curator may seem to become the artist and the artworks may seem to be illustrations of his or her idea, but in reality, the curator is playing a game, creating a decoy which may seem protagonistic but is actually a device, a magic trick to keep the interface between the world at large and art in a state of positive misunderstanding.

The curator rejects the need to repeatedly show new works (often produced by young artists) and claims that the public immediately prefers new artists and new works merely because they are new, and not due to profound judgment of the artwork's overall quality. Differing from the tendency of modern culture to place anything new under the spotlights, the curator suggests not to disclose the date of production on showcased artwork to eliminate any misconception driven by this knowledge (Clement & Christov-Bakargiev 2008, p. 84).

Placing two contrasting art pieces closely together and creating a logic and/or an emotional connection between the two has been a strategy and strength used by Christov-Bakargiev (2012). She explains that an exhibition "facilitates conversations between artists and artworks, both dead and alive, real and unrealised; fertile discussions between what is visible and the invisible presence of what is not" (Clement & Christov-Bakargiev 2008, p. 84). Her vision for connecting art from the past with contemporary art and showcasing the relationship between the two has been demonstrated in many of the shows she has curated to date, including the 2008 Biennale of Sydney, the 2012 Kassel *dOCUMENTA (13)*, and a project she implemented in 2018 at the Castello di Rivoli Museum, and this vision is still ongoing.

At the 2008 Biennale, a work named *Sketch of Squatters* by Kwatkwat artist Tommy McRae, born in 1835 and died in 1901, was exhibited at the AGNSW. The work is a drawing of colonisers preaching to Indigenous people. It was drawn in charcoal on paper and served at the Biennale to showcase a perspective about colonialisation, through an Indigenous voice rather than a Western one (Biennale of Sydney 2008b, p. 68). In this way, Christov-Bakargiev promoted an Indigenous perspective and showed its continuing relevance. The work was displayed in a confined space at the AGNSW's lobby, where Brisbane artist Ross Gibson exhibited his art project "Conversations II," offering live conversations with visitors around "time, language, attitude, attentiveness" (Gibson 2008). This is a clear example of Christov-Bakargiev's effort to present the old and the new together. However, McRae's work depicted a political idea, in a way that is easily understood by a non-Indigenous audience. The work was not abstract and did not depict cultural mythologies from Indigenous culture. It fitted the narrative for contemporary art to depict a political agenda that is spoken about in current information channels.

Christov-Bakargiev's ideas about contemporary art, and the status of Indigenous art within it, only give a partial perspective on the 2008 Biennial, for Sydney's institutional heritage of

collecting Indigenous art as art is longstanding. As early as 1945, appointed director of the AGNSW Hal Missingham swayed the board of trustees to acquire Indigenous art. This was achieved in 1947 in addition to securing a position of assistant director for the gallery. Tony Tuckson was appointed as assistant director and became an important advocate for Indigenous art (Russ 2013, p. 108). Although at the time Indigenous art was still only considered in the category 'primitive art', in 1960 Tuckson managed to get the AGNSW to commission "a large exhibition of Australian Aboriginal Art, mostly bark paintings, for Australia-wide tour of the state galleries" (Thomas 2011, p. 9). According to Morphy (2001, p. 40) this was the first major acquisition of Indigenous art in Sydney, of "works from the Tiwi artists of Melville and Bathurst Islands and the Yolngu artists of Yirrkala in north-east Arnhem Land".

Large canvases from Papunya were exhibited in Sydney as early as 1977 at the Aboriginal Artists Gallery, directed by the Aboriginal Arts and Crafts, Pty Ltd. (AACP), which was supported by the federal government (Myers, 2005, p. 123). In the early 1980s there was still no real interest in Western Desert paintings in Australia, and the main achievement for the Indigenous art movement was in its inclusion in biennales for contemporary art (McLean 2016, p. 147). The first Perspecta exhibition held in 1981 showcased three collaborative acrylic paintings by Papunya Tula artists (McLean, 2013, p. 170). Clifford Possum's acrylic paintings were exhibited in 1983 at the Mori Gallery 1983 in Sydney, and the same gallery held larger exhibitions of Western Desert paintings in 1984 and 1987. By the late 1980s Western Desert art had gained significant attention in the art world; in Australia in particular. Papunya Tula Artists Michael Nelson Tjakamarra and Clifford Possum gained significant acclaim (McLean 2011). For instance, an 8.2 m (27 ft) long painting by Nelson was installed in 1987 in the entrance-hall of the Sydney Opera House (National Library of Australia 2012). In 1995 Tim and Vivien Johnson sold ten and donated five canvases from Papunya Tula to the AGNSW (Myers 2005, p. 117). Perkins assembled a large collection for the exhibition *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius,* the 2000 retrospective of Papunya Tula paintings at the AGNSW. It was a natural progression for Indigenous art to be included in contemporary art events such as the Biennale of Sydney in the later part of the 20th century and the start of the 21st century.

For *Revolutions* Christov-Bakargiev meditated on how Indigenous art enters the contemporary art domain both as a commercial activity just like the rest of the contemporary

art world and in relation to the specific trend around abstract canvas paintings – the use of repetitive dots or lines which emerged during modernism. According to the curator, revolutionary art was no longer expected (Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008, p. 33).

> While western artists were expanding the field of their art by embracing performative ritual and ceremonies from non-western traditions, in Australia reverse revolution occurred in the early 1970s, when a traditional western medium (canvas) was introduced into the field of Indigenous painting. Some celebrate the expanding waves of this 'revolution by night', rewriting Australian history and looking at it as a 'social sculpture' that creates an economy for remote communities through art, while others today are suspicious of the potential paternalism of the system that has developed around the movement, as well as of the potentially conservative nature of the use to which such painting can be put.

Christov-Bakargiev stated that she is aware of her own bias as a Western curator who operates in an art world underpinned by (Western) history and epistemology. She resists the contemporary art expectations for the conventional, aspiring instead for greater diversity and difference, where the old and the new, the known and the unknown meet, collide, coalesce of clash. While desiring to change familiar grounds as repeatedly indicated in the *Revolutions* catalogue, she is nevertheless constrained by the art world context in which she operates (Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008, p. 33). This dilemma reveals the challenge she faced when considering Indigenous art for her 2008 event. As in all biennales, the curator sought to present contemporary art that was innovative and presented new ideas in new and different ways, including, like many biennales at the time, a global transcultural focus and new ways of thinking, forming and storytelling including Indigenous ones.

The curator searched for justification to integrate Indigenous art into an existing art world that is restricted by norms and ideas of a Western modernist culture. Although the Indigenous art displayed at *Revolutions* offered to the post-industrialised world a new opportunity to embrace a different and exciting culture (McDonald & Snepvangers 2009; Phillips 2008), Christov-Bakargiev's resolution was to transfer the responsibility onwards. She hints to the fact that Australia may need to resolve its relationship with Indigenous art before the rest of the world can do so (Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008, p. 31):

> If you think of Aboriginal ways of configuring place and the continuous enactment of life appearing in songs and storytelling, a cyclical view where things are repeated, you raise the question of the ways in which Australian indigenous philosophies may interact with western philosophies to produce a way of thinking about contemporary Australia.

Although Christov-Bakargiev showed keen interest in Indigenous art, she sought its meaning through its relationship with Western values. Indigenous art, Christov-Bakargiev indicated, can only gain limited recognition in the contemporary art world, a recognition achieved following on from earlier strategies to focus on the similarities between Indigenous art and modernist art. The curator neglected to explore the value of Indigenous art for what it is in its own right, and instead, focused on a yet-to-be defined connection between Indigenous art and 'contemporary Australia', a connection that once defined, according to Christov-Bakargiev, would facilitate the recognition of Indigenous art in the contemporary art world.

Like other leading curators, Christov-Bakargiev sought to create a popular event, pleasing a large mainstream public. Traditionally, contemporary art exhibitions expanded geographically to multiple locations for each event, which increased their impact and reach. Movement and visits to several locations in a short period has emerged as a global trend for biennales; space and location in contemporary art are significant and have increased the commercial value of art events and their artworks (Patrick 2008; Phillips 2008). The art public is interested in spreading out and seeing various places, as with other forms of tourism. The connection however between art and tourism is not evident, as in certain respects those two activities may contradict each other. Contemporary art is largely political and thus portrays messages that may be overwhelming and require deep thinking; in contrast, the expectation from mainstream tourism is lighter, that is, entertainment that can easily be consumed and digested (Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008). Contemporary art events have succeeded to merge these two goals, however, this has been achieved under the banner of 'popular culture'.

The evaluation of Indigenous art within such a paradigm is complex. It can be assumed that some audiences from around the world have visited Australia and engaged with Indigenous culture in one form or another; others, are curious and interested to do so in the future to expand their knowledge about Indigenous art and culture. Is it the role of the Indigenous art

movement to fulfill this curiosity? Margo Neale (2017, p. 44) describes the interest in Emily Kame Kngwarreye as follows:

> there is now a global climate in which people have a strong desire to look beyond their own cultures and find common ground with other peoples—to find connection through cultural difference. Both these shifts were evident [in the audience's engagement with Kngwarreye].

Neale (2008, p. 20) suggests that Kngwarreye offered a reconciliation path between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures and assisted in bringing the two worlds closer to each other. She identifies the audience's desire to connect with other cultures through art; however, she is not here explicitly referring to tourism. But her observation raises the question of whether the desire for cross-cultural connection can in fact be fulfilled through the domain of contemporary art. The complexity of Indigenous art seen both as fine art and as a tourist commodity, and with that the status of the Biennale as a tourist attraction raises the vexed issue of how to present Indigenous art without compromising its cultural value. This dilemma is driven from the above discussion of the conflict between the desire for popular appeal and cultural capital in the 2008 Biennial. Did Christov-Bakargiev include Reid's work to enhance international visitation to her exhibition and adhere to the desires of current audiences to connect with 'exotic' cultures, or did she include Reid's work to be politically correct as expected in today's world? In light of the history of Indigenous art up to 2008 it can be assumed that although these reasons may have been at play, Reid was included in the exhibition because Indigenous art was presented in previous exhibitions, but also to gratify audiences' curiosity about 'exotic cultures' and adhere to the mandate of political correctness. If contemporary art in the Biennale context was aimed at tourism, entertainment, and the exploration of Sydney, was Indigenous art presented in the right environment?

Beyond those commercial aims *Revolutions*, however, had a higher purpose. In the catalogue for *Revolutions* Christov-Bakargiev referred to the rise of biennales as 'the biennale syndrome' (Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008, p. 33). She defined biennale events as "periodic International events of contemporary art today". According to Christov-Bakargiev et al. (2008, p. 30) biennales have disempowered smaller arts organisations such as artist-run spaces and small-scale individual creative initiatives. In *Revolutions*, Christov-Bakargiev strived to turn away from modernity, viewing 'contemporary' as the search for revolutionary

voices, considering the regrettable institutionalisation of the contemporary art world (Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008, p. 33).

'Revolutions' is such an evocative term within a Western (art) world context. Since the early days of art emerging from the cloistered halls of medieval churches, 'art' has been represented through 'periods' marked by successive 'revolutions'; in style, perception, concept, technology etc, informed by, at times, dramatic social, political and cultural change. However, the 16th Biennale of Sydney in 2008, titled *Revolutions – Forms That Turn*, employs the term ambiguously with less emphasis on dramatic change and more on a sense of repetition.

The title intended to pronounce a duality between the desire for contemporary art to create change through strong statements and unconventional art, against the limitations for contemporary art, where strong statements become weak due to imposed institutionalised boundaries. Exploration of the specific themes customary to contemporary art in the 21st century provide insight into how Indigenous art sits within or in relation to this framework. Christov-Bakargiev et al. (2008, p. 30) explain that the terms 'revolution' and 'modernity' were popular until the mid-1970s when they represented positive change. Thereafter, both these terms became associated with negative events such as the organisation of terrorism, violence against minorities, and capitalist domination. With *Revolutions* as the title of the show, Christov-Bakargiev aimed to reverse back to the original sense of the word, while attempting to offer powerful and transformative art a renewed meaning. As endorsed by participating artist Iwona Blazwick (Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008, p. 35) "Christov-Bakargiev has proposed that the 2008 Biennale of Sydney marks another return of the spiral of the modernist revolution that began in the 1900s and swung out once more in the 1960s and 1970s". Nonetheless, despite the curator's aim to offer an alternative interpretation to contemporary art, *Revolutions* struggled to offer real substitute to a predefined art historical narrative.

Doreen Reid Nakamarra at Christov-Bakargiev's Biennale of Sydney: the exhibition's limitations

This section analyses the curatorial and discursive framing of a painting by Doreen Reid Nakamarra (1955-2009), a remote Indigenous artist, presented in the Biennial. This canvas is

a prime example of the way artists are chosen based on Western selection criteria, for example the artists' earlier exposure and popularity. Insufficient background context with the artworks, and the presentation of works such as Reid's in the context of a broader installation of objects by other artists to affirm their supposed 'contemporaneity', demonstrates a strongly embedded Western practise.

Exposure of artworks in major art exhibitions assists artists with developing their career, however, despite Reid's achievement as an exhibiting artist in the Biennale of Sydney, it is argued here that the curatorial approach for her work lacked real engagement with it. Rather, the selection of Reid as a participating artist was influenced by the commercial 'star artist' model, which is a Western concept that determines the inclusion and exclusion of art into the contemporary art domain (Adorno 2001, p. 101). A year prior to the 16th Biennale of Sydney in 2008, Doreen Reid Nakamarra's work was exhibited at the National Gallery of Australia's *National Indigenous Art Triennial*: *Culture Warriors*. This exhibition toured to three major art institutions in Australia, and in 2009 the exhibition was shown at the American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center, Washington DC (Downie 2009). It is likely that through initial exposure of Reid's works in Australia Christov-Bakargiev, and the Washington museum came to know about Reid's practice. Reid was selected for these shows based on her popularity in the art world. The same artists get selected for exhibition in multiple international art events according to their popularity and appraisal in the art world, but not according to the messaging in their artworks or their status and reputation in their own communities.

Once Reid's work became part of the international exhibiting pool, her success in the contemporary art world, according to its terms, was assured. Reid's praise during the 16th Biennale of Sydney was followed by an international career and her work was selected for major art events around the world. *Revolutions* was held between June and September 2008, in August that same year Reid won the General Painting Award at the 25th Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Awards (NATSIAA). After Reid's passing in 2009 her work continued to feature in major public and private collections and events, including the National Gallery of Victoria, and *dOCUMENTA (13)*, curated in 2012 by Christov-Bakargiev also. In 2016 Reid's work was exhibited in *Everywhen: The Eternal Present in Indigenous Art from Australia*, at the Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, USA. Reid is described as the most famous artist of the later generation of artists emerging from the

Western Desert art movement (Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art 2016). The artists' painting style gained her international recognition due to her innovative and graphic style, known for the curvy dotted lines laid down on large canvases.

The painting exhibited at *Revolutions* was an untitled work (Fig. 4) displayed at the contemporary arts space Pier 2/3, the venue for the historic showing of *The Aboriginal Memorial* in 1988 as will be discussed in Chapter 5. Reid's painting was a large canvas, 180 cm x 245 cm, commissioned for the Biennale and exhibited in an unusual fashion: it lay flat on a raised platform. This large-scale canvas depicted the "undulating sandhills surrounding Marrapinti in Western Australia" (Papunya Tula Artists Pty. Ltd. 2008). Its finely executed texture evoked thought about the desert plains and sandy landscape, the work was described in the Papunya Tula website as "forming a crucial part of the holistic experience of voluminous waves and movement, journeys and revolutions" (Papunya Tula Artists Pty. Ltd. 2008). The dynamism in the work related to the theme for the exhibition, 'forms that turn'. The forms and shapes in Reid's work and the colours that mimic the desert landscape, including soft oranges, light yellows, creams, and blacks suggested internal motion and passion for Country. Author Robert Epp (2008, p. 98) explained about Reid's work that "the painting's motif of brown zigzag lines read as a metaphor for the waves of valleys and ridges in the desert landscape". Curator Stephen Gilchrist (cited in Masters, 2016, p. 46) offered a cultural interpretation to the work: "the painting should not be read as mere illustration but real-time communion with ancestors, their sacred geographies and the practices that sustain them". The fine linework and dotting formed an abstract interpretation of the landscape depicted, and the complex pattern of repeating optical lines invited viewers to stand back and absorb the powerful movement in the painting. This style of artworks however doesn't take away from the significance of the site and its cultural meaning, knowledge which has been handed down from generation to generation through ritual, song, and ceremony (Cumpston & Patton 2010).

Doreen Reid Nakamarra, associated with the Pintupi language and Ngaatjatjarra people, had a nomadic life. She was born in the mid-1950s in Mummine, near the Warburton Ranges in Western Australia, and walked with her family to Haast Bluff. Reid's life was turned upside down by European expansion into remoter parts of the Australian continent. From living a highly nomadic life in the bush she had to rapidly adjust to a sedentary life at Haasts Bluff, a government settlement for Aboriginal people, where families and tribal groups were often

forced together, despite cultural differences, and in some circumstances long held cultural animosities. Her living conditions were poor. In 1984, Reid and her husband George Tjampu Tjapaltjarri, settled in the new community of Kiwirrkurra. Her husband was of the first Papunya painters in the period from the 1970s to the 1980s, when artmaking was largely considered an activity for men. Reid was introduced to the contemporary art world by her husband. Later in life Reid developed her own artistic style, which, according to Grosz (2011, p. 195) represented Country, but also feminist ideas; the paintings represented to her audiences women's power and "their capacity to survive and thrive".

The production of art under Reid's living circumstances sent a political and feminist message, a common practice in the contemporary art world. The message was that despite the impact of colonisation, Reid and her peers were able to see and live the beauty of their Country and culture. In Reid's artistic process, the values of Country and culture had stronger impact than her difficult daily circumstances. According to Grosz (2011, p. 194) Reid's work was characterised by "a new opening, a new direction, a new linearity". As such, her work was deemed to be suited, according to art world curators and critics, to the contemporary art environment.

As discussed in the last chapter, from the 1980s, a key reason Indigenous art was endorsed in the contemporary art world was that it resembled modern (abstract) art, which dominated the art world at that time. Although the 16th Biennale of Sydney took place twenty years later, it is likely that the underlying selection criteria for Reid's work was based on the artwork's abstraction and as such resemblance to the 'modernist tradition', which was still dominant then. Reid's work fitted the trends and discourse of the contemporary art world; the work was perceived as an installation, presented as a 3D object, and there was a close association between performance (Reid used ceremony and dance as inspiration for her work) and Reid's painting. All those mediums and practices together were common to, and accepted as contemporary art, therefore, focusing on the commonalities and resemblance between artworks, and not, as one might expect from contemporary art, on their alterity.

Significant effort is made by curators to align remote Indigenous art with contemporary art world fashions. In *Magiciens* the Warlpiri men's display, Yarla, was exhibited near British artist Richard Long's mud circle. This presentation assisted in associating Yarla with other contemporary art, as though Yarla would become contemporary when presented under

Long's wings and reputation as a contemporary artist. The curator for *Revolutions* placed a sound installation alongside Reid's work, and in that achieved an even more 'contemporary art' like display – a mixed media exhibition, as is popular in the contemporary art world. Reid's work was displayed alongside Italian Futurist Luigi Russolos noise making machines from c. 1913 and the cutting-edge sound installation *Murder of Crows* by Janet Cardiff and Georges Bures Miller. This sound installation was reviewed by scholar Robert Epp (2008, p. 98):

> The three works at Pier 2/3 form one of the more successful clusters of historical and contemporary art. Dominating the huge warehouse space is the sound installation Murder of Crows, 2008, by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, one of the highlights of the Biennale. The installation consists of 100 speakers placed on the floor and wooden folding chairs set in a circle around an old gramophone speaker that rests on a battered card table. Cardiff's lethargic voice murmurs from the gramophone speaker, recounting terrifying scenes from a nightmare. Her narrative, accompanied by a complex audio track that includes music, bird noises and the splash of waves, creates a powerful shift in perception from the visual to the aural imagination.

In *Revolutions*, the installation of the three works together was driven by the curator's vision for the exhibition: engage the audience with a sensory experience affected by the combination of the works placed together in the one space. Once artworks are offered in the public sphere there is no way to control how they will be received, although with basic information and context provided, audiences can have a better understanding of the works and their meaning (Neale 2017). While the curator for the Pier 2/3 cluster exhibited Reid's work through her 'revolutions' theme, highlighting the artist's continuous battle for cultural recognition and land rights, she had also imposed her own interpretation on Reid's installation, as Reid's intended meaning was different from the exploration of audio-visual connections.

Like any event, performance, or text, art can be interpreted in many ways, which may not directly correspond to the original intended meaning. Although, as Perkins (2010, p. 26) asserts, Indigenous artists paint in their own terms, the interpretations are diverse. For instance, the political, post-colonial, and feminist conditions of Reid's life, used to interpret her work, are a product of analysis made by art world participants. Reid, however, as has

been researched about many other Indigenous artists, operated from much more pragmatic motives (Altman 2005; Myers 2006). Indigenous communities with very poor living conditions became the source of art production early on through the Australian Government intervention. Reid wanted to develop a career that could offer her an occupation and provide income to her family. Reid appreciated that an artistic career could facilitate this. Nonetheless, there is certainly more than just income that motivated Reid, as Perkins (2010) testified, after Reid's death Papunya Tula corporation acknowledged that "the job is far more than making sales and balancing books. The art is connected, deeply rooted in people's lives" (Perkins 2010, p. 27). Reid was driven to gain income, but her art practice was also of cultural and intrinsic significance.

The designs Reid painted on her canvases related to what she understood to be of interest to art world audiences. Reid stated that she created paintings for exhibition, and sale to 'white people', in order for them to experience the Country through her eyes (Grosz 2011). She painted what she knew best: her Country, and interpretations of her cultural knowledge visualised through abstract brush strokes on canvas. As seen in the curatorial placement of Reid's work alongside Cardiff and Miller's sound installation, in the 16th Biennale of Sydney, and similar such events, curators and/or art authorities were expected to justify the fittingness of Indigenous art to existing criteria for contemporary art. The challenge that comes with the need to justify Indigenous art limits the selection of Indigenous art for contemporary art exhibitions.

For the purpose of contemporary art discourse, connections have been drawn between Reid's life circumstances and a political message relayed through her art. From this perspective, Reid's canvases are a product of the socio-political events taking place in her lifetime, the most notable being colonisation and as a result migration. In addition to abstraction as a trend for contemporary art, the concept of 'time' is also considered a criteria for contemporary art (Hoptman et al. 2010; Meyer 2013; Smith et al. 2016). Smith et al. (2016) appreciate the possibilities that lie within artmaking, here, the present time can be depicted through explicit visual representation. Contemporary art is a tangible display of influences and experiences from the past expressed creatively in the present. This criterion, based on the concept of 'time', is adapted to Indigenous art in so far as artists look at Country, and interpret its past and future. Indigenous artists explore their inherited tradition and what it may become in the future (Biddle 2016). The optical illusion of movement in Reid's work depicts not only her

geographical journey covering vast landscapes, but also the travel in time, connecting history with contemporaneity and the time ahead. Scholar Elizabeth Grosz (2011, p. 196) describes this through Reid's context:

> Art became a living line of connection from the past to the future, a lineage marking the continuous movement of peoples from the long distant past into the present and future, traveling vast terrains only through the help of narratives art elaborates.

In respect to the subject matter it was possible to depict Reid's cultural and geographical inspiration in language acceptable and customary for contemporary art; depictions interpreted in the English language as the norm in the field.

Nonetheless, statements written for Indigenous art are largely written in a way that assumes prior knowledge of Indigenous art and culture, ultimately leaving audiences ignorant about the background context for the work. Therefore, statements lacking background information about Indigenous culture are not effective and could potentially alienate audiences from engaging with Indigenous art. In contrast to the accompanying text for Reid's work in the *Revolutions* catalogue, which offers scant cultural knowledge, an example of what has been stated about Reid's artworks is the statement for the work *Untitled (Marrapinti)*, produced by Reid in 2008 and acquired by the Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art in 2009. This work has broad formal resemblance to Western modernism, but in fact depicts the same Country as depicted in the commissioned work for the Biennale, as the caption explains (Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art 2016):

> Untitled (Marrapinti) 2008 is a painting associated with a rock-hole site in Western Australia and the Tingari ancestors who created country and law as they travelled the Western Desert. Tingari women camped at this site during their travels towards the east and it is here that they made nose bones, known as marrapinti. After the ceremonies at Marrapinti, the women continued towards Wilkinkarra (Lake Mackay).

Indigenous mythology transfers messages and values important to Indigenous people, as in the statement above, referring to creation of Country and law. However, the above statement leaves many questions unanswered, for example, what are nose bones used for? What is the ceremony for? What is the purpose of the women's travel? Indigenous mythologies

authorised to be shared with the broader public placed in generic statements that assume familiarity with Indigenous culture lack clarity and detail for a novice Indigenous art spectator. Further education is needed before this art can be appreciated for what it really is, relating to complex systems of Indigenous culture and law.

Christov-Bakargiev strived to construct, in the context of an institutional event such as the Biennale of Sydney, a platform that created social change and relayed important ideas to the audience and beyond. Yet she could not shake off Western frameworks for contemporary art. Evidence of this is the fact that the catalogue for *Revolutions* is written entirely in English, except for occasional stand-alone sentences quoted in other European languages including French and Spanish. Much of the literature is historical and was deemed relevant to accompany images of artworks displayed in the catalogue. Doreen Reid Nakamarra's work features alongside James Bardon's text: an excerpt from *Revolution by Night: or, Katjala Wananu* (the Son After the Father), Local Consumption, Sydney, 1991, pp. 181-182 (quoted in Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008, pp. 230-231). James Bardon is Geoffrey's Bardon's brother, the latter known for his significant contribution to the creation of the Western Desert art movement in the Indigenous community Papunya (Geoffrey Bardon's involvement with the Papunya movement is elaborated upon in the Introduction to this thesis). James Bardon's prose describes his recollection of viewing Western Desert painters at work, quoting (in English) some of the artists present. Reid's work is thus not accompanied by text in her Pintupi language or in the very least text translated from Pintupi to English, rather by prose written by a white man who depicts his interpretation of art production in the Western Desert.

The inference to be drawn from the exclusive use of English in the *Revolutions* catalogue is that the exhibition organisers assumed that the language would be understood by all. This is reminiscent of the argument (as discussed in Chapter 3) that art is universal; therefore, it is understood by all. Yet Reid's work cannot be understood by all spectators in the same manner. It is not understood by audiences unfamiliar with Indigenous cultures. Bardon as a mediator between cultures provided the audience with some context for Western Desert art making, however, only Bardon was offered the voice to represent Reid, but any explanation of Indigenous Dreaming and mythology was omitted from the catalogue text. Bardon's prose is not obsolete, it has its place as preparation and background to what Reid could have explained herself: the mythological story or cultural and site-specific motives she had painted. In *Magiciens* (Martin 1989a, p. 267) the opposite scenario occurred: in the catalogue

for the exhibition two Warlpiri men are quoted, but context for these quotes is missing; in both cases the audience remains ill-informed.

In the *Revolutions* catalogue Hetti Perkins published an essay titled Bush Mechanics (Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008, pp. 60-61), where she writes: “Painting on canvas is simply a means to communicating in a language understood by the mainstream” (p. 60). That is, the audience can relate to Reid’s artwork because it is familiar in terms of its medium (painting), materials (acrylic on canvas), and form (ostensibly abstraction). The problem with this interpretation, which prioritises medium and style, is that it limits the cultural meaning of the artwork under consideration. The audience is most likely unaware of such meaning. If indeed, as Christov-Bakargiev (Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008, p. 106) argues in the exhibition catalogue, that contemporary art’s purpose is beyond ‘art for art's sake’ – that the integrity of art lies beyond its existence and aesthetic alone – then the audience must be made aware of such meaning.

In line with Christov-Bakargiev, Perkins (Christov-Bakargiev et al. 2008, pp. 60-61) claims that Indigenous art is political: that by its mere existence Indigenous art embodies the survival of Indigenous culture despite colonisation. Perkins gives the example of canvas, which in Western culture is perceived as a valuable art material, while in Indigenous remote communities it is sometimes used as a practical tool to, for instance, block the sun away. Indigenous artists’ use of canvas not only as an artistic but as a quasi-architectural material is but one of the cultural differences between Western and Indigenous cultures, and the diverse purpose a given object may have in these dual contexts. Reid’s work however, has a specific cultural meaning relating to Country, beyond colonial and political history. Unfortunately, an Indigenous perspective on the work was not offered in the *Revolutions* catalogue.

Looking forward: *dOCUMENTA (13)*

A brief analysis of Christov-Bakargiev’s approach for *dOCUMENTA (13)*, a major art event that took place in 2012 in Kassel, Germany, and one of the highpoints in Christov-Bakargiev’s career as a curator, provides a window into possible developments of the curators’ view and approach towards contemporary art since her curatorial role in the 2008 Biennale of Sydney. This in turn, helps understand whether the presentation of Indigenous art in the contemporary art world has changed since. In *dOCUMENTA (13)* Christov-Bakargiev

exhibited works from Urban Australian artists such as Fiona Hall and Gordon Bennett and worked with Indigenous curator Hetti Perkins to display the work of Papunya Tula artists Warlimpirrnga Tjapaltjarri in addition to Doreen Reid Nakamarra. While in *Revolutions* Christov-Bakargiev predominantly worked independently, in *dOCUMENTA (13)* she collaborated with a group of international curators, including Perkins who led the curatorial practice for the Indigenous art on display (Australia Council for the Arts 2012). Furthermore, in *Revolutions* a single work by Reid was exhibited, while in *dOCUMENTA (13)* a large space was dedicated to the two participating Indigenous artists, with multiple works on display for each artist. The main exhibition space for the event was the Fridericianum, built in 1779 as one of the first public museums in the world. Considering that this major institution is associated with a history of conservative cultural values, the exhibition of Indigenous art in it had remarkable conceptual and visual impact, pointing to increased global power shifts, and a diversifying society. In view of this, the curator offered greater exposure and space for Indigenous art to be appreciated on its own, with Indigenous interpretations and voices, and value as a contemporary art stream. These small but significant shifts in the curator's approach point to her increased recognition of Indigenous art.

The association formed by Christov-Bakargiev with Indigenous art was beneficial to increasing its exposure in large events of contemporary art in Europe. The relative success of international contemporary art fairs is measured by attendance numbers as much as anything else. Besides such numbers representing the potential economic injection into the city, it also represents the potential exposure of artists to international audiences. *dOCUMENTA (13)* attracted a recorded 860,000 visitors. In this event too, the location for the exhibition was pivotal: the event was spread in thirty-six different locations around Kassel but was not limited to various venues in Kassel alone. It stood out from other *documenta* events from previous years because it crossed borders to Kabul (Afghanistan) Alexandria/Cairo (Egypt), and Banff (Canada) (Wolbert 2014). Christov-Bakargiev (2012, p. 7) explained:

> …the importance of engaging with a site and, at the same time, producing a polylogue with other places. A place is no fixed thing; it has an episodichistory and takes its particular aspect through an intense immersion.

As pointed out by European curator Georges Petitjean (2016), the exhibition of two Indigenous artists in such a pivotal event for contemporary art in a European art centre indicates increasing exposure, and recognition of Indigenous artists in Europe.

It is worthwhile to analyse the *dOCUMENTA (13)* event from a perspective of inclusion of artists from multiple cultures. This insight may clarify the approach towards Indigenous art at that time and signal changes that have occurred. While in *Revolutions* the majority of exhibiting artists were Western, greater capacity, and attention to the diverse nationalities and cultures of participating artists was required for *dOCUMENTA (13)*. American academic Barbara Wolbert (2014) notes that prior to WWI and WWII art exhibitions aimed to be nationalist in their display, clearly establishing the national origins of art and artists. However, similarly to the approach taken in the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*, in *dOCUMENTA (13)* Christov-Bakargiev rejected this focus on the nationality and ethnicity of the artists; choosing an approach of inclusivity. Because she perceived the kind of diversity politics that dominates large biennale events to be outdated, she shifted this recurring focus on nationality and ethnicity which is often highlighted by the mass media, to other categories of interest (Wolbert 2014, p. 3). For example, in *documenta 12* the artist Yan Lei's was explicitly presented as "part of a contingent of seven artists from the People's Republic of China, who the curators' dramaturgy and journalists' reviews had singled out on account of their nationality"; while *dOCUMENTA (13)* referred to Yan Lei without particularly referring to his origins (Wolbert 2014, p. 3). The criticism of *Magiciens* was around not providing background information and context for the participating artists, however, *dOCUMENTA (13)* did not hide this context, it merely did not focus on it as the most important attribute for the artworks. This approach assisted with shifting the focus to the qualities of the works, in lieu of pointing out an Otherness of non-Western artists.

An attempt to resist the materialistic drives of Western capitalism has also encouraged the transformation of the contemporary art world to be a more culturally inclusive space. The dominance of Euro-American economies globally has meant that the globe has been flooded with Euro-American culture and brands; a materialism that is still very different to the cultural interests of Indigenous artists living in remote communities. By distancing contemporary art from popular culture there is a greater opportunity to introduce new cultural ideas and concepts to art audiences. According to Christov-Bakargiev it is ideal that contemporary art has become accessible in everyday life to wide audiences (Clement &

Christov-Bakargiev, p. 83). The downside is that contemporary art is perceived as a commodity just like any other product in our consumerist society. For this reason, Christov-Bakargiev has aimed to distinguish her art events as unique art experiences rather than merely art ‘shopping malls’, as the hundreds of other biennales around the world appear to have become.

Through her idealism and her core values engrained with the notion of harmony of all creatures, Christov-Bakargiev has introduced some ground-breaking ideas to the event. For instance, *dOCUMENTA (13)* was essentially a statement about the importance of the natural environment while highlighting the rights of all living creatures. She applied this theory in practice by permitting owners to bring their dogs (including her own) to some of the exhibits. Visits to Brian Jungen's installation ‘Dog Run’ in Karlsaue park were only allowed when accompanied by a ‘dog friend’ (Corbet 2012; Wolbert 2014). Although not exclusive to Christov-Bakargiev, the curator aimed to remove her curatorial choices from market values and replace criteria such as artists’ popularity with what she perceived as the quality and importance of the work (Catling & Frohn 2012). Herewith, the curator created a meaningful event, estranged from the entertaining character of other biennales and festivals referred to as a ‘public spectacle’ (Wolbert 2014, p. 20).

Thus, In contrast to the 16th Biennale of Sydney, *dOCUMENTA (13)*, featured two Indigenous artists from remote communities, was spread across multiple international locations, enjoyed greater visitation, and included more non-Western artists with the focus on the quality of their art (e.g. Asian artists). It also emphasised the event’s originality while lessening the importance of art market demands and prewritten criteria for contemporary art. The way Christov-Bakargiev organised Indigenous art in *dOCUMENTA (13)* was deeply influenced by her experiences in Australia (Gruber 2012). The curator came to appreciate Desert art for its aesthetic qualities and extended its exhibition in the event. Christov-Bakargiev also understood that to offer an authentic and honest experience to the public collaboration with local Indigenous curators was essential. Nonetheless, the event in its essence resembled the 16th Biennale of Sydney, considering the underpinning cultural values and customs leading the curator on the individual level.

Conclusion

This chapter argued that despite changes in the art world in the 21st century, notably its decentralisation, the art world had become highly institutionalised and linked to capitalist values. This can be explained by observing exhibition venues and events that hold fame and who follow standard criteria for contemporary art that are restricted to popular trends in the urban West. Biennales increasingly became popular around the world attracting large audiences while actual 'revolutionary' art initiatives including artist collectives and alternative art events have been pushed to the fringes. In an art world driven by popular culture in lieu of cultural capital new challenges have arisen for promotion of Indigenous art. Indigenous artists, in contrast to fashions in large contemporary art events, commonly exhibit art produced on canvas, paper or natural art materials, depicting ceremonial stories concerning Indigenous culture and law. Opportunities for exhibition of this art are available as sub-specialisations, however, are negligible in prestigious contemporary art environments.

International curators such as Christov-Bakargiev adhere to a conventional art environment powered by commercial indicators for success. Therefore, in major art events an alternative approach that highlights values such as cultural capital and diversity is rarely opted for. Some of Christov-Bakargiev's merits lie in her insightful presentation of the relationships between historical and contemporary artworks (similarly to Gilchrist's approach discussed in the next chapter), and her approach towards diversity, which focuses on a thematic organisation of her exhibitions rather than on the nationality of the participating artists. However, her input is limited to her own frameworks, which in respect to Indigenous art results in carelessness about Indigenous cultural frameworks. Raising the consciousness of the contemporary art world about the significance of Indigenous ceremonial stories, Country, and law has proven to be a slow process because of the limited Indigenous voices in the sector.

The 16th Biennale of Sydney exhibited only one Indigenous artist from remote Australia, Doreen Reid Nakamarra (in addition to the historical work by Tommy McRae). This despite impressive statistics showing that Indigenous artists with works sold at auction between 1995 – 2003 make up 32 percent of all artists in Australia (Coate 2008). The reason for this lacuna lies in the foundational principles for contemporary art, including those of The Biennale of Sydney. As stated by Christov-Bakargiev (2008) contemporary art events are concerned with themes that influence people's daily lives. Herewith, Christov-Bakargiev refers to current

affairs involving, for instance climate change impacts and equal rights for immigrants. These themes are covered by the mass media through internet pages, and television and radio programs, and are targeted at urban populations. Artworks that correspond to these themes were selected for the Biennale. Thus, it is not surprising that Indigenous art, with its focus on phenomna from its own culture, was not deemed suitable for the Biennale of Sydney or in fact, for other contemporary art events. The ommission of Indigenous art of the 'traditional' kind is also true to recent Biennales of Sydney (2020, 2022).

For Indigenous art to be understood, respected and included in the contemporary art world, greater exposure of Indigenous voices is needed, alongside acknowledgment and detailed interpretation of the meaning depicted in the art. Audiences for contemporary art require clarification of the context of Indigenous art as well as mediation between conventional contemporary art and Indigenous art, to positively engage with Indigenous art. Moreover, authorities in the contemporary art world must try to be genuinely revolutionary and accept diverse cultures and customs. Although the contemporary art world presents itself as an open, culturally diverse, decentralised and boundless platform, there are repeating criteria that define each contemporary art event. At present, Indigenous art is restricted to specialised exhibition opportunities and is rarely presented in major events for contemporary art unless it adapts its concepts and forms to the current trends in the contemporary art world.

Chapter 5 - Indigenous Curatorial Perspectives

Djon Mundine

The previous two chapters critiqued the presentation of remote Indigenous Australian art in two large-scale contemporary art exhibitions by non-Indigenous curators: Jean-Hubert Martin's *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) and the 2008 Biennale of Sydney *Revolutions - Forms That Turn* (2008) by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. These chapters discussed the exhibition of Indigenous art in those events, which were meant to promote cultural difference and undermine canonical art history through engagement with non-Western cultures. The chapters also discussed the various ways in which Indigenous art was decontextualised or under-contextualised in those exhibition contexts, through a close analysis of the physical placement of objects in the gallery and the literature that accompanied these exhibitions.

This chapter changes direction somewhat. Rather than discussing the work of non-Indigenous curators, it focuses on one Indigenous curator: Djon Mundine. Rather than a single exhibition, moreover, it examines several shows across Mundine's career from *Aboriginal Bark Paintings from the Collection of the Art Gallery of NSW: North-East Arnhem Land* (1981) to *Aboriginal War Memorial* (1988) to *Four Women: (I do belong) Double* (2017). In addition to establishing the overarching aesthetic and political preoccupations of Mundine's work, this chapter gives insight into his view that Indigenous art should be included in the contemporary art field, supported by Indigenous knowledge and frameworks. Mundine's insight – based on a personal interview conducted with Mundine in 2017 – is especially valuable for my task of theorising the place, role, and challenges of the Indigenous art movement in Australia and overseas for several reasons. My aim here is to understand: i) the ways in which Mundine's cultural background as an Indigenous curator, and curatorial approach have contributed to the Indigenous contemporary art movement; ii) the influence Mundine's curatorial practice has had on the reception of Indigenous art in Australia; iii) the criteria Mundine employs to curate exhibitions; iv) what (if any) tensions exist in Indigenous art being exhibited as simultaneously contemporary and traditional, and v) what motivates Mundine and other Indigenous curators' curatorial practice.

As well as discussing Mundine's work and writings, this chapter positions his work against the historical backdrop of the rise of Indigenous curation in Australia, and more specifically in relation to the work and writings of other Indigenous curators such as Hetti Perkins and

Stephen Gilchrist. One of the crucial arguments considered in this chapter is that Indigenous curators bring a unique perspective to Indigenous art due precisely to their Indigeneity, evoking unfamiliar sensations and generating new insight amongst their audiences. Towards the end of the chapter, this in turn prompts a consideration of the idea that, rather than seeking to be included in contemporary art, the Indigenous art movement would be better served through separating itself from this sphere. Gilchrist (Gilchrist 2020b, pp. 252-263), for example, has argued that the control of Indigenous art should be solely decided by Indigenous people in institutions that are separate from Western contemporary art institutions, with their historical ties to colonisation and 'the exotic'. Within the curatorial narrative traced in this thesis, the logic of Gilchrist's argument can be understood in these terms: Indigenous art was once considered an anthropological relic; later, it was incorporated into the field of contemporary art. Gilchrist further argued that having now been established in contemporary art, Indigenous art should seek to remove itself in the interest of furthering Indigenous sovereignty.

Gilchrist's position is fascinating to consider in the context of the argument developed in preceding chapters, namely, that Indigenous art be seen as part of contemporary art. At first glance it contradicts arguments in favour of including Indigenous art in the field of contemporary art. Yet, as will be argued in this chapter, a cultural institution operated by Indigenous Australians – even one outwardly hostile to the practice and discourse of contemporary art – could still be understood as a vital addition to the contemporary artistic landscape, rather than a separate and autonomous field of cultural activity. Moreover, curatorial strategies implemented by Gilchrist to decolonise the museum will be shown to intersect with other curatorial and artistic strategies – for example, anachronism – that already exist within the field of contemporary art.

The need for Indigenous curation

There are many non-Indigenous art associates who have dedicated their lives to understanding and interpreting Indigenous art and culture, to empower Indigenous people and expand cultural awareness and appreciation. Indigenous communities today, moreover, rely on some non-Indigenous historical and cultural anthropological research to re-establish

cultural knowledge and practices[11]. However, since the early 1970s – coinciding with the rise of contemporary art – there has been ongoing enquiry about the validity of research on Indigenous Australians by non-Indigenous people. More so, it has only been since the 1990s, following the 1988 Australian Bicentenary, that mainstream cultural institutions have been under pressure to reconsider their role in the production and reproduction of historical narratives in relation to Indigenous Australians. An important outcome of such efforts has been the establishment of new rules and regulations guiding institutional practice based on cultural protocols developed in partnership with Indigenous cultural advisors. The need for non-Indigenous researchers to be aware of culturally appropriate methodologies for research has become paramount for ensuring that research is both ethical and useful for Indigenous people. However, it has also been argued that Indigenous people obtain a primary role in that research and that the results form successful collaborations contribute to capacity building and enhance that field of study. As Osmond and Phillips (2014, p. 561) write:

> Indigenous research methodologies call for the inclusion of Indigenous participants, voices and perspectives in scholarly research. For non-Indigenous historians, the implication is the re-positioning of Indigenous knowledge and understanding — involving Indigenous people not merely as research subjects but as central to the research process.

In both academic, and cultural institutions such as galleries and museums, engagement with 'Others', along with the meaningful inclusion, participation and control of these institutions by Indigenous people is seen as essential. In the era of post-colonialism, following the period of exhibitions addressed in this thesis as case studies (starting from 1989 and up to 2015), art world approaches have adjusted to some degree, in response to the rise of multiculturalism. In the 1980s, the American anthropology historian James Clifford perceived contemporary museums of natural history and art as 'contact zones', aiming to decentre themselves by recognising that the items they temporarily hold are intertwined in an "unfinished historical processes of travel" (Clifford 1997, p. 213). These concepts are discussed in the "new museology" that has developed across colonial-settler states since the early 1990s, in which

[11] From a global perspective Enwezor (Maya Lecker & Krill 2015; Shatz 2002) endorses the opportunity of non-Western curators to accumulate knowledge about current affairs and social complexities, and offer alternative perspectives to the art world. This is achieved through the exhibition space as a platform for presentation and dialogue with multiple audiences, including collaborators and colleagues, the host institutions, and an engaged public.

Australian museology has been recognised as a pioneer due to its emphatic attitude towards collaborations with its Indigenous communities (Message 2008, p. 755). In accordance with this trend, Australian museums and galleries have shifted their focus from the demands of innovation, newness and modernity towards building and strengthening connections between communities and people through exchange and conversation.

In accordance with this turn towards Indigenous community engagement, there has been an institutional push to identify, train, and include Indigenous curators within the Australian context. The *Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries* (Janke 2018) is evidence of this and identifies five key reasons for the change: 1. Correcting the legacy of historical injustices around the role museums and galleries had in the past, justifying and promoting acts of colonisation; 2. Moving away from Eurocentric principles in the museums and gallery industry towards adoption of Indigenous values and with that introducing Reconciliation sentiments; 3. Increasing Indigenous employment and opportunities based on compensation for knowledge and skill sharing; 4. Nominating Indigenous people as caretakers of their own cultural material in museums and galleries; and 5. Enhancing contact with Indigenous communities to repatriate and share knowledge and resources. Strong Indigenous presence, including Indigenous art and art management in institutions is linked to the recognition of Indigenous art in the contemporary art world. In this way, the identity of the artists, and the narrative and meaning of their artworks is presented from the source, or as close to that source as possible. It is argued that this Indigenous presence contributes to a deeper understanding of, and engagement with Indigenous art, which in turn strengthens the relationship of art audiences and associates with the art, and their desire for it to be part of the art world.

Before Indigenous curators were employed by public art institutions, non-Indigenous curators were hesitant about how to showcase and relay the meaning of Indigenous art to a non-Indigenous audience (Neale 2014, p. 290). One such challenge was related to mediums and materials used by Indigenous artists that were unfamiliar to the Western art world (for example, natural materials such as bark and earth pigments). The contemporary art community had to, and – as discussed in this chapter must continue to – adapt and develop new language in order to incorporate Indigenous art into its sphere (Perkins 2015, p. 14). Consistent with this shift, Australian art institutions finally began making a place for Indigenous voices, stories and values in the 1990s. This represents a shift aligned with the

start of the engagement of Indigenous curators including Djon Mundine, Hetti Perkins and Brenda Croft, and the integration of their curatorial approaches in institutions. The engagement of Indigenous curators is important both to Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians because it contributes to the national dialogue, connection, and shared identity through the expertise and networks of Indigenous curators (Janke 2018; McLean 2016; Myers 2019). In doing so it brings Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge together and acknowledges pre-existing collaborations. Sharing responsibilities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff in the art environment means that traditional Western ways of thinking need to shift, and become more flexible and attuned to other structures and systems. By working together, it is argued, Indigenous curators can provide Indigenous agency in a contemporary art world, portray the cultural motivation of Indigenous artists, and remove the 'outsider' label that is often applied to Indigenous art.

Mundine (2017 pers. comm., 1 November) recognised early in his career that more power is held by directors and curators in the art world than by the artists themselves, as is often believed by the general public. Art directors and curators are the ones in control, they make the decisions, and determine which artists can or cannot be included in their exhibitions (Croft 2015). Therefore, the careers of artists rely on selections made by directors and curators. Art historians can also influence an artist's career by critiquing and contextualising art; however, artists need prior endorsement by curators to be recognised, a process that highlights the importance of Indigenous curators advocating for the inclusion of Indigenous artists. The role of the Indigenous curator has become important not only for the exposure they offer Indigenous artists in their own exhibitions, but also to the artists' overall visibility in the contemporary art world (Fisher 2015, p. 804). By selecting artists for their own exhibitions, curators also influence the choice of other curators. For example, the turning point in the career of artist John Mawurndjul's was his inclusion in 1988 in the exhibition *Dreamings: The art of Aboriginal Australia* curated by Australian anthropologist Peter Sutton (Bullock et al. 2018, p. 40). This was an opportunity that led to subsequent inclusions of his work in major exhibitions such as *Magiciens* in 1989 (discussed in Chapter 3). Thereafter his work toured to Germany and England (1993-1994) with the exhibition *Aratjara: art of the first Australians*, organised by Swiss-born Bernhard Lüthi and supported in Australia by Gary Foley, Charles (Chicka) Dixon and Indigenous artist Lin Onus (Bullock et al. 2018, p. 40).

Djon Mundine's career and perspectives - 1980s onwards

Born into a prominent Bundjalung family in the New South Wales Northern Rivers town of Grafton in 1951, he has come to be celebrated as "one of Australia's most highly regarded curators" (Adlington cited in Mundine 2017, p. 7). Mundine is a prominent curator of Indigenous art in the Australian contemporary art space, and is also known as an arts writer, activist and artist. He has been an active and influential expert in the Indigenous art field throughout his career largely as an independent curator. This section surveys key moments in Mundine's career, including his roles as art advisor and curator in Arnhem Land, his nomination as one of the first Indigenous curators in Sydney's Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) and later at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), and his curation of large and small art projects including the *Aboriginal Memorial* and *Four Women: (I do belong) Double*. There were major developments in the space of Indigenous curation that are linked to the curatorial practice of Mundine and his fellow Indigenous curators of the time.

Mundine started his career in the arts in 1979 after accepting the position of art advisor at the Milingimbi community in the Crocodile Islands, and later the curator position at Bula'bula Arts in the Ramingining community, both in Arnhem Land (Mundine 2009). In the post-assimilation era, art development in remote communities was seen by the federal government as a means of facilitating both economic and cultural development. Art advisors in remote communities were on the whole non-Indigenous, and as an Indigenous person Mundine was seen by the government as especially appropriate to undertake the job (2017 pers. comm., 1 November). This perspective, however, reflects a failure of the government to acknowledge the complexity and diversity of Indigenous cultures, an issue that was, at the time, also reflected in the exhibition of Indigenous art, when the complexity and diversity of Indigenous culture was not fully appreciated.

Mundine was from Northern NSW, and although he was familiar with Arnhem Land art, culture and tradition, he had only limited direct experience with it, through literature available at that time, and his periodic engagement at Aboriginal Arts & Crafts Pty. Ltd., from 1976 to 1978 (2017 pers. comm., 1 November; Mundine 2007; Mundine 2009). Historically many remote communities have preferred engaging service providers who are not implicated in community and family politics and are 'neutral' in their dealings with the community, in that, the value of Mundine's Indigeneity was unrealised (McHugh 2018).

Mundine himself reflects that he was referred to as ‘Balanda’ by Yolngu people – a term that commonly refers to Australians with European ancestry and is often misunderstood as referring to a ‘white person’, but more accurately means ‘outsider’. Mundine recounts:

> When I first went to Arnhem Land to work I described myself as a Bandjalung Aboriginal person in my application for the job. As I walked by local people would ask each other: is he Balanda (European) or Yolngu (Aboriginal)? No, he’s Aboriginal, they would laugh. In such communities people assess your personal self; your identity as an individual human being is as important as anything else. It’s difficult to be an individual in today’s society and certainly difficult to be an artist. Identity is a much-discussed topic in the Australian contemporary art world (Mundine 2015, p. 20).

Mundine’s position as art advisor in an Indigenous community of which he had no direct knowledge or experience confirmed a stereotypical view of Indigenous peoples as all being the same rather than appreciating Indigenous Australia as multicultural.

Generalisations and assumptions about Indigenous people are prevalent in Western society. Although there is now more awareness of the multiple histories and geographical backgrounds of non-Western contemporary artists than there was before WWII, documenting these histories in the most detail possible assists in delivering to art audiences context about non-Western art (Enwezor 2017). Mundine (2017 pers. comm., 1 November) endorses this view in respect to Indigenous art and culture and argues that when speaking about Indigenous art there must be greater appreciation of the diversity of Indigenous cultures. It should be recognised that Indigenous people are spread over a large and geographically diverse island continent, colonised beginning in the south–east from 1788 and subsequently moved inward and northward. This colonisation impacted Indigenous groups differently as the colonial frontier expanded over the following centuries. The perception by the contemporary art world of Indigenous art and culture as homogenous reflects an ignorance about historical facts and simplifies Indigenous art to a single stylistic category with limited sources of inspiration. This perception is also reflected in the continued resistance of the contemporary art world to accept Indigenous art. By facilitating knowledge about the depth and breadth of Indigenous cultures, tangible histories are revealed, with the true colonial past of dispossession, displacement, and elimination clearly on display and open to critique (Mundine 2017, p. 14).

Engaging Indigenous curators who can facilitate and promote Indigenous perspectives and epistemologies in contemporary art exhibitions, while considering historical, cultural and sociological influences on Indigenous peoples the perspectives of the artist are accurately portrayed.

Mundine kept his position at Bula'bula Arts in Arnhem Land for sixteen years while simultaneously establishing connections with major NSW art institutions (Mundine 2019). In 1981 Mundine was appointed as an Indigenous curator at the AGNSW, collaborating with non-Indigenous curator Bernice Murphy. There, he made a significant early contribution to the categorisation of Indigenous art as 'art', rather than the 'art of others' or 'Tribal Art' (Art Gallery of New South Wales 1983; Free 1981). The AGNSW celebrated its role in the history of recognising Indigenous art as 'art' by promoting its late 1950s acquisition and display of Tiwi *tutini* poles and Arnhem Land barks. However, these *tutini* poles were collected by the non-Indigenous deputy director and gallery benefactor and were informed by a discourse of Tribal Art. Thus, while the gallery helped facilitate the transition of Indigenous art from the museum to the gallery, it was nevertheless via the racialised category of Tribal Art prominent in Europe and North America at the time. In his role at the AGNSW, Mundine provided input for the first major exhibition of Indigenous art at the main gallery: *Aboriginal Bark Paintings from the collection of the Art Gallery of NSW: North-East Arnhem Land*, which was a display of two hundred bark paintings from the gallery's early collecting period. This event was exceptional, and significant for the formation of a developing discourse on Indigenous art, because it was held in the main gallery instead of in the Tribal Art section, as was the norm for Indigenous art exhibitions at the time. Furthermore, up to that point in time there wasn't a dedicated curator for the Tribal Art category, and this was the first time that an Indigenous advisor was engaged to offer insight and advice about an Indigenous art collection. Of the exhibition, Mundine suggested that:

> The bark paintings are being transferred to felt-covered backboards to which they are attached by copper wire, to replace the nail system. The nails did not damage the works but they did give the impression of lack of respect for the works rather than the intended simplicity (Art Gallery of New South Wales 1983).

This exhibition was deemed by the European art curator at the time, Renee Free, as an "eye-opener to everyone, a major milestone" (Russ 2013, p. 170) and demonstrates how

Mundine's input assisted in raising awareness about the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous artists.

Despite Mundine's appointment as an Indigenous curator at the AGNSW in 1981, only in the 1990s did the expansion of institutional interest in Indigenous art resulted in increased employment of Indigenous curators. The AGNSW, followed by the MCA, became interested in expanding their Indigenous art collections by strengthening their connections with Indigenous communities (Croft 1994, Mendelssohn et al. 2018, Russ 2021). Mundine's contribution preceded this by almost a decade. By 1984 Mundine's informal position at AGNSW became official and was funded by the AGNSW (Art Gallery of New South Wales 1983). Through this role Mundine worked in remote communities in Arnhem Land with Indigenous artists, and twice a year he spent two weeks at the AGNSW (Art Gallery of New South Wales 1983). This position allowed him to maintain a strong relationship with the art's source, as desired by the gallery (McLean 2011, p. 57).

In 1992 Fiona Foley and Mundine curated a breakthrough exhibition of contemporary Indigenous art at the MCA, entitled *Tyerabarrbowaryaou: I shall never become a white man*. This event was the first of its kind in the museum and aimed to present contemporary voices and experiences in Aboriginal culture (Museum of Contemporary Art 2022, Croft 1994). In 1993 Arnott's Biscuits Limited donated 173 Bark Paintings to the MCA, including 42 works by acclaimed Western Arnhem Land artist Yirawala. This was the most comprehensive collection of the latter's works in one institution and its acquisition evoked the need for Indigenous connections and knowledge, to manage and exhibit this collection. Mundine established a relationship with the MCA in Sydney during his service at Ramingining and became the leading curator for Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander art at the MCA in 1996 and in 1997. This appointment is significant for Mundine's career, but in the context of this thesis it is even more significant for the MCA because the institution clearly capitalised on Mundine's connections in Arnhem Land to expand its collection.

In 1996 Mundine curated a blockbuster exhibition at the MCA titled *The Native Born: objects and representations from Ramingining, Arnhem Land*, which displayed sculptures, weavings, and other works commissioned from Bula' Bula Arts in 1984, when Mundine worked at that art centre (Owen 2008). Mundine was the driving force behind the success of the exhibition; despite this, support for other Indigenous curators did not immediately follow. *The Native*

Born emphasised an Indigenous approach towards the natural environment, instead of the traditional Western point of view (Neale 2014). The exhibition achieved Indigenous purposes, and in particular those of the Yolngu people from north-eastern Arnhem Land, through the showcasing of paintings and textiles; that is, both sharing their value of care for Country, and gaining economic benefit (Kleinert 2009). Mundine (2000, p. 85) explained that the exhibition demonstrated a cross-cultural connection, in that some of the canvases contained designs that are traditionally painted on sand. He pointed out that, in the same way that Indigenous people are exposed to Western culture, their artworks (in this case on Western art materials) expose the contemporary art world to Indigenous culture and become part of it. Although the institution engaged Mundine, it did not - at the time - recognise the absence of specialised skills and insight for Indigenous art. The lack of further appointments of Indigenous curators following *The Native Born*, suggests that the MCA was primarily interested in expanding its collection while maintaining Western perspectives for its presentation. This was a failing on behalf of the MCA that reflected a wider institutional lack of commitment to, and recognition of the value of Indigenous curators.

Curatorial appointments are always political to some degree, occurring in the context of "social and economic processes and institutions", appointments are culturally biased and controlled by those cultural forces in power (Fisher 2015, p. 805, Mundine 2009, p. 171). Australian art institutions engaged predominantly non-Indigenous curators to curate Indigenous art until the late 1990s, when the pressure to fill these positions with culturally fitting employees could not be ignored. This late change of policy is somewhat surprising, given earlier events such as the emergence of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act in 1991, which was driven by the federal parliament to encourage reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia. Additionally, in Prime Minister's Paul Keating historic speech in 1992, he recognised the injustices committed against Indigenous peoples and supported the reconciliation process. By the late 1990s, however, it became clear that Indigenous curators had connections, political power, and insight, such as Indigenous cultural protocol (for instance acknowledgment of Country and Elders, and knowledge about traditional ceremonies) which was indispensable to the exhibition of Indigenous art.

Mundine's role at the AGNSW was 'historic' – it took almost three decades to offer training opportunities and positions identified for Indigenous people (Gilchrist 2020b, p. 255). That said, following in Mundine's footsteps was a cohort of Indigenous curators working in

national institutions, with Sydney-based Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative having the first Indigenous curators from 1987. In the early 1990s Daphne Wallace and Margo Neale, associated with Boomalli, were engaged at the Yiribana gallery (AGNSW). After a decade of curating with Boomalli outside the mainstream, Indigenous curator Hetti Perkins obtained short contracts at the AGNSW until 1998, when she became the official full-time curator of Indigenous art. In the same year Perkin's Boomalli co-curator Brenda Croft obtained a similar position at the Art Gallery of Western Australia[12].

With the influential appointments of Mundine and Perkins in the 1990s, the contribution of Indigenous curators changed the face of Australian art. Indigenous curators had been expected to demonstrate connections between Indigenous art and categories that were then common in national Australian institutions such as Tribal Art. Before contemporary art became the norm, it was Indigenous curators (alongside several non-Indigenous authorities involved with the Indigenous art movement) who pushed for Indigenous art to be considered as a form of hybrid between Indigenous tradition and modern art. By occupying the field of contemporary art Indigenous artists obtained a foothold in the present and future of the art world, as seen in Mundine's *Aboriginal Memorial* installation.

The Aboriginal Memorial

In 1988 Mundine was praised for conceiving the *Aboriginal Memorial* installation (Fig. 5), permanently on display at the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) in Canberra. In the year of the Australian bicentenary, the installation was a nationally significant work of art and a memorial that honoured all Indigenous people who died while defending their territory since European invasion in 1788 (National Gallery of Australia 2022). This installation displayed two hundred painted *dupun* (hollow log coffins) by forty-three artists from Ramingining, signalling a historical account with rich Indigenous cultural manifestations of ceremony and mourning rituals (Gilchrist 2020a, p. 22).

Analysing the purpose and ideas behind the *Aboriginal Memorial* offers a deep understanding of Mundine's perspectives on the interrelations between the art world and Indigenous art. The work was initially displayed in a unique location in Sydney, the Pier 2/3, within one of the heritage listed Walsh Bay wharfs. Nick Waterlow, curator of the Biennale of Sydney for the

[12] Brenda Croft then famously went on in 2002 to become the curator of Indigenous art at the NGA. Only from the early 2000s have positions for Indigenous curators become widespread.

third time, was celebrated for selecting the exhibition site (Smith 2001, p. 636). Mundine has suggested that his preferred location, other than the Biennale, was the Australian War memorial in Canberra. At that time there was a significant challenge in exhibiting the installation in a major public institution in Australia, as no matter what would be exhibited, the formal, and nationalistic context of the venue could not be ignored. This discussion around the location for the installation is a recurring one when Indigenous art is at stake. Due to the significance and sacred character of certain sites to local Indigenous groups, Indigenous curators face a major challenge when selecting locations for Indigenous art exhibitions (Gilchrist 2020b, p. 257). Additionally, Indigenous art is often produced in an environment that is markedly different from its venues of presentation. Such a different environment may not appeal to the artists. In art projects Indigenous curators perform as advisors about culturally appropriate sites, and as mediators between institutions, artists and traditional owners when sites are negotiated.

Mundine recognised that it was not for him to demonstrate the reality of colonial violence alluded to in his exhibit; rather, his aim was to transmit to the public the 'burden of excruciating loss' (Gilchrist 2020b, p. 258). Rather than focusing on one specific event, with the memorial Mundine's installation of Yolngu art memorialised the enduring grief and sorrow that Indigenous people experience daily due to Australian colonial history (Mundine 2019; National Gallery of Australia 2018). Mundine combined an ideological-political, and an artistic motivation for the Memorial, through a strong aesthetic appeal. While some prominent Indigenous voices boycotted the event, Mundine found a way to respond to it (Smith 2001, p. 635). Mundine did not celebrate the event, but rather made a political statement through this art installation. Participation in the event meant that Indigenous people communicated with non-Indigenous Australia in an attempt to find common ground. This idea was reinforced by Smith (2001, p. 629), who argued that since the 1970s Indigenous art such as the *Aboriginal Memorial* led the Australian nation towards a cultural process of recognition of the first Peoples of Australia, alongside their history of oppression and disposition. To date, the NGA refers to the *Aboriginal Memorial* as a symbolic arts installation for their "Reconciliation Action Plan" (National Gallery of Australia 2022). These perspectives highlight that Indigenous curators can support the process of national reconciliation by introducing Indigenous views and concerns in national events and thereby encourage a national dialogue.

The Memorial was a unique installation because of its multiple functions: it commemorated the death of Indigenous people over two hundred years; it was also a work of art, depicting through sculpture and installation the artists' Country. Herewith, Mundine was attempting to educate the art world about, and ignite market interest in, hollow logs as an artistic medium (Smith 2001, p. 638). Mundine's input was crucial, bringing to the table cultural practice, a political voice, and a commercial intention. Lendon (2016, p. 1) highlights that this hybrid functionality of the Memorial was fleshed out over time, in its multiple presentations in 1988 at the Biennale, its re-design for the NGA foyer in 2010, its international iterations and its later presentation back at the NGA. Initially seen as ground-breaking contemporary art, the Memorial was later perceived as 'installation art', and through time recognised as a mode of intercultural exchange internationally. Despite these interpretative shifts, its socio-political message has prevailed.

Regional galleries

The previous two chapters have focused on international landmark exhibitions. However, in respect to Mundine's work in leading art institutions in major cities and local community-based galleries and museums, it is necessary to highlight that the latter are as significant if not more significant to Indigenous peoples and material culture (Clifford 2001, p. 477). Whereas national art galleries have larger expenditure budgets and operate to satisfy a mainstream audience according to popularity, regional galleries are smaller, servicing a predominantly local audience who often visits multiple times, and have relatively limited budgets (Mackenzie Steele & Huxley 2010, p. 22). These differences influence the motivations of regional galleries, which can provide opportunities to local and emerging artists and curators, with more flexible and broad frameworks for what and how to exhibit. At a global scale, large art events such as biennales or fairs in major capital cities are at the level of leading art institutions, compared with alternative regional events with a specialised focus. An example of this is the 1994 Havana Biennial's show *Tyerabarrbowaryaou II – I shall never become a white man,* the first global exhibition to be led by Indigenous curators, co-curated by Mundine with Fiona Foley. Although the Havana Biennial was distinguished from the dominating mainstream biennales such as Venice or São Paulo, it represented an influential event in the history of biennials, particularly during the 1980s and 1990s. *Tyerabarrbowaryaou II* enabled a second Indigenous curator (Fiona Foley) to participate in the curation of a major exhibition, and was also an international show for a prominent 'non-Western' biennial that provided exposure and experience to emerging artists and curators.

Small local institutions such as the Lismore Regional Gallery, NSW (discussed below), on the other hand can serve multiple functions. They offer an important social and cultural focus to the local public and provide services to foster community engagement, learning and understanding. They can generate the interest of locals in cultural knowledge that is becoming scarce or has been lost, and can function as a place for self-education and maintenance of culture and custom, which in turn contributes to finding local solutions for issues in the community (Fuller 1992, p. 361). Regional and smaller galleries also offer a platform for new Indigenous voices to be heard and can enhance cultural diversity in a particular region, where minority and majority culture members can interact and engage with each other. In these galleries, Indigenous engagement can promote respect for Indigenous people in the community and assist with avoiding stereotypical assumptions about their culture.

Traditionally, regional and smaller galleries have acquired less popular art mediums, such as photography and sculpture by emerging artists, to save costs and fit smaller acquisition budgets (Mendelssohn et al. 2018, p. 110). This however has provided new career opportunities for local artists, including professional development, expansion into untapped markets, and relationship building with professionals from the art sector (Fairley 2022). Furthermore, many Indigenous artists that reside in small communities are not concerned with becoming 'star-artists' and obtaining fame. In contrast, they experience a notion of pride when exhibitions that feature their artworks are presented in their localities and local media, accessible to their peers and families[13]. Finally, anthropologists and Indigenous staff who have visited small Indigenous communities have made equal contributions to national and local institutions, which in turn contributed to a developing relationship between these institution types (Pickering & Gordon 2011, p. 3). According to the *Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries* (Janke 2018) regional institutions can increase access to appropriately documented and provenanced cultural materials provided that Indigenous staff are employed in them.

[13] For instance, my anecdotal observation was that a group of Alice Springs-based artists from the Iltja Ntjarra Art Centre expressed greater enthusiasm painting a mural at the local shopping centre in 2014, than for the acquisition of their works in 2016 by the National Museum of Australia, despite the lower financial gain. The Alice Springs mural process generated for the group a local, familiar and supportive audience.

In 2017 Mundine curated the exhibition *Four Women: (I do belong) Double*, held in Lismore. This is an example of a significant political art exhibition held at a regional gallery. The show presented the work of eight current female Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists including Fiona Foley, Karla Dickens, Romaine Moreton, Teena McCarthy, Wart, Theresa Ritchie (in collaboration with Jacky Green and Seán Kerins) Nasim Nasr, and Carolyn Strachan (in collaboration with Alessandro Cavadini and the Borroloola community). Through this event, Mundine aimed to evoke awareness about the detrimental effect of colonisation and racism on Indigenous women and women of colour in terms of their exploitation, rape and disempowerment. It encompassed references from Indigenous language and ceremony, new and old photographs of family and Country, and political statements. Although he is a male, *Four Women* highlighted that Mundine as an Indigenous curator was well-placed to curate this gender-themed show due to his capacity to deliver pressing political messages while navigating Indigenous cultural protocol and practice.

As with any curatorial effort, the exhibitions that Mundine (2017 pers. comm., 1 November) curates comprise a twofold methodology of theoretical framework and aesthetic focus. Mundine views Indigenous art as 'contextual', responsive to its context; accordingly, a prominent focus is placed on the context and period in which the art has been produced. In his catalogue essay for *Four Women* Mundine sets the scene for his exhibition in the 1960s and 1970s. Key events in Australia, such as the 1967 referendum, the establishment of the Aboriginal medical service in 1971 and the Aboriginal legal service in 1970, as well as American civil rights and anti-Vietnam War activism, form the backdrop for the exhibition, which surveys the impact of these political events on the feminist movement among women of colour. The exhibition provided a platform for female artists who explore their past and present identity through art. For example, with her photograph *HHH #8* (2004), Fiona Foley portrayed a woman wearing a Ku Klux Klan dress and a black hood, the women's eyes are the only visible body part (Mundine 2017, pp. 14, 20, 30). This work provoked audiences to consider racism, and how prevalent white supremacy is in Australia. Wart, a subsequent female artist in the exhibition displays a series of oil paintings titled *Secret Phases of Fear* (#1-16, 2005), which portray roughly painted portraits of women of colour, whose facial expressions range from discomfort to horror (Mundine 2017, pp. 12, 58-61). Iranian photographer Nasim Nasr presented her *Forty Pages* (#2-5, 2016) series, where her photographed portrait is seen with forty border stamps on her face. Nasr aimed to relay her struggles and bureaucratic experience when trying to leave Iran for a safer country (Mundine

2017, p. 12, 44-47). As illustrated in these works, Mundine skilfully presented Indigenous and non-Indigenous art alongside each other, connecting the works through a thematic approach in a contemporary exhibition that explores current feminist issues.

The Director of the Lismore Regional Gallery, Brett Adlington, wrote in the catalogue for *Four Women* that Mundine devoted "a deep sensitivity to this exhibition" and that the event was "resounding with power and intelligence" (cited in Mundine 2017, p. 7). In this context, Mundine's sensitivity as a curator is related to his life experience as an Indigenous man who is attuned to issues of racism, inequality and social rights; sensitivity that is needed for the exhibition of Indigenous art. Mundine's achievement is related, first, to his choice of artists for the exhibition, artists with whom he had formed relationships, and developed an understanding of their practice and purpose in his past exhibitions. Second, like in the *Memorial*, where Mundine alluded to the lives of Indigenous people through two hundred hollow logs, he attributed personal human characteristics to the different "faces and figures" in *Four Women*, for instance, Nasim Nasr's photographs of self, and Wart's disturbing faces painted in oil were brought forward to explore the struggles faced by these women (Fraser in Mundine 2017, p. 20).

The analysis of *Four Women* undertaken in this section has demonstrated the breadth of Mundine's practice, its focus not only on Indigenous identity but also its intersection with other identities, in this instance femininity and the politics of feminism. *Four Women*, in addition, has served as a useful example of the way that regional galleries, such as Lismore's, comprise a significant site for Indigenous art and politics in Australia, although they are seldom afforded the recognition that they deserve in curatorial studies, which has tended to focus its attention on large-scale international exhibitions and events in major art institutions.

Curatorial issues

Having now analysed several of Mundine's key projects, historical as well as recent, this section steps back and approaches the issue of the status of Indigenous art in the contemporary art world from a different point of view. Rather than perceiving the inclusion of Indigenous art in the global field of contemporary art as a desirable scenario, it considers alternative arguments by Mundine and other Indigenous curators. For instance, Gilchrist and

Perkins argue that Indigenous art might benefit from remaining at a distance from other forms of contemporary art, or even to be kept separate from other forms of practice and discourse.

Mundine has reflected on his experience as a curator in relation to the issues of cultural homogenisation and commercialisation, both of which comprise significant points of concern for his practice (Mundine 2017, pers. comm., 1 November). Homogenisation results from the impacts of globalisation, whereby local economies connect globally and people adopt elements of other cultures (Wiegerling 2004). In this context, when exhibiting Indigenous art, Indigenous curators face several choices around identity, to highlight the distinctiveness of Indigenous artists, emphasise their universality, or both, or neither. In a globalised world, people and places are connected through migration, a shared (English) language, and a global economy. This has resulted in resistance in the form of strong national and social self-identification. However, despite a persisting cultural differentiation, society has become even more homogeneous (Fairley 2011; Wiegerling 2004). According to Mundine, however, homogenisation is dangerous: Indigenous artists cannot forget the histories of their people nor can they ignore their cultural heritage. Mundine (2010, p. 94) asserts that individuals and groups are attached to their past and traditions and must acknowledge them proudly. Conversely, he makes derogatory reference to the American post-war cultural vision of ‘The New Blacks’; educated First World citizens that have moved on from atrocities and discriminatory treatment of the past to a new and ‘modern’ world, to illustrate his own position. Mundine, in the context of Indigenous Australia, does not support this attitude, arguing that Indigenous people cannot overlook their history. This commitment is reflected in the critical examination of Indigenous identity and history in his work as a curator, writer, and activist.

In the Australian Indigenous context, Mundine (2010, p. 94) argues, the risk of homogenisation is to lose cultural traditions in a hegemonic Western culture. Indigenous curators operate within a competitive commercial environment, whereby economic pressures conflict with socio-political and cultural goals for Indigenous art exhibitions. Yet Mundine does not support a commodification and commercialisation of Indigenous art and rejects regrets values driven by individualism. He has asserted that:

> Western moral is dead. Westerners sell everything – food, land – to make money. They would grow cattle or sell land to foreigners. National values and national

> aspirations don't exist anymore, people don't know what this means. What matters is where the power is (Mundine 2017, pers. comm., 1 November).

In accordance with this viewpoint, Mundine's curatorial focus is not set on the visual aesthetics of the works and their appreciation in a fine art context – an aesthetic or formalist reading of Indigenous art – rather he advocates for recognising the surplus value of Indigenous art as social capital, emphasising that culture and tradition have no monetary value. In this context, according to Mundine, social capital refers to the value of Indigenous art to Indigenous people in the presentation of their own language, mythologies, heroes, music, dance and other cultural practices. Purposes for Indigenous art making other than financial exist: it is also created by Indigenous artists for their own people and younger generations to see, appreciate, and remember their cultural practice. Of course, Indigenous art also generates value for non-Indigenous people who obtain new knowledge and insight about a culture little known to them. Indigenous directed Art Centre Iltja Ntjarra has been outlining the purpose of their art making as to keep "the Hermannsburg watercolour tradition strong for future generations" as well as "to introduce the beautiful landscape of the Northern Territory to people in urban environments" (Holder & Mundine 2020; Rubuntja 2020). Also Desart Inc. the peak arts body for Central Australian Aboriginal Arts and Crafts centres, highlights that the programs Desart inc. deliver "support art centres on the principles of 'culture first' and industry best practice" (Desart Inc 2019). These approaches demonstrate that Indigenous artmaking supports the maintenance of cultural practices and the sharing of knowledge locally in Indigenous communities, as per Mundine's vision, as well as nationally with non-Indigenous audiences, alongside or even ahead of commercial gain.

That said, the social and cultural benefits to Indigenous communities that derive from the market for Indigenous art cannot be ignored. Mundine strategically utilises the pluralist framework of contemporary art to advance a cultural and political agenda. It is a productive contradiction or tension of contemporary art that it can accommodate within itself practices and discourses that seek to distance themselves from it. Although predominantly white, the field of contemporary art is sufficiently malleable to allow room for critiques of colonisation and patriarchy, as witnessed in Mundine's own work.

Indigenous curators such as Mundine offer alternative solutions to the status of Indigenous art in the contemporary art world. As described above, Mundine's work embodies a critique of

formalist contemporary art. Instead, he seeks to mobilise art as a vehicle for Indigenous cultural frameworks and knowledge systems within a formerly Western cultural framework. For him, the function of exhibiting Indigenous art within a contemporary art context is to provide a platform for Indigenous voices in the social, cultural, and political arena – and this as an antidote to what he regards as the dead morality of Western societies.

On the future of Indigenous curation and cultural institutions

Other voices on the issue of where Indigenous art fits within the contemporary art world are more explicit in calling for the separation of Indigenous cultural institutions from the contemporary art world. Indigenous Australian curator Stephen Gilchrist (2020b, pp. 252-263), for example, has argued along these lines that the control of Indigenous art should be handed over solely to Indigenous people. Within the historical narrative traced in this thesis, the logic of his argument is this: in the past Indigenous art was considered an anthropological relic; eventually, it was incorporated within the field of contemporary art. Having entrenched itself in contemporary art, Indigenous cultural producers (per Gilchrist) should seek to remove themselves from this sphere and establish a designated space for Indigenous art presentation, according to Indigenous frameworks, with the aim of empowering Indigenous voices. Controlled solely by Indigenous people, such institutions would resonate more with Indigenous people, and at the same time non-Indigenous art audiences would be offered innovative and insightful exhibitions.

Gilchrist (2020b, pp. 252-263) enumerates multiple reasons for such a shift towards Indigenous cultural institutions of this kind. First, to increase the value of Indigenous art to Indigenous people, the Indigenous art movement needs to shift its priorities by ceasing to adapt to the norms of contemporary art. Gilchrist argues for the prioritisation of the needs of Indigenous people, and for the discussion of Indigenous art in Indigenous terms, with respect to cultural practice, the past, and the present – and that this is more important than fitting into the Western contemporary art paradigm. While contemporary art thinks of itself as fluid and pluralist, according to Gilchrist (2020b, pp. 252-253) contemporary art maintains rigid criteria such as the 'refusal' to exhibit Indigenous cultural objects in the context of contemporary art. Treating Indigenous art with more flexibility and through multiple lenses would be more suitable to Indigenous art. Gilchrist maintains that Indigenous art is more than

just 'art', and the complexity of its context, creators and presentation is greater than what can be accommodated within contemporary art.

It is instructive to view Gilchrist's theory in the context of his curatorial practice. In 2016 Gilchrist curated the exhibition *Everywhen: The Eternal Present in Indigenous Art from Australia*, at the Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, USA. His aim was to 'Indigenise' or decolonise the museum, that is, to emphasise Indigenous culture in its own terms, while minimising Western frameworks or intervention. Gilchrist (Gilchrist & Skerritt 2016, p. 111) states that the exhibition explored:

> power and who gets to claim time, history, place, and cultural memory. The essential question for me is not why are we excluded from cultural texts and institutions, art histories, and formations of nationhood, but why are we part of these systems to begin with. The norm is a disruption for Indigenous people, so how can we disrupt this historical violence that has become normative? For me, one possible strategy is to return to the foundational narratives of place, people and practice and to weave those into the internal logic of the exhibition.

Gilchrist's *Everywhen* sought to disrupt conventional museum categorisation such as chronology and geography by replacing it with Indigenous political concerns and visual concepts. For example, he placed historical objects such as Collamons (by unknown artists) estimated to be from the period 1896–1931, in front of recent Papunya works including Walter Tjamlitjinpa, *Rainbow and Water Story*, 1972; Mick Namararri Tjapaltjarri, *Big Cave Dreaming with Ceremonial Object*, 1972; Ronnie Tjampitjinpa, *Two Women Dreaming*, 1990; and Arnhem Land artist Gunybi Ganambarr, *Buyku*, 2011. This curatorial ploy, similar to Christov-Bakargiev's curatorial approach discussed in Chapter 4, created a dialogue between old and new works, history and contemporaneity. Gilchrist's strategy of anachronism is widely used in contemporary art.

Curatorial practices such as Gilchrist's highlight the differences between Indigenous art and other types of contemporary art and, therefore, the need for dedicated spaces for Indigenous art. This has been characterised as a "third space" by Métis artist David Garneau (2014, p. 326) who suggest filling the gap in the contemporary art world, between Western and Indigenous cultures, with an alternative space. Garneau (2014, pp. 320, 326) refers to the

practice of Indigenous artists, who operate with knowledge from both their own, and mainstream cultures, as one that requires its own "Indigenous current". Whether or not Indigenous art is exhibited in separate spaces, the different needs and aspirations of Indigenous art and artists must be considered, so that Indigenous voices, desires and meaning are not lost within curatorial and institutional frameworks of contemporary art.

As argued by Mundine (2017 pers. comm., 1 November), another reason why Indigenous art might be separated from the contemporary art canon is the need to identify private funding (beyond the mining industry), which would facilitate opportunities such as the 1993 *Aratjara: art of the first Australians,* a touring Indigenous art exhibition first held in Dusseldorf, instigated and directed by Indigenous people (Mundine 2013b, p. 52). In the mid-1980s the Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Arts Board of the Australia Council (ATSIAB) consisted of Indigenous activists Gary Foley, Charles (Chicka) Dixon and artist Lin Onus, who obtained, with their successors in 1988, the power to direct and curate this event, and control the decision-making processes around it. The exhibition presented over one hundred artists and 150 artworks, and seventy Indigenous artists and artworkers travelled to Europe. An advisory committee of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, originally formed to inform the *Magiciens* exhibition in 1989 (see Chapter 3), was engaged to shape the conception of *Aratjara*. The exhibition was driven by a political agenda: to reject the bicentennial celebrations in Australia. The overseas location meant that the political message was relayed to a global audience instead of to an Australian one who continued to celebrate two hundred years of colonisation despite Indigenous resistance. Two million Deutschmarks were raised for the exhibition from German sources by Swiss-born Bernhard Lüthi, and the Lufthansa airline sponsored the freight of artworks to and from Germany. A privately funded exhibition, *Aratjara* empowered Aboriginal people to determine their own direction for the exhibition, and offers a relevant model for future exhibitions of Indigenous art staged outside the mainstream of contemporary art.

This model of Indigenous cultural self-governance offers a useful paradigm for organising exhibitions of Indigenous art in the terms of and according to Indigenous principles. Mundine (cited in Myers 2019, pp. 74-75) shares his personal experience as an Indigenous curator and recommends that Indigenous curators engage not only with formal art-institutional exhibitions but also with exhibitions outside of that environment, such as artist-run galleries, meetings where Indigenous people gather, and private exhibition spaces. This expanded

conception of exhibition planning and venue choice is worth taking seriously insofar as it could allow curators greater aesthetic autonomy. It could also distance Indigenous art from the tokenism of large-scale institutions, censorship, or pressure to align with fashion trends in the art world. That being said, cultural projects that are hosted by an established institution benefit from its existing budget, support, and staff's insights (Nakamura 2007, p. 161). They also obtain wide exposure, opportunities to network with others from the field, and longevity in the sense of archival resources.

A final argument for separating Indigenous art from contemporary art is motivated by the demand for cultural and political independence and agency. Australia possesses an abundance of arts institutions in each capital city, and regionally, but it lacks dedicated Indigenous art institutions in its jurisdiction. There has been a long-term nationwide debate about the need for a dedicated national Indigenous gallery. In 2011, Hetti Perkins said to *The Australian*: "I think that we (Indigenous people) need our own place, our own cultural institution" (Wilson 2011). Perkins (1993, p. 104) said that "a stand-alone [Indigenous art] institution would fill a much-needed gap in the nation's cultural landscape". Curator Okwui Enwezor – the focus of the next chapter – reinforces this claim when discussing the importance of dedicated institutions in the place the art is produced. He emphasised the need for high-calibre arts institutions in Africa, and at the same time encouraged Africans to manage this aspect themselves:

> Generally we're still dealing with a lack of institutions, or those that were set up before, but have not moved forward—or even institutions that are just holding onto their former selves. This is one of the things that I believe only Africans can solve, you know (Enwezor 2017).

Like the abundance of African art, and its diverse styles and presentation, Indigenous art too needs a dedicated art institution to represent it in its centre of production.

An example of an established institution such as the one envisioned for Indigenous art is the newly launched *First Americans Museum* (FAM) in Oklahoma City. The museum, which started operating in 2021, is a dedicated institution for the first American tribes and was funded collaboratively by the state of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City and the Chickasaw Nation (Billock 2021). It is set to offer a presentation platform to 39 local first American tribes, and

its design by architect Johnson Fain considers the spiritual importance to first native Americans of the circle and spiral forms. The NT government intends to establish a dedicated art institution for Indigenous art in Alice Springs, to be directed by Indigenous people. In 2017 it announced the construction of a major national Indigenous art gallery in Alice Springs starting in 2020. The Government promised an investment of 50 million dollars for this purpose. The NT government has also announced the establishment of a National cultural centre, investing 20 million dollars in this second establishment (Department of Tourism and Culture 2017). The Aboriginal organisation Nganampa Development Corporation has presented to the government a proposal for the establishment of the National cultural centre (Finnane 2017). Such institutions would facilitate the direction and curation of Indigenous art by Indigenous staff, thus bringing forward Indigenous frameworks and ideas. Their purpose and program may be dedicated to establishing specialised curatorial strategies for the exhibition of Indigenous art.

This section has outlined three arguments offered by various authors in favour of how and why Indigenous art should distance itself from contemporary art institutions: to decolonise the museum by replacing hackneyed Western value systems with ideas more relevant to Indigenous culture, to secure funding for projects that would allow Indigenous producers greater autonomy, and to establish a national Indigenous centre. It is worth reflecting further on whether these projects would truly constitute the departure of Indigenous art from the contemporary art world, or whether rather they would amount to an intervention occurring partially *within* and *in response to* contemporary art. Take for instance the third proposal: a national centre dedicated to Indigenous culture, one dedicated not only to the exhibition of Indigenous art, but also the promotion of Indigenous knowledge and preservation of Indigenous history. The need in Australia for such a centre, which would serve the needs of Indigenous people and form a valuable addition to the national cultural landscape, is doubtless long overdue. Yet rather than completely separate from non-Indigenous contemporary art spaces, a national Indigenous cultural centre of this kind is best understood as an autonomous institution that would at the same time interface and interact with cultural forms and institutions beyond itself, not least contemporary art, which offers a reserve of artistic, curatorial and discursive practices for interrogating identity, history and the archive – the sort of projects undertaken by Mundine and Gilchrist discussed above.

The same relationship of critical Indigenous curation and contemporary art pertains to Gilchrist's efforts to decolonise the museum, and the Western knowledge systems and history of colonisation engrained in it. Rather than a clean break from contemporary art, such activities – especially the curatorial strategy of anachronism initiated by Gilchrist in *Everywhen* – intersect with other forms of contemporary art, from the racialised institutional critique of Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992–93) to Christov-Bakargiev's defamiliarising presentation of present-day and ancient art in the 2008 Sydney Biennial. The latter exhibitions are only two points within a rich constellation of exhibitions and aesthetic strategies, but they illustrate how difficult it is to view efforts to Indigenise the museum as separate from the world of contemporary art. The same goes, finally, for issues surrounding Indigenous cultural producers' search for funding sources for exhibitions: in essence, the ethical issues pertaining to this activity are little different to those facing contemporary art venues, whether large or small. As such, funding models of contemporary art spaces offer useful – although certainly not the only – precedents for Indigenous exhibition-makers and creatives. In all three cases – the national Indigenous cultural centre, curatorial decolonisation of the museum, and the search for funding for Indigenous exhibitions – rather than conceiving of Indigenous art as a phenomenon external to contemporary art, it is beneficial to think of it as overlapping and indeed in certain respects indistinguishable from it.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the necessity of Indigenous curation in an institutionalised art environment. As contemporary art has become an inclusive space for diverse cultures, a need has emerged to present non-Western cultures in their own terms. In this respect, Indigenous curators offer an innovative perspective on art curation, and art audiences obtain a broadened understanding of Indigenous culture and tradition. Despite most Indigenous curators having an urban background different to the remote Indigenous art they represent, there are many ways they contribute to its exhibition in the contemporary art world. Their artist selection is based on personal and professional connections and relationships, their conceptual ideas are motivated by their cultural knowledge, and they have the ability to navigate institutional conventions. Indigenous curators in collaboration with non-Indigenous curators can create new definitions for art and a new art history. A central idea considered in this chapter was that art projects led by Indigenous curators add to the historical narrative missed by the Western art canon and are able to resist the standard categorisation and criteria imposed by it.

The lack of Indigenous curators up until the 1990s influenced the discourse on Indigenous art, which, in their absence, was based on Western underpinnings. Djon Mundine's important contribution to the field of Indigenous curation has been discussed in this chapter. Mundine excelled as an arts adviser in Arnhem Land, and later as a curator at the AGNSW and the MCA. The knowledge and expertise which he acquired while working with remote Indigenous artists in Arnhem Land gave him a significant advantage over other curators, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. His early experience highlights the generalisations that were made in Australian society about Indigenous culture, that is, that Indigenous peoples are mono- rather than multi-cultural. This narrow perspective limited the presentation of rich context and meaning for Indigenous art. Moreover, Mundine's pioneering curator's role at the AGNSW and MCA outlined insufficient employment opportunities for more Indigenous people in the arts, characterised by a lack of commitment from institutions at that time, who failed to recognise the need for Indigenous art collections to be managed utilising Indigenous views and knowledge. It is worth noting that Mundine successfully collaborated with several non-Indigenous curators such as Bernice Murphy and Nick Waterlow and later, in the 1990s, with Bernhard Lüthi for the exhibition *Aratjara*. The understanding that Indigenous art needed to be represented and handled by Indigenous curators, at times, in collaboration with non-Indigenous curators, developed over time.

The tension between tradition and contemporaneity has been singled out in this chapter, where Indigenous curators have successfully presented traditional Indigenous knowledge and culture in a contemporary art context such as in the exhibition *Four Women,* where identities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women are presented in one space highlighting current day struggles faced by women of colour. Through this show, other regional exhibitions, and major art projects such as the *Aboriginal Memorial* led by Mundine, it has been made clear that Indigenous curators progress national sovereignty. They do this by evoking discussion between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people around the history of colonisation and discrimination, by participating in events of national significance and presenting Indigenous views and concerns. Differently from the conventional curatorial focus to exhibit art in institutions and collections, Indigenous curators may have different priorities, for instance, curating and supporting the production of art for cultural maintenance or political messaging. This focus may also impact their art selection: values such as quality and innovation may have different interpretations and lead to a different set of priorities.

Indigenous curators including Mundine, Gilchrist and Perkins have sought alternative models to exhibit Indigenous art. Mundine envisions supporting freedom of creation through exhibition outside of public art institutions. *Aratjara* for example, an event lead by Indigenous people, and largely funded privately, offered freedom of expression, and insight into concerns that matter to Indigenous people, which in turn created value to non-Indigenous people in that they were presented with reliable information and new insight. To achieve autonomy, and create a space that celebrates Indigenous art in its own right, and according to its particular frameworks, Gilchrist and Perkins propose to establish a dedicated Institution for Indigenous art in Australia. They advocate for a separate, or third space that would operate outside of what they perceive as the Western art environment. While Indigenous-run institutions can enrich artistic and cultural discourse through its difference from non-Indigenous institutions; such institutions can also qualify or nuance existing understanding of the politics of contemporary art. Those three Indigenous perspectives combined allude to the absolute need to seek, listen to, and consider Indigenous voices when exhibiting Indigenous art. The following chapter will discuss how Nigerian-American curator Okwui Enwezor has put forward African voices in the contemporary art world.

Chapter 6 - International Curatorial Interpellations

Okwui Enwezor and Emily Kame Kngwarreye

The last chapter recognised a discussion of various scholars, activists and curators' proposal to establish a national centre for Indigenous culture. Nigerian born curator Okwui Enwezor, the primary focus of this chapter, made a similar argument: the foundation of African conceived and controlled institutions in the several hubs dedicated to African art in Africa – ones that exhibit art near the sites of its production – would enrich the artistic and cultural identity of the region. Despite the significant level of local artistic production and exhibition-making, he argued in 2017, there was a need for high calibre arts institutions that would transform Africa into a major art centre:

> Generally we're still dealing with a lack of institutions, or those that were set up before, but have not moved forward—or even institutions that are just holding onto their former selves. This is one of the things that I believe only Africans can solve, you know (Enwezor 2017).

Reminiscent of the Indigenous Australian voices such as Gilchrist and Perkins, Enwezor advocated the importance of dedicated institutions proximate to sites of cultural production. He emphasised the need for high calibre arts institutions in Africa founded and operated by African people (Stony Brook University Art History 2014). Yet the similarities between Enwezor's vision of African art institutions, and that of the Indigenous Australian cultural institution described by Gilchrist and Perkins, end there. This is because Enwezor envisaged African art institutions that would be cosmopolitan and multicultural, connected to, rather than distinct from art of other regions – and as part of, rather than distinct from, the contemporary art world. This last point is important: for Enwezor, contemporary art was not something to distance oneself from – rather, it was a field of institutions, practices and discourses to be transformed from within.

In search of curatorial models for presenting Indigenous Australian art, this chapter looks outside Australia and examines the life experience, theoretical writings, and curatorial rationale of Okwui Enwezor. The curator, who enjoyed a similar international status to Christov-Bakargiev, managed to bridge some cultural differences during his career, such as

historical and artistic perspectives, and aesthetic values, due to his personal experience with ethnic discrimination and inequality. Enwezor used the art arena as a stage for broadcasting powerful political messages – not least, racial equality and the importance of multiculturalism – to the wider society. Through examining Enwezor's novel curatorial and theoretical perspectives, this chapter seeks to analyse his impact on the format of the exhibition in terms of how culturally diverse art is presented and contextualised. As an African man, Enwezor worked to promote African art primarily, yet his experience is analysed here to draw conclusions about the potential for the recognition of Indigenous art.

In this chapter key moments in Enwezor's curatorial career will be explored alongside his critical writings. His key exhibitions over a twenty-year span beginning in the mid-1990s will be discussed, but the focus will be on *All the World's Futures*, the 2015 Venice Biennial, and *documenta11* (2002). These exhibitions are of special significance to the overarching argument of his thesis: the first, because *All the World's Futures* included the work of Indigenous Australian artist Emily Kame Kngwarreye, or 'Emily', as she is commonly referred to in the literature. Building on the analysis developed in earlier chapters, I critically evaluate Enwezor's curatorial treatment of Emily's work in Venice, paying particular attention to the curatorial and discursive framing of her work. My analysis will situate Emily's work within the promotion of cultural diversity and the critique of colonialism and environmental destruction that comprise two overarching themes of the exhibition, then contend that Enwezor's positioning of her work alongside the work of other women artists of colour opens new interpretative possibilities for her work. Following this, the chapter will turn its attention to *documenta11*, which although it didn't include Indigenous Australian art, is nonetheless relevant to consider in the context of my argument as an experimental model for exhibiting art produced outside international art centres. The chapter ends with a general remark about the usefulness of Enwezor's curatorial methodology to the international exhibition of Indigenous Australian art.

Enwezor's curatorial rationale

Enwezor may have spoken of the importance of founding an African arts institution, but the bulk of his curatorial activity did not take place there. The curation and theorisation of African art remained throughout his career a primary preoccupation, which he pursued as a member of the African diaspora. Enwezor's status as a Nigerian writer and theorist in the

American and later European art world shaped his globalist, cosmopolitan outlook, which saw him champion artists of the African diaspora whose sensibilities paralleled his own, and other contemporary art produced outside the North Atlantic region – including, as will be discussed below, Indigenous Australian art.

Enwezor knew that his life experience as a migrant to America reflected the peripheralism he promoted (McLean 2014c, p. 132, Green & Gardner 2016, p. 186). He was born into an affluent family in the city Calabar, in coastal southeastern Nigeria. During the Biafran civil war from 1967 to 1970 Enwezor's family was endangered and had to move multiple times. Enwezor migrated to New York in 1982 at the age of 19: "his move to America was about expanding his worldview and getting involved with the downtown Manhattan art scene he'd read about in magazines" (Turner 2014, p. 4). It was in New York – the city in which he lived and worked for twenty years – that he became fascinated by contemporary art and the lack of representation of African-American artists in its institutions. Enwezor was influenced by writers and curators including Jean-Hubert Martin (Butler & Enwezor 2009, p. 15) – a sign of the last influence of the French curator of *Magiciens*, discussed in Chapter 3, on future generations of innovative curators. One of the first curators to present in his exhibition a diversity of artists from around the world, Martin would exert an influence on Enwezor's curatorial endeavours. Another key influence was *Black Orpheus* magazine, co-founded by Ulli Beier, a German scholar who helped establish significant research on modern African art. *Black Orpheus* provided a platform for writings from across Africa and its diaspora (Pawłowska 2015, p. 227).

Enwezor wrote art critique, exhibition catalogue texts, and art historical articles, as for example his 1997 article *Reframing the black subject* published in the Third Text Journal. Here, Enwezor criticised the art world for representing black African artists as 'Others' while these artists' own voices ignored. In that same year Enwezor also wrote the catalogue text for the Second Johannesburg Biennale and focused on the international and 'nationless' art community. Additionally, Enwezor authored and co-authored several publications, in which he reviewed artworks of (African) artists, discussed curatorial practices, and confronted race politics. This included (amongst many other publications) *Steve McQueen* (1999) *Lorna Simpson* (2006), *Archive Fever* (2008) and *David Adjaye* (2015).

In the mid-1990s in New York Enwezor, and authors Chika Okeke-Agulu and Salah Hassan promoted and theorised contemporary African visual culture through *Nka: A Journal of Contemporary African Art*, which Enwezor continued to work with for most of his life. The first issue of *Nka* came out in 1994, which set out the central approach to which Enwezor adhered through his entire career. Enwezor argued that the Eurocentric character of the art world must change, and that postwar art history must be revisited. Recognition of the parallel modernities that have taken place in the world, in particular in Africa and in the West, will drive inclusivity in the art world (Green & Gardner 2016). Just prior to the publication of the first issue of *Nka*, the Guggenheim Museum in New York was scheduled to host an exhibition of African art; which when it was shown earlier in London obtained strong criticism due to its omission of contemporary African art. Enwezor accepted the position of co-curator for *In/Sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present* (1996), the exhibition that launched his curatorial career.

Before focusing on several exhibitions that offer compelling solutions to the challenge of exhibiting Indigenous art, it is worth surveying Enwezor's career more broadly to understand where they sit within his overall body of work. Following *In/Sight*, Enwezor was appointed as the artistic director for the Second Johannesburg Biennale in 1997; in 1998 he was nominated as the adjunct curator at the Art Institute of Chicago. In 2002 Enwezor was elected Art Director for *documenta11* in Kassel, Germany, the first *documenta* to have a non-European Director, and the first to include a major contingent of non-European artists. This event was one of the most important *documentas* in history; Enwezor, who already achieved significant recognition for African artists, also shifted the art world's attention from the North Atlantic Canon to other and broader geographies (Green & Gardner 2016, p. 222). Following Enwezor's tenure at Kassel he held different roles in art institutions around the world. He curated exhibitions in museums and biennales, including the 7th Gwangju Biennale in South Korea in 2008, and the Paris Triennale of Contemporary Art in 2012. The last directorial roles Enwezor held were at Haus der Kunst in Munich, Germany between 2011 and 2018, and at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015, *All the World's Futures*.

My analysis of Enwezor will begin with the exhibition *All the World's Futures*, focusing on its critique of globalisation and in particular its curatorial presentation of the work of Emily Kame Kngwarraye. Enwezor regarded contemporary art as a means to instigate change in society around issues such as the impact of colonialism, Western imperialism, capitalist

exploitation, and environmental destruction, and this political approach was nowhere more evident than in *All the World's Futures*. For instance, artworks by Abu Bakarr Mansaray, Terry Adkins, and Daniel Boyd were exhibited at the Arsenale as part of the central international exhibition. Mansaray's series of sketched designs on paper depicting war machines was positioned against Boyd's black and white series of canvases, depicting historic maps that helped Indigenous men navigate the ocean (Browning 2016). The space was dominated by sombre colours, with raw materials used by the artists, alluding to distress and unrest. Boyd's *Untitled* work was also represented in the Central Pavilion, Giardini, juxtaposed with Robert Smithson's *Dead Tree*. Both artworks pointed to the artists' relationships with their natural environment. The main theme for the event was a critique of globalisation in the 21st century, in which world-wide human and environmental tragedy appeared to be the new norm. The exhibition was framed as a stern look at global misery, addressing "a disordered world, of national conflicts, as well as territorial and geopolitical disfigurations" (Enwezor 2014). Enwezor was concerned by the profound inequalities perpetuated by globalisation, arguing that industry consolidation was necessary to reducing labour earnings imbalances and ensuring a more equal distribution of capital. Yet the multiplicity of futures suggested in the exhibition title also evoked the idea of futurity rather than apocalypse, implying that art had a role in imagining and experimenting with models that would shape these futures.

Diversity was key to Enwezor's selection criteria, as indicated by the multicultural and multiethnic selection of artists included in *All the World's Futures* (see Appendix 2, which surveys the participating artists' birth year, gender, country of origin, current living and working location, and art medium). Statistical analysis reveals that the exhibition showcased generational and gender diversity: 63 percent were born between 1960–1979 and were male artists, 37 percent were female artists. The artistic mediums included in the event, moreover, were varied and comprehensive, with a large focus on installation art (19 percent), accompanied by sculpture (14 percent), video (13 percent) photography (11 percent) and film (10 percent). To illustrate, Chinese artist Qiu Zhijie's (born 1969), showcased a room entailing 108 objects and images and twenty-eight lanterns, available as set design for performers during the biennale. The installation titled *JingLing Chronicle Theater Project* (2010-2015) was aesthetically intriguing, and reflected on a variety of social concerns in China including socio-economic disadvantage, crime, corruption and censorship (La Biennale di Venezia 2015d). Another example is the body of works by Nigerian artist Karo Akpokiere

(born 1981), also exhibited in the Arsenale, and titled *Zwischen Lagos und Berlin*, meaning 'between Lagos and Berlin'. Akpokiere exhibited fifty of his rich and busy comics drawings (gouache, pen and pencil on paper), to depict his difficulties of living between, and moving back and forth from two cities, Lagos and Berlin. Broadly, his work discussed the challenging migration issues faced by migrants such as himself, moving from Africa to Europe (Diallo 2015). These examples are in line with contemporary art trends indicating that mixed-media installation and video art are the most popular 21st century art forms (Smith 2009). Enwezor clearly did not want to risk the absence of any generation of artists or art form, omissions that would inevitably be questioned in an exhibition of this magnitude.

Enwezor's exhibition featured artists from a diversity of backgrounds, presenting Western art alongside non-Western artists, with the latter framed as avant-garde innovators rather than followers. The exhibition presented 140 artists from fifty-three countries (Smith 2015). The split between Western artists and non-Western artists was almost equal, with 51 percent comprising Western artists. There were higher number of artists from large centres in the West such as USA and France, but many smaller countries were still represented by at least one artist, for instance Lagos, Jordan, and Kenya. *All the World's Futures* featured the largest amount of artists from African descent ever exhibited in Venice and illustrated the increasing exposure of African artists in the global art world (Baskett 2016). The exhibition included twenty-one artists from African descent, seven of which permanently based in Africa, and eight who live in Africa in intervals. This compared to twenty-one American artists in total for the exhibition. This was doubtless an explicit focus of Enwezor's curatorial strategy: to mediate between the North Atlantic and the Global South, his focus on diversity indicative of a globalist ambition to encourage audiences to think in terms of rhizomatic flows of art world power rather than the centre-periphery logic of provincialism.

Emily's *Earth's Creation* at Enwezor's Venice Biennial

Enwezor was strategic about the artists he selected for his exhibitions aiming to enhance their broader social identity through this selection (ArtReview 2015). In 2014 he travelled to Australia for a week to select Australian artists for *All the World's Futures*, visiting the major public galleries in Melbourne and Sydney (Turner 2014). Seven artists were selected, including Daniel Boyd, Emily Floyd, Marco Fusinato, Newell Harry, Sonia Leber, and David

Chesworth. He also selected a large acrylic on canvas work, *Earth's Creation* (1994), by the late Central Australian artist Emily Kame Kngwarreye, on which this section will focus[14].

The work, exhibited at the Giardini Central Pavilion, is a large four-panel artwork (275 cm × 632 cm) painted with vivid acrylic colours to mimic the colours in the natural environment surrounding Emily's birthplace. The work encompasses "everything" that supports Emily's values, that is, life, Country and culture (Neale 2008, p. 123). Emily used blue, green, red and yellow dots, and paint spatters to depict her Country in a special period of rain and new natural growth (La Biennale di Venezia 2015b). The work is rich with movement, and although Emily's expressive abstractionism eschews traditional Aboriginal iconography, the work was "unquestionably guided by the ancestral knowledge of her homeland" (La Biennale di Venezia 2015b).

Before exploring Enwezor's curation of Emily further, some biographical background on the artist is necessary. Emily started painting in the late 1970s and painted in Anmatyerre Country (the area on which the Utopia community is located) in the Central Desert until her death on September 2nd 1996 (Fisher 2016; Neale 2008). Emily's cultural tradition was transferred to her by her father, whose knowledge had previously been taught by his own father. Emily's name, Kame, alludes to the Yam seeds and is more than a personal name: her Dreaming, too, was Kame (yam), and Emily often presented the Yam seeds in her paintings. She painted stories from the spiritual world she belonged to, which included in her tradition

[14] It is worth noting that Emily's work had already been exhibited at the Venice Biennale almost two decades earlier. In *Fluent* (1997), curated by Indigenous curators Hetti Perkins and Brenda Croft as well as Victoria Lynn (Fisher 2015), the work of three Indigenous women artists were presented side by side in the Australian Pavilion. Eight untitled and unstretched paintings by Emily from 1994 to 1995 were exhibited on this occasion (National Museum of Australia 2018). Emily was the only artist of the three – the second and third were Yvonne Koolmatrie, a fibre artist, and Judy Watson – who had not obtained formal arts education. Differently from Enwezor, who drew attention to Emily's biography and specific cultural context, the curatorial team for *Fluent* did not accentuate a geographical distinction between the three artists nor have they used the typical stereotype for remote artists: "sphere of timeless nature,“ or the stereotype for urban artists: "modernity, progress and cultural time" (Fisher 2015, p. 803). Sibyl Fisher (2015) explained that currently it is not common to make a distinction between 'urban' and 'remote' artists. The curators' message was ideological, they pointed out that Indigenous heritage and cultural values continue to expand (National Museum of Australia 2018). Perkins (1997, p. 9) suggested alternative means to talk about art in a universal language when she described in the catalogue the meaning of Emily's striped artwork as "a word in a language we can all understand". While both the curators for *Fluent,* and Enwezor aimed at placing Emily in the context of other contemporary artists, Enwezor positioned Emily's work in an international context. In the same way, as seen in the previous chapter, Mundine connected Indigenous women to a broader context of marginalised women of colour. In *Fluent*, however, Emily's work was positioned alongside other contemporary Indigenous artists alone, which resulted in average reviews about this Australian showcase as a whole, claiming that it was conservative and modest (National Museum of Australia 2018).

the Dreaming of: yum, sacred grasses, bush potato, wild orange, and emu. Emily explained about her work that she painted the:

> whole lot, that's whole lot, Awelye (my Dreaming), Arlatyeye (pencil yam), Arkerrthe; (mountain devil lizard), Ntange (grass seed), Tingu (dreamtime pup), Ankerre (emu), Intekwe (favourite food of emus, a small plant), Atnwerle (green bean), and Kame (yam seed). That's what I paint, whole lot (Emily Kame Kngwarreye 2008).

In the catalogue book *Utopia: the Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye*, Indigenous curator and author Margo Neale (2008) describes Emily's culture and Dreaming in order to give a sense of the artist's drives and motivations. Neale depicts the relationship between Emily's cultural tradition and her paintings, explaining that Emily's signature nose piercing was a tribute to the ancestor Alhalkere, the name of a rock with a hole standing on that Country. Neale (2008, p. 224) explains: "I do not refer to Alhalkere as a body of knowledge possessed by the artist; instead I describe these images and her lived experience and expression of being part of Alhalkere". Emily engaged with Alhalkere, her subject matter, in many ways outside of painting: in dance, song, ceremony, sand drawings, and while collecting bush foods. She had a deep connection with her land, which was central to her spiritual identity. Neale's analysis emphasised the artist's dependency on her Country beyond her role as a storyteller: Alhalkere and Emily are not two separate things, Neale argues, they are one entity, and art was a tool for Emily to express the extension or manifestation of herself in a tangible manner.

It is worth considering how aspects of Emily's art and biography align with Enwezor's curatorial prioritisation of diversity. In 1988, in Utopia, a remote community in Central Australia, Emily had begun to produce paintings that resembled modernist art. Until the late 1980s Indigenous artists were predominantly male artists associated with the Papunya movement, Arnhem Land bark painters, or from the Kimberley region, but Emily was the first Indigenous woman to exhibit her works in a solo show in 1990, in the then new commercial gallery *Utopia art Sydney* (Neale 2008, pp. 258-259). Emily worked on Country and used ground and body paint designs familiar to her from traditional ceremonies as inspiration for her paintings. Nonetheless, Emily was praised for creating her work in

abstraction, beyond the stereotypical Indigenous art iconography (La Biennale di Venezia 2015b).

Enwezor presumably selected Emily because of the combination of her socio-cultural circumstances and messaging, as well as her modernist pictorial sensibility – even though she did not define herself in terms of the latter. Her status as an Indigenous woman from a remote community meant that her paintings could be interpreted within critical frameworks promoted in Enwezor's exhibition: the critiques of capitalism, colonialism, and environmental destruction. As an Indigenous woman, Emily was violently subjected to the European-dominated capitalist value system which exercised terror and genocide on Indigenous Australians to expropriate their resources and land. Her background was linked to strong cultural traditions including Anmatyerre law, traditional spiritual growth, and resource management related to her Alhalkere Country. Working most of her life on cattle stations she was exploited by colonisers as part of a 'cheap' Aboriginal labour force; in the 1930s and 1940s, for example, like most Aboriginal pastoral workers in the Northern Territory, she was paid simply in rations when working at Ungoola, then known as Bushy Park Station (National Gallery of Australia 2020).

In stark contrast to the *Magiciens* exhibition explored earlier in this thesis, where there was a total lack of contextualising information about the participating Indigenous artists, in *All the World's Futures* Emily's life was acknowledged as "raw and challenging". After the age of ten, colonial intervention was felt throughout her life, and Emily as a young woman was forced to work at a cattle station on her Country, assisting with livestock (Enwezor 2015, p. 149). It was important for Enwezor, as part of his curatorial strategy, to recognise the political messaging associated with Emily's biographical information.

Enwezor's curatorial focus was on current socio-political issues, and Emily's biography – and by extension her art – bore witness to the continuation of traditional cultural practices as well as the imprint of European colonialism on Australia. Enwezor's presentation of Emily's work is noteworthy for several reasons: its spatial prominence within the space, its positioning of her work alongside two other female artists of colour, and the alignment of Emily's work within the narrative articulated by the exhibition as a whole.

Regarding the first point, Emily's work occupied a prominent position in the space – this framed Emily's work as generative, a point of origin, echoing at the level of curation the subject matter of the painting. The way in which Emily and her work were contextualised was based on her belonging to the Anmatyerr people and their culture, and the history of Aboriginal people in Australia (Enwezor 2015, p. 149). Her unique socio-cultural circumstances were emphasised in writing about her work. This focus was different to information about other participating artists, where references to the artists' background such as their higher education degrees and literary inspirations were highlighted.

The second reason that Enwezor's curation of Emily's work is noteworthy, was the manner in which it located her canvas alongside the work of two other women artists, Ellen Gallagher (born in Providence, USA) and Huma Bhabha (born in Karachi, Pakistan) (Fig. 6), both women of colour with mixed cultural backgrounds. The innovation in Enwezor's curation in Venice was that rather than selecting Western artists who thematise racism and injustice second-hand, he selected artists "representing their own histories and dilemmas" (Engberg 2015, p. 61). Enwezor's grouping of Emily's work with Gallagher and Bhaba invites analysis of the links between them. One of these links is the notion of disorder and displacement, themes which describe "a disordered world, of national conflicts, as well as territorial and geopolitical disfigurations", which have inspired these artists to create their art (Enwezor 2014).

Emily and Gallagher's works are also linked by their connection to Country and mythological inspirations. For example, Emily's work is inspired by the story of "Yam Dreaming, a story about the growth pattern of a wild yam that is central to Kngwarreye's development as an artist" (La Biennale di Venezia 2015b). Gallagher's work was also inspired by a spiritual connection to her culture and land, and exploring the traditions of the Caribbean islands across its landscape, wildlife and mythologies such as to "Drexciya, a mythical black Atlantis at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean" (La Biennale di Venezia 2015a).

A point of difference between the artists is that Gallagher's work is also influenced by written texts and their accompanying published images, of authors and poets such as Edouard Glissant, Aimé Césaire, and Philip Wheatley (Enwezor 2015, p 571). Emily's involvement in art, by contrast, started with her participation in a Women's art development project which focused on printing batiks, depicting her native country using Western art materials, through

“bold simplicity of the new way of re-interpreting traditional mark-making, with its apparent absence of information” (Neale 2008, p. 20). Her failing eyesight influenced her artistic practice; Emily testified that a major reason for moving on from Batik works to acrylic on canvas in 1988 was her deteriorating vision (Green 2005, p. 185). From the outset Emily adopted what is by Western standards an unconventional approach to art, and an unconventional art studio. Like her peers, she did not use a table or an easel to hold her paintings; she sat crossed legged on the ground, using a variety of sticks and makeshift objects which she found in her surroundings, as opposed to commercial paintbrushes. Emily did not use conventional colour pallets; instead she used old food containers to hold her acrylic paints. Finally, Emily did not have art magazines or museums in her surroundings, she drew inspiration from her bush camp, environment and Country (Neale 2008, p. 217).

The connection between Emily and Bhaba, the other artist also shown in the 2015 Giardini, lies in the combination in their work of traditional modes of mimetic depiction and their oblique imaging of the catastrophic events of modernity. The increasing success of Emily’s art in the late 20th century can be partly attributed to her modernist style, which resonated with art world audiences (Neale 2008, p. 251). Emily’s subject matter was always based on her surroundings; she constantly depicted her Country: ‘Alhalkere’. Even if her work resembled non-representational modernist works, her paintings retain this reference to her local environment. Comparably, Bhabha’s distinctive artistic expression, which appears to resemble modernist assemblage, spiritual sculptures, or mechanical debris, is largely known as ‘post-apocalyptic’, resulting in a visual of an imagined future filled with wreckage (La Biennale di Venezia 2015c). Similar to Emily, Bhabha’s work was also inspired by her (urban) environment, the magnificent scenery of Hudson Valley, and the recycled materials she had collected there.

Despite the links between the three women artists identified above, *Art Monthly* magazine (Engberg 2015, p. 63) criticised the curatorial decision-making around the hanging of Emily’s painting, arguing that there was no evident curatorial link between the three works except that they were all created by women of colour – a critique, it will be recalled, not unlike that levelled at Christov-Bakargiev’s *Revolutions*. Engberg’s critique is understandable to an extent, because offering an exhibition platform to an artist based on a broad generalisation can be perceived as superficial or racist (Immigration Museum 2012, p. 42).

For instance, in a symposium hosted by the Immigration Museum in Victoria a challenge noted for the museum was the act of ‘highlighting difference’, that is, grouping people together that are not from the ‘dominant culture’ (Immigration Museum 2012, pp. 55-56). This practice evoked in some young people alienation from cultures other than one owns. Engberg’s criticism was overstated for the reasons stated above. That said, Enwezor’s curatorial rationale might have been more explicit in demonstrating the connection between the artists, beyond their grouping according to their gender, cultural, and political backgrounds. In order to forestall criticisms such as Engberg’s, greater attention might have been paid to the network of formal connections between the three artists’ work.

Despite this shortcoming, the hanging and discursive framing of Emily’s work in Enwezor’s show avoided many of the pitfalls of Martin and Christov-Bakargiev’s approach to showing Indigenous art. While *Magiciens* did not offer any context at all about the participating Indigenous artists, in the catalogue for *Revolutions* the context and interpretation for Doreen Reid Nakamarra’s work were elaborated by a white man. In *All the World’s Futures*, on the other hand, Emily’s work was positioned alongside women with marginalised backgrounds (in contrast to Christov-Bakargiev’s design in *Revolutions*, which positioned Reid’s work against artworks from a Western tradition, and in so doing sought to legitimise the work as ‘contemporary art’). In Enwezor’s exhibition, biographical information was provided about Emily’s background, her culture, and the connection between her work and Indigenous Australian culture more generally. Emily’s transition from painting in cultural ceremonies to a fully-fledged fine art career was also covered in the accompanying literature, thus connecting her artistic trajectory to a wider story about the history of Indigenous art in Australia:

> Emily Kame Kngwarreye was an Australian artist who brought the traditions of her Aboriginal ancestry to an international audience. Because she grew up in a remote desert area of Australia known as Utopia, some 230 kilometers (143 miles) northeast of Alice Springs, she was almost ten years old before she first saw a white man or horses (Enwezor 2015, p. 149).

The third reason that Enwezor’s curation of Emily’s work was notable, is that his historical framing of Emily’s artwork resonated with the argument of the exhibition as a whole. The catalogue text emphasised Emily’s biography and background alongside her successes in the

art world (Enwezor 2015, p. 149). The text alludes to the authenticity and quality in Emily's work. Although as mentioned her art was not always connected to stories from the Ancestral Times, Emily's art is thoroughly entangled with her cultural context. Emily's work was more than peripheral or incidental to Enwezor's vision, her visualisation of a Creation story fortuitously resonated with Enwezor's call for art to engage with its futurity. Enwezor's curation of Emily's painting, furthermore, encourages a globalist reading of Emily's work rather than a Euro-American modernist reading. Emily's work was connected to other women artists of colour, all have unique inspiration sources and styles, which are not necessarily modernist. Enwezor's curatorial approach contrasts with that of Martin and Christov-Bakargiev in that he highlights the context and sometime extreme circumstances of the artists rather than hiding it as in *Magiciens* or as adapting it as in *Revolutions.* The setting up of networks of influence and cross-cultural fertilisation was central to Enwezor's curatorial agenda, which was exemplified in his handling of Emily's work and indeed in the formal characteristics of the latter as well.

Critiques of *All the World's Futures*

My analysis of Enwezor's curatorial treatment of Emily's work gives insight into the exhibition as a whole, which was not without its critics. A recurring critique of *All the World's Futures* was that Enwezor was more concerned about the alarming state of the world than artistic proficiency. Jeppesen (2015, p. 106), for example, argued that various areas of the exhibition were cluttered with artworks of dubious quality. This indicates that the curatorial imposition of a socio-political focus can limit artists' creativity and aesthetic experimentation because, just like the fashion trends to which contemporary art is beholden, a blinkered focus on politics necessarily confines art to a single acceptable (political) format. Too often, a single-minded prioritisation on social or political results in the instrumentalisation of art, which instead of fostering a spirit of unification and community gives rise to an empty spectacle of politics. In a similar vein, Tromble (2016, p. 80) criticised *All the World's Futures* for developing an overly pessimistic and unconstructive critique of contemporary life.

As for the audience response to the 56th Biennale, some visitors found the exhibition off-putting because of the disheartening subjects discussed; others found it uplifting due to its depth and meaningful discussion of social, cultural, and political issues beyond the realm of

art (Tromble 2016, p. 74). Yablonsky (2015) criticised the context within which the curatorial message was delivered, making the point that it is challenging to concentrate on the 'misery of the world' when the context of the exhibition (and others) is the opulent heart of the European art world, one of parties, fine dining, and luxury. Engberg (2015, p. 61) even criticised Enwezor's performed reading of *Das Kapital*, dismissing the installation as 'decorative' and that it handled a meaningful text lightheartedly through song and reading: an entertaining 'cocktail party' rendition of a grave text. This type of criticism is recurring but will remain in place so long as art, irrespective of its social or political agenda, simultaneously functions as large-scale public entertainment.

Were these critical and audience responses to the Biennial justified? In his own defense, Enwezor (2014) asserted that his exhibitions built on the 'appearance of things' to describe the current state of the world. The role of contemporary art in Enwezor's *All the World's Futures* was to unveil the disasters of the past. A work of art, he argued, is beyond what one merely sees: it allows for a profound critical reinterpretation of the existing state of things (Enwezor 2014). *All the World's Futures* was inspired by German philosopher Walter Benjamin's 1940 essay, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', which argues that although there is an attempt to reconcile the past, modern destruction prevents any such reconciliation and instead, there is more disaster (Benjamin 1989). In fact, Enwezor's inclusion in the exhibition of Swiss artist's Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920) was a further allusion to Benjamin, whose essay begins with a discussion of this work. In turn, *Angelus Novus* is highlighted in the biennale catalogue to mark the mood of the exhibition, offering an image of the present in which progress and development have led to suffering. In Klee's work, this is depicted as an angel that is fixated on something that he is about to move away from. His mouth is wide, and his wings are outstretched, he is about to walk away from the present.

What Enwezor's various critics underestimated was not merely how the exhibition perpetuated Enwezor's curatorial promotion of cultural diversity but his innovative approach to Indigenous art, as manifest in his presentation of Emily's *Earth's Creation*. The analysis conducted above of Enwezor's curation of Emily's canvas into the Venice Biennale demonstrates new interpretative possibilities for reading not only her work, but the work of artists operating on cultural peripheries more broadly. *All the World's Futures* occasioned discussion about global issues and problems that are removed from specialist art discourse. His messaging to spectators was strongly focused on the suffering in the world, and despite

the grimness of this theme, it was presented in a popular international art event, which did not isolate any country or culture, but brought them together. The concerns and life circumstances of the artists he selected were highlighted as a primary focus across the exhibition. My analysis of Emily's work has demonstrated that she was exhibited as a contemporary artist, and despite the aesthetic resemblance of her work to the modernist tradition, curators such as Enwezor have successfully presented her unique cultural background and devastating history through their particular curatorial approach. Although Emily's work was not exhibited alongside other Australian Indigenous artists, it was exhibited alongside female artists of colour in such a way that called for attention to their stories. As such, the integrity of Emily's work was evident in the exhibition, reminding the audience about her Indigenous culture and desert Country.

The centres of contemporary art

Not only is Indigenous art marginalised, but Australia in general has suffered from its respective distance from other Western countries. Opportunities for Indigenous artists remain limited due to cultural but also geographical distance from the centre of art. But, as will be recalled from the theoretical framework in Chapter 2, Enwezor argued that the situation changed in post WWII climate. If at that time the centre was doubtless Europe and the USA, the global dispersal of art world power towards the end of the century due to factors including the destruction after the war, migration, and the expansion of urban centres increased the exposure and recognition of non-Western and Indigenous art. In the article 'Modernity and postcolonial ambivalence', Enwezor (2010) presents a critical question: where is the centre – or where are the centres – of contemporary art? He describes the task at hand as "to discover the current habitations of contemporary practice" (Enwezor 2010, p. 601). This enquiry entails three main subsidiary questions: Where is the physical and geographical centre of contemporary art? Has world power shifted as a result of economic change in South East Asia? And does the scale of arts institutions have influence on the centre of contemporary art?

Against the idea that contemporary art resides in a single or even several defined locations, Enwezor asserted that there are "multifocal, multilocal, heterotemporal, and dispersed structures around which contemporary art is often organized and convened" (Enwezor 2011, p. 601). This methodology frames Australia as a significant cultural centre and with that

highlights Indigenous art as a legitimate and popular movement within contemporary art. Further advantaging Australia in Enwezor's outlook was his identification of a general shift in art world power towards East Asia: recent inputs from East Asia, he argued, are pivotal to the networks of contemporary art. Asian countries such as China and South Korea used to export their art and ideas to the West, but the West is now importing their influence back to their own centres. Both these countries achieved financial success due to major export industries. They have exported industrialised models from the West and integrated them into operational models from their own countries, which resulted in a prosperous economy. This development is still encouraging not only due to the geographical proximity of Australia to East Asia, but it also demonstrates that other regions and countries outside the Euro-American region have the possibility to develop into a major art centre, and this potentially includes Australia.

Although the contemporary art world likes to think of itself as evaluating art according to its quality first and foremost, the reality is that perceptions of art are biased and are influenced by the nationality of the artist or their popularity. Velthuis (2013) has demonstrated that contemporary art – whether African or Australian – in the West is largely assessed according to a familiarity bias, that is, agents rely on and trust information sources with which they are familiar. In respect to Indigenous art, there is either little to no awareness about it, or it is based on stereotypes and stigmas such as the 'exotic' and 'primitive' (see Chapter 2). The category of the 'primitive' is also linked to its perceived strangeness or exoticism, attributes that are also associated with basicness, crudeness, and undesirability. Although these ongoing stereotypes spark the interest of foreign audiences, they also limit the recognition of Indigenous art in the contemporary art world.

Enwezor was confronted with similar issues when representing African art and found that the most effective method to change such attitudes is by educating the public not only about the concept of diversity in general, but about the particular African cultures and contexts from which the art originated. The present study of Indigenous art curation can learn from the specific ways in which Enwezor curated African art. He argued against the exoticisation of culture in the contemporary art world, which he believed obstructed genuine cultural recognition and aesthetic appreciation. To combat the art world's obliviousness about Africa – its politics, society, and art – throughout his career Enwezor raised awareness about African

issues such as the cultural complexity of the continent and African in the diaspora, and promoted scholarship attentive to the complexity of African art. Enwezor (2017) argued that:

> What we must really do, when we talk about Africa, is be specific. We must speak about Africa with a great sense of its complexity. This premise is what I would say lays the grounds for my specific form of intellectual and curatorial militancy. Because, when we discuss African production only in the context of Western audiences' recognition, it propagates false narratives.

The goal of communicating knowledge about Africa to art audiences, Enwezor argued, is to develop an understanding that Africa exists as its own cultural entity, with complex issues and cultural underpinnings. To this end, Enwezor encouraged collaborations in curatorial teams and amongst artists, engaging fellow curators and experts from diverse disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and science to work alongside him on his projects. For instance, in the 2012 French triennial titled *Intense Proximity: An Anthology of the Near and the Far* held at the acclaimed French art institution Palais de Tokyo, Enwezor collaborated with smaller art centres in France, including Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers and Le Crédac and Bétonsalon, to communicate the event to a wider audience (Gonzalez & Julliard 2012, p. 3). Additionally, for *Intense Proximity,* Enwezor collaborated with four associate curators, Mélanie Bouteloup, Abdellah Karroum, Émilie Renard and Claire Staebler. Enwezor also invited theorists and intellectuals to participate in the guest program who helped flashing out the conceptual frameworks for the event (Enwezor cited in Khazam 2012).

To promote African artists, he opened his practice up to a wide circle of artists and art world practitioners who relate to African art or have lived in an African country, but who do not necessarily hold African heritage. This is a significant point of divergence between Enwezor's outlook and that of Gilchrist, for example, who as discussed in the previous chapter argued that Australian Indigenous art should be administered primarily by Indigenous Australians. Enwezor, on the other hand, was focused on the infusion of Africa with outside cultures, its cross-fertilisation rather than separation and exclusion.

To understand and to teach cultural diversity, Enwezor argued that the art world might engage curators from diverse backgrounds along with non-Europeans (Stony Brook University Art History 2014). Enwezor's first influential exhibition on African photography,

In/Sight (1996), was developed in collaboration with others, such as Spanish curator Octavio Zaya and French curator Danielle Tilkin, demonstrating his desire from the outset to work in a multicultural and multi-skilled environment, which provided a rich and diverse knowledge base. Later in his career this approach remained fundamental to his ambition to produce powerful exhibitions that would simultaneously inform his audiences. For *documenta11* (2002) Enwezor again collaborated with artists and curators from different nationalities, incorporating broad areas of expertise, and also led scholars, experts, artists and economists to locations outside of the West to meet artists in their home countries, in lieu of bringing artists to the Euro-American art centres (Green & Gardner 2016, p. 202).

Enwezor's *documenta11* achieved this goal through a geographical decentralisation of the exhibition. Although the exhibition did not include Indigenous Australian art, this strategy of geographical decentralisation offers an experimental model for how such art might be curated in the future. Rather than bringing the world to Kassel, Enwezor's 2002 *documenta11* took the festival to the world, by including four physical locations in Africa: Lagos, Freetown, Johannesburg and Kinshasa; in Germany, there was also a location out of town in a poor workers' suburb (Green & Gardner 2016, p. 202). Connecting the North Atlantic to the global environment through the most iconic and influential contemporary art event of all with a focus on artists from Africa was Enwezor's mission. As he later asserted, "My goal was to break out of conceptual limitations: the assumption that Africa is sub-Saharan, is ethnic, and is a homogenous cultural sphere. I included non-Africans in the show" (Butler & Enwezor 2009, p.16). Through *documenta11*, Enwezor attempted to "redefine the existing canon of contemporary art and redefining audiences' engagement with art itself as something entangled with politics and geography" (Green & Gardner 2016, p. 202) This decentralisation of the contemporary art world broadened the reach, opportunities and participation of artists and audiences from around the world, and assisted in creating a more inclusive environment.

Thus Enwezor defined art which originates outside large art centres as *off-centred* art (Anatsui & Enwezor 2011, p. 99), arguing that art of this kind often reflects the influence of, and connection to, the artist's own place and culture (Anatsui & Enwezor 2011). Nonetheless, Enwezor was a great diplomat: he understood that to achieve recognition of African art in the contemporary art world realistic strategisation was necessary – an exhibition of only non-Western artists would not be possible, he knew, because "German auditors, public, and public funds would not support only non-Western art" (Green & Gardner 2016, p. 200). In future

exhibitions geographic dispersion became conventional; in 2015 Enwezor's Venice Biennale, for instance, included the work of artists from 136 countries, which wasn't displayed according to the artists' country of origin but rather according to 'filters', which were parameters set by the curator to group concepts and mediums together. The first filter encompassed the theme of 'incomplete manifestations', it included live events and was named 'liveness: on epic duration'. The second filter addressed 'changes in the global environment', it included installations, films, paintings and sculptures and was titled 'garden of disorder'. The third filter – 'capital: a live reading' – was focused on the concept of capital, with live readings of Karl Marx's 'das kapital' (Enwezor 2014). *documenta11* offered Enwezor authority to change the face of future biennales, with respect to the selection of artists and their nationality, and the structure of biennales themselves.

The dispersed topology of *documenta11* represents a novel solution to representing the multicultural dynamic of contemporary art, but it was not without its critics. Some argued that Enwezor's curatorial practice favoured diaspora artists above artists who actually live in their homelands (Baskett 2016; Ogbechie 2010). Part of the reason why Enwezor predominantly worked with non-Western artists who live in the West was pragmatic – he had access to artists in his immediate proximity – such as access to artists operating in proximity – and this, after all, is a primary reason why art world operators seek to locate themselves near the centres of art world power. As art historian Mallory Sharp Baskett (2016, p. 33) has argued, artists of the diaspora are easier to make contact with due to geographic factors. The American director of the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007), Robert Storr, dedicated a pavilion to African art while acknowledging that Africa is a continent with numerous cultures and languages, and as such one pavilion was not an ideal solution to the challenge of representing the diversity of African art (Herbert 2007, p. 80). Enwezor objected to Storr's measly allocation of a lone African pavilion at Venice, but by working with a limited number of artists of the diaspora Enwezor left himself open to a similar criticism: that he failed to emphasise the diversity of African culture and neglected the 'cultural history of Africa' (Baskett 2016, p. 33)[15]. McLean (2014c) recognised Enwezor's achievement as a curator who

[15] According to Ogbechie (2010), Enwezor strived to highlight the contemporaneity of his exhibiting artists, but by working with artists of the diaspora he inadvertently downplayed the importance of traditional culture. The diaspora, he contends, results in an absence of 'tradition' and 'culture'. Artists that engage with cultural traditions in their birthplaces embody a unique perspective that markedly differs from those of the Diaspora. This is because as Casey (1993) has argued, our homeplace creates our identity and who we are, shaping intimate connections with our native language, forms of expression and ties to place. People of the diaspora develop new worldviews that are a result of the combination of their past heritage with present cultural

included non-Western (and predominantly African) artists in contemporary art events and expanded the borders of the centres of contemporary art. However, as per McLean, Enwezor's curatorial strategy was based on contemporary theories of multiple modernisms (as opposed to an exclusive Eurocentric modernism), with a focus on positioning African artists within a global history of modernism and diversity. Within this framework, in his exhibitions Enwezor limited the inclusion of Indigenous Australian, Native American, Sami, or Maori art.

One of the main critiques of Enwezor's curatorial practice centred on his apparent emphasis of the 'global' at the expense of the 'local', which was seen to contradict Enwezor's efforts to reflect the cultural diversity of the art world in a major international exhibition. Yet Enwezor's model also offers the possibility of showing art – including Australian Indigenous art – in a radically localised fashion. The decentralised exhibition structure devised by Enwezor for *documenta11* invites speculation about how such a structure might be utilised in the presentation and framing of remote Indigenous art in Australia and internationally. Indeed, it would seem that Enwezor's curatorial model has much to offer curatorial thinking about remote Indigenous art. *documenta11* opens a curatorial paradigm that potentially preserves within a large-scale exhibition the cultural and geographic alterity of so-called off-centred art – such as remote Indigenous art – while at the same time making this art accessible in proximity to the site of its production. Such a model could open new possibilities for major Australian exhibitions located on the seaboard, such as the Sydney Biennial, which could without too much difficulty establish satellite sites in remote locations across Australia – places where remote Indigenous artists work, and places depicted in these artists' work. There would be major cultural and environmental obstacles if such an ambitious exhibition was to be staged. Not only would it potentially be a great boost for the tourism industry in remote areas; it would also circumvent many of the problems that arise when Indigenous art is removed from its original context and recontextualised within a white cube far from its point of origin. Delegating curatorial authority to members of remote Indigenous communities is a rich, generative possibility for rethinking existing modes of Indigenous art curation. Such an idea is worth pursuing in future curation of Indigenous art,

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influences. Aside from the liberating effects that come with expansion of one's cultural horizon, this results in new perspectives on the past, for instance negative memories of a culture or convoluted forms of expression (Papastergiadis 1998).

and is just one of the many ways surveyed in this chapter that Enwezor's work and legacy shows its use-value to curatorial thinking about Indigenous art.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on an internationally renowned non-Australian curator in an attempt to gain a fresh perspective on the curation of Indigenous art. Although Enwezor selected only a few Indigenous artists for his exhibitions, this chapter draws on his unique position as an African man in a Western dominated art world, and his approach for and success with the exhibition of culturally diverse art in global art centres. After sketching a brief biographical context for Enwezor's work and his primary curatorial and theoretical preoccupations – such as the promotion of cultural diversity and the critique of Eurocentrism – this chapter analysed his inclusion of Emily Kngwarraye's *Earth's Creation* in his 2015 Venice Biennial. The exhibition was notable for its critique of the context of art: the critique of colonialism, environmental destruction and the capitalist exploitation figured heavily in the work on display as well as the accompanying literature. Emily's work was shown to feed into these core themes in numerous ways. My analysis sought to read Emily's work in the room where it was displayed in the Biennial, alongside the work of Ellen Gallagher and Huma Bhabha. The exhibition of Emily's work alongside works by these other women of colour promoted cultural diversity and a cosmopolitan, globalist outlook, and furthermore invited discussion about the complex affinities and resonances between the three artists' work. The final section of this chapter focused on Enwezor's 2002 *documenta11*, an exhibition widely remembered for its decentralised structure, with satellite venues in various locations outside Africa. Although the exhibition didn't feature Indigenous Australian art, the finding of my research is that Enwezor's decentralised exhibition structure has to offer contemporary thinking about the curation of Indigenous art, and could potentially be adopted by a large-scale Australian exhibition as a novel way to promote Indigenous art within the framework of contemporary art.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the exhibition of remote Indigenous art as contemporary art between 1989 and 2015. Through an in-depth critique of several key exhibitions within this timeframe – large-scale international exhibitions as well as innovative smaller events organised by Indigenous curators – my research has generated new insight into how contemporary Indigenous art is exhibited, and the role of curators exhibiting Indigenous art in the contemporary art world. After summarising the central argument of each chapter, the present chapter will indicate directions of future research opened up by this thesis.

Chapter 2 offered a theoretical framework and historical context for this research. It traced how the discourse on Indigenous art developed since that time when colonisers came into contact with Indigenous cultural expression. Early exhibition of Indigenous art in art institutions was explored, highlighting conventional curatorial approaches for its exhibition before the onset of contemporary art including modernist curation that underscores the autonomy and abstraction of the artwork, and anthropological curation that concentrates on the links between the art and Indigenous knowledge systems. These differing curatorial approaches – and their impact on Indigenous art discourse – were analysed. The chapter then historicised the engagement of Indigenous curators in the 1980s, with Djon Mundine pioneering in this role. The important role performed by Indigenous curators in Australian art institutions, and their challenges in a largely Western dominated art world was examined. Finally, non-Western art and its status in the emergent contemporary art world was discussed. Contemporary art was broadly characterised as an international and inclusive space, and examining its development up to this point clarified the position of Indigenous art in a global narrative of recent art history.

Chapter 3 of this thesis analysed the place of Indigenous art in this major French exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* in 1989. This event offered an alternative model for the exhibition of non-Western art, aiming to correct the earlier approach for it in MoMa's 1984 *"Primitivism"* exhibition, where non-Western artists were anonymous. While in *Magiciens* the exhibiting artists were identified, the exhibition did not expand on the artists' background and origin, and largely underestimated its audience by not providing it with context for its participating artists. The purpose of this lack of context was to highlight that all artists are deserving of

equal opportunities in the art world. While alluding to an imagined universality, namely, that artists from around the world are concerned with the same human pressures and desires, *Magiciens* omitted to foreground important intricacies between the artists and their cultures. It was concluded in this chapter that the curatorial strategies in *Magiciens* were based on Western underpinning values despite its aim to emphasise ideas such as equality and universalism, which were defined through a Western agenda. Although *Magiciens* established a globalised art environment as a novel approach for art exhibitions, it omitted vital political and cultural contexts for the selcted artworks. The curators of the exhibition claimed that in the context of an art institution (in contrast to a cultural museum) it is not expected to be pedagogic or immersed in scientific detail (Magnin et al., 1990). By considering this argument it became clear that new protocols are needed for exhibiting culturally diverse art in the context of Western art institutions.

After critiquing the *Magiciens* exhibition, Chapter 4 studied the changes in the exhibition of Indigenous art since 1989 through an in-depth analysis of the 2008 Biennale of Sydney's title show *Revolutions – Forms That Turn*, curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. Although in the early 21st century it has become commonplace to exhibit art from around the world in major institutions for contemporary art, Indigenous art was still marginalised, as in this Australian biennale, which represented only a single Australian Indigenous artist, Doreen Reid Nakamarra. *Revolutions* was slightly different to other biennales of the time in that it focused on urban culture and exhibition themes covered by the mainstream media, omitting to recognise a broader variety of concerns and traditions. Reid's work was accompanied by a didactic panel that offered information on the artist and her work. However, the cumulative effect of several curatorial decisions about how to present Reid's work – firstly, its presentation on a plinth, secondly, its rotation to the horizontal plane, and thirdly, its location alongside a sound work by Janet Cardiff and Georges Bures Miller – the cultural specificity of Reid's work was lost; it appeared as one element within a total installation. The analysis conducted in this chapter demonstrated that that this event, like others of this time, was bound to an institutional conservatism in terms of themes and mediums, followed by a strong focus on innovation and commercialism, which limited the acknowledgment of Indigenous culture and values.

The engagement of Indigenous curators as a means to highlight Indigenous cultural, social and geographical contexts in contemporary art exhibitions was discussed in Chapter 5. The

contribution of Indigenous curators to curatorial practices was explored in detail with a particular focus on the perspectives of leading Indigenous curator Djon Mundine and his peers including Hetti Perkins and Stephen Gilchrist. It was recognised that Indigenous curators navigate between both Indigenous and Western value systems, and through this are uniquely placed to communicate cultural knowledge to art audiences. The chapter also showed that Indigenous curators are engaged both for projects with national significance, and for regional and smaller projects. Djon Mundine for instance made a significant contribution to the Australian national dialogue with his 1988 installation titled The *Aboriginal Memorial.* By combining socio-political concepts with an aesthetic idea for the *Memorial*, he aimed to raise awareness about the suffering and loss of Indigenous people due to Australian colonial history. The chapter concluded with a discussion of Gilchrist and Perkins' call for a national Indigenous gallery in Australia that would offer a dedicated platform for Indigenous values and art, and will increase Indigenous employment. While there is a need for such a dedicated gallery, it was argued that the contemporary art world can indeed hold a place for such an institution.

The final chapter of this thesis investigated a different perspective for non-Western and Indigenous art curation – that of leading Nigerian-American curator Okwui Enwezor. This curator used the contemporary art world as a stage for raising awareness about important social and political issues such as discrimination, racial equality, and cross-cultural diversity. Enwezor's curatorial approach to exhibiting Emily Kame Kngwarrey's *Earth's Creation* in the 2015 Venice Biennale was explored. This work was shown in the exhibition alongside the works of two women of colour, artists Ellen Gallagher and Huma Bhabha, who like Emily occupy marginal socio-political identities. The placement of these works alongside each other, emphasised the global interconnectedness of their work and invited the spectator to discern similarities and differences between them. This chapter concluded with a discussion of Enwezor's decentralised *documenta11* exhibition, which it was argued may offer an innovative curatorial model for exhibiting the work of Indigenous art. Enwezor's decentralised exhibition model, whereby satellite events are held in different countries, suggests that Australia could adopt such contemporary thinking about the curation of Indigenous art, and consider a large-scale Australian exhibition as a novel way to promote Indigenous art within the framework of contemporary art.

This thesis has addressed the dearth of research into the inclusion of Indigenous art in contemporary art exhibitions, but it also opens several lines of questioning for future research. Inquiries that require further investigation include a focus on engagement with remote Indigenous communities, that is, how can Indigenous artists, themselves, have greater impact on the exhibition of Indigenous art? To overcome the challenge of engaging with remote Indigenous art critically (as per Garneau in Myers, p. 82), it is necessary to have greater involvement and insight from the source. In addition, consideration must be given in the curation of urban and remote art to their different style and context. The question then arises as to what curatorial strategies can be used in the contemporary art space to address the differences, and also highlight the commonalities between remote and urban Indigenous art. A related question concerns the role for non-Indigenous associates, including researchers, curators and critics in the space of Indigenous art. These questions demonstrate the need for a broad scope in considering the implications of Indigenous art exhibition and research.

This study has also revealed the need for further research into Indigenous art exhibitions in major contemporary art events internationally, such as biennales, art fairs, and *documenta* – to understand specifically how the art is presented differently from local and exclusively Indigenous art exhibitions. Such research would help to ensure that Indigenous art is exhibited in a way that communicates the cultural context within which it was produced. In addition, there is an urgent need to critically examine the exhibition of Indigenous art at specialist contemporary art institutions and events such as MONA in Tasmania, the MCA in Sydney, and international biennales, triennales and art fairs that take place in Australia. This thesis marks the starting point of such research, but more work needs to be done in this field.

Finally, the relatively new practice of Indigenous curation, its unique application in Australia, and the limited opportunities for it, also demand further research. Alongside this current research, and that of Gilchrist (2020), specific research, about Indigenous curation in large scale contemporary art events is needed. Also, more research is needed on audiences for contemporary art and how they perceive Indigenous art within it. Along with opening up these and various other possible directions for art-historical investigations, this thesis has made a substantial contribution to research into the presentation of Indigenous art in the contemporary art world, and has laid the foundation for developing alternative curatorial strategies for art originating in marginalised cultures across the world.

List of Illustrations

Image in Fig. 1. removed
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Fig. 1. *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, book cover. Image Source: Ergode Books website, 2022, <https://ergodebooks.com/>.

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due to copyright

Fig. 2. Tony Tuckson, White lines (vertical) on ultramarine (1970-1973).
Image source: Art Gallery of New South Wales website, 2022,
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Image source: Contemporary And (C&) Magazine website, 2016, <https://www.contemporaryand.com/magazines/magiciens-de-la-terre/>.

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Fig. 5. Ramingining artists, Djon Mundine, The Aboriginal Memorial, 1987–88
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Appendix 1: Participating Australian artists in *Revolutions – Forms That Turn*

Australian Artists	Gender	Ethnicity	Australian Indigenous	Australian Indigenous (Remote)	Comments
Cokatoo Island					
Vernon Ah Kee	M		x		
Richard Bell	M		x		
Shaun Galdwell	M	Caucasion			
TV MooRe	M	Caucasion			
Mike Parr	M	Caucasion			
theweathergroup_U	Mix				
Pier 2/3					
Doreen Reid Nakamarra	F			x	
MCA					
Rosemary Laing	F	Caucasion			
Tracey Moffatt and	F		x		
Gary Hillberg	M	Caucasion			
Julie Rrap	F	Caucasion			
MCA/Royal Botanic Gardens					
Destiny Deacon and	F		x		
Virginia Fraser	F	Caucasion			
AGNSW					
James Angus	M	Caucasion			
Gordon Bennett	M		x		
Tommy McRAE	M			x	Born 1835
Raquel Ormella	F	Caucasion			
Stuart Ringholt	M	Caucasion			
Balang KubarrKu	M			x	Classified as "other artists", perhaps selected at a later stage
Simryn Gill	F	Asian			divides her time between Sydney, Australia and Port Dickson, Malaysia
Total core artists: 17 Australian artists or collaboratives					
Indigenous artists trained in art school: 5					
Remote Indigenous artists: 1 (3)					

Data: Biennale of Sydney guide (2008)
Note: only permanent installations (not including performances)

Appendix 2: Participating artists in *All the World's Futures*

Artist	Birth year	Gender	Country of origin	Lives and works	Medium	Australian Indigenous	Australian Indigenous (Remote)
Jumana Emil Abboud	B. 1971	F	Palestine/Canada	Jerusalem (IL)	drawing video installation performance sculpture		
Adel Abdessemed	B. 1971	M	Algeria	Paris (FR)	animation installation performance sculpture video		
Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc	B. 1977	M	France	Metz (FR)	video photography installations drawing		
Abounaddara	Collective Founded 2010		Syria/Palestine	Damascus (SYR)	film		
Boris Achour	B. 1966	M	France	Paris (FR)	installation sculpture		
Terry Adkins	B. 1953 - D. 2014	M	United States	Brooklyn (USA)	sculpture performance video photography		
Saâdane Afif	B. 1970	M	France	Berlin (DE)	performance sculpture		
Chantal Akerman	B. 1950 - D. 2015	F	Belgium	Paris (FR)	film video-installation		
John Akomfrah	B. 1957	M	Ghana	London (UK)	film video-installation		
Karo Akpokiere	B. 1981	M	Nigeria	Lagos (NG) Berlin (DE)	drawing graphic-design		
Mounira Al Solh	B. 1978	F	Lebanon	Beirut (LBN) Amsterdam (NL)	drawing painting video video-installation		
Meriç Algün Ringborg	B. 1983	F	Turkey	Stockholm (SE)	installation		
Jennifer Allora & Guillermo Calzadilla	B. 1974 B. 1971	F M	United States Cuba	San Juan (PR)	sculpture photography performance sound video		
Kutlug Ataman	B. 1961	M	Turkey	London (UK)	photography video		
Maja Bajevic	B. 1967	F	Bosnia	Paris (FR) Sarajevo (BA)	video performance installation photography		
Ernesto Ballesteros	B. 1963	M	Argentina	Buenos Aires (AR)	painting drawing sculpture		
Sammy Baloji	B. 1978	M	Congo	Lubumbashi (CG) Brussels (BE)	photography		
Rosa Barba	B. 1972	F	Italy	Berlin (DE)	film installation sculpture publication		
Georg Baselitz	B. 1938	M	Germany	Munich (DE)	painting sculpture graphic - design		

Eduardo Basualdo	B. 1977	M	Argentina	Buenos Aires (AR)	installation sculpture drawing		
Petra Bauer	B. 1970	F	Sweden	Stockholm (SE)	video		
Walead Beshty	B. 1976	M	United Kingdom	Los Angeles (US)	photography sculpture painting video		
Huma Bhabha	B. 1962	F	Pakistan	Poughkeepsie (US)	sculpture		
Christian Boltanski	B. 1944	M	France	Paris (FR)	sculpture photography painting film		
Monica Bonvicini	B. 1965	F	Italy	Berlin (DE)	installation sculpture video photography drawing		
Sonia Boyce	B. 1962	F	United Kingdom	London (UK)	photography installation drawing video		
Daniel Boyd	B. 1982	M	Australia	Sydney (AU)	painting drawing	X	
Ricardo Brey	B. 1955	M	Cuba	Gent (BE)	installation sculpture drawings		
Marcel Broodthaers	B. 1924 - D. 1976	M	Belgium		film sculpture		
Tania Bruguera	B. 1968	F	Cuba	New York (US)	installation performance		
Teresa Burga	B. 1935	F	Peru	Lima (PE)	painting installation sculpture		
Keith Calhoun and Chandra Mccormick	B. 1955 B. 1957	M F	United States	New Orleans (US)	photography		
Cao Fei	B. 1978	F	China	Beijing (CN)	photography video digital media		
Nidhal Chamekh	B. 1985	M	Tunisia	Tunis (TN) Paris (FR)	drawing installation video photography		
Olga Chernysheva	B. 1962	F	Russia	Moscow (RU)	film photography drawing		
Tiffany Chung	B. 1969	F	Vietnam	Ho Chi Minh City (VT)	drawing photography video installation		
Cooperativa Cráter Invertido	Collective Founded 2011		Mexico	Mexico City (MX)	multidisciplinary		
Creative Time Summit	Collective Founded 1974		United States	New York (US)	multidisciplinary		
Elena Damiani	B. 1979	F	Peru	Copenhagen (DK)	installation sculpture works on paper		
Jeremy Deller	B. 1966	M	United Kingdom	London (UK)	video installation		
Thea Djordajdze	B. 1971		Georgia	Berlin (DE)	sculpture installation		

Marlene Dumas	B. 1953	F	South Africa	Amsterdam (NL)	painting		
E-Flux Journal	Collective Founded 2008		United States	New York (US)	publication		
Melvin Edwards	B. 1937	M	United States	New York (US)	sculpture		
Inji Efflatoun	B. 1924 – D. 1989	F	Egypt	id.	painting		
Antje Ehmann and Harun Farocki	B. 1968 B. 1944 – D. 2014	F M	Germany	n/a	video		
Maria Eichhorn	B. 1962	F	Germany	Berlin (DE)	installation		
Walker Evans	B. 1903 – D. 1975	M	United States	n/a	photography		
Harun Farocki	B. 1944 – D. 2014	M	Germany	n/a	film		
Emily Floyd	B. 1972	F	Australia	Melbourne (AU)	sculpture		
Peter Friedl	B. 1960	M	Austria	Berlin (DE)	installation painting film video		
Coco Fusco	B. 1960	F	United States	New York (US)	performance video		
Marco Fusinato	B. 1964	M	Australia	Melbourne (AU)	installation photography performance		
Charles Gaines	B. 1944	M	United States	Los Angeles (US)	drawing photography video installation		
Ellen Gallagher	B. 1965	F	United States	Rotterdam (NL)	painting works on paper film video		
Ana Gallardo	B. 1958	F	Argentina	Buenos Aires (AR)	performance		
Dora Garcia	B. 1965	F	Spain	Barcelona (ES)	performance		
Theaster Gates	B. 1973	M	United States	Chicago (US)	installation		
Isa Genzken	B. 1948	F	Germany	Berlin (DE)	sculpture installation		
Gluklya	B. 1969	F	Russia	Saint Petersburg	installation performance video		
Sônia Gomes	B. 1948	F	Brazil	Belo Horizonte (BR)	sculpture		
Katharina Grosse	B. 1961	F	Germany	Berlin (DE)	architecture sculpture painting		
Gulf Labor	Collective Founded 2010		United States	New York (US)	multidisciplinary		
Andreas Gursky	B. 1955	M	Germany	Düsseldorf (DE)	photography		
Hans Haacke	B. 1936	M	Germany	New York (US)	painting installation photography		
Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige	B. 1969 B. 1969	F M	Lebanon	Paris (FR) Beirut (LBN)	film video photography installation		

Newell Harry	B. 1972	M	Australia	Sydney (AU)	installation works on paper photography		
Kay Hassan	B. 1956	M	South Africa	Johannesburg (SA)	painting collage installation video sculpture photography		
Thomas Hirschhorn	B. 1957	M	Switzerland	Paris (FR)	installations		
Carsten Höller	B. 1961	M	Belgium	Stockholm (SE)	installation performance film		
Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson	B. 1938 – D. 2014 / B.1938 – D. 1973	n/a	United States	n/a	sculpture installation film photography		
Heung Soon Im	B. 1969	M	South Korea	Seoul (KR)	film installation		
Invisible Borders: Trans-African Photographers	Collective Founded 2011		Lagos	n/a	photography		
Tetsuya Ishida	B. 1973 - D. 2005	M	Japan	n/a	painting		
Ji Dachun	B. 1968	M	China	Beijing (CN)	painting		
Isaac Julien	B. 1960	M	United Kingdom	London (UK)			
Hiwa K.	B. 1975	M	Iraq	Berlin (DE)	installation video		
Samson Kambalu	B. 1975	M	Malawi	London (UK)	drawing painting installation video performance		
Ayoung Kim	B. 1979	F	South Korea	Seoul (KR)	film photography installation performance		
Alexander Kluge	B. 1932	M	Germany	Munich	film		
Emily Kame Kngwarreye	B. 1910 - D. 1996	F	Australia		painting		X
Runo Lagomarsino	B. 1977	M	Sweden	Stockholm (SE) São Paulo (BR)	installation works on paper sculpture photography		
Sonia Leber and David Chesworth	B. 1959 B. 1958	F M	Australia United Kingdom	Melbourne (AU)	video film		
Glenn Ligon	B. 1960	M	United States	New York (US)	painting installation film		
Gonçalo Mabunda	B. 1975	M	Mozambique	Maputo (MZ)	sculpture		
Madhusudhanan	B. 1956	M	India	New Delhi (IN) Kerala (IN)	Film video		
Ibrahim Mahama	B. 1987	M	Ghana	Tamale (GH)	Installation sculpture		
David Maljkovic	B. 1973	M	Croatia	Zagreb (HR)	film collage sculpture installation		
Victor Man	B. 1974	M	Romania	Berlin (DE)	painting		

Abu Bakarr Mansaray	B. 1970	M	Sierra Leone	Freetown (SL) Harlingen (NL)	drawings paintings sculpture		
Chris Marker	B. 1921 – D. 2012	M	France		photographer film		
Kerry James Marshall	B. 1955	M	United States	Chicago (US)	painting sculpture		
Helen Marten	B. 1985	F	United Kingdom	London	Sculpture video installation		
Fabio Mauri	B. 1926 – D. 2009	M	Italy	n/a	film performance		
Steve Mcqueen	B. 1969	M	United Kingdom	Amsterdam (NL)	film video		
Naeem Mohaiemen	B. 1969	M	Bangladesh	Dhaka (BD) New York (US)	film installation		
Jason Moran	B. 1975	M	United States	New York (UK)	Music		
Ivana Müller	B. 1972	F	Croatia	Paris (FR)	performance installations video multimedia		
Lavar Munroe	B. 1982	M	Bahamas	North Carolina (US) Washington DC (US)	painting, drawing sculpture installation		
Oscar Murillo	B. 1986	M	Colombia	London (UK)	painting		
Wangechi Mutu	B. 1972	F	Kenya	New York (US)	collage video performance sculpture		
Hwayeon Nam	B. 1979	M	South Korea	Seoul (KR) Berlin (DE)	film video		
Bruce Nauman	B. 1941	M	United States	New Mexico (US)	sculpture photography video drawing works on paper performance		
Cheikh Ndiaye	B. 1970	M	Senegal	New York (US) Dakar (SN) Lyon (FR)	painting photography installation		
Olaf Nicolai	B. 1962	M	Germany	Berlin (DE)	performance work on paper photography sculpture installation		
Chris Ofili	B. 1968	M	United Kingdom	London (UK) Trinidad (TT)	paintings		
Emeka Ogboh	B. 1977	M	Nigeria	Lagos (NG) Berlin (DE)	installation sound		
Philippe Parreno	B. 1964	M	France	Paris (FR)	film installations performance drawing		
Pino Pascali	B. 1935 – D. 1968	M	Italy	n/a	sculpture performance		
Adrian Piper	B. 1948	F	United States	Berlin (DE)	performance		
Lemi Ponifasio	B. 1964	M	New Zealand	Auckland (NZ)	performance		
Qiu Zhijie	B. 1969	M	China (CN)	Beijing (CH)	video photography		

Raha Raissnia	B. 1968	F	Iran	New York (US)	painting drawing filmmaking performance		
Raqs Media Collective	Collective Founded 1992	M, M, F	India	New Delhi (IN)	installation film photography		
(Narula, Monica; Bagchi, Jeebesh; Sengupta, Shuddhabrata)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	multidisciplinary		
Lili Reynaud-Dewar	B. 1975	F	France	Grenoble (FR)	installation performance		
Mykola Ridnyi	B. 1985	M	Ukraine	Kharkiv (UA)	film installations sculpture photography		
Liisa Roberts	B. 1969	F	France	New York (US) Helsinki (FI) Saint Petersburg (RU)	films video sculpture installations		
Mika Rottenberg	B. 1976	F	Argentina	New York (US)	video		
Joachim Schönfeldt	B. 1958	M	South Africa	Johannesburg (SA)	painting sculpture work on paper		
Massinissa Selmani	B. 1980	M	Algeria	Algiers (DZ) Tours (FR)	drawing animation		
Fatou Kandé Senghor	B 1971	F	Senegal	Dakar (SN)	photography film installation		
Prasad Shetty and Rupali Gupte	B. 1974 B. 1974	M F	India	Mumbai (IN)	sculpture		
Gedi Sibony	B. 1973	M	United States	New York (US)	sculpture		
Gary Simmons	B. 1964	M	United States	New York (US)	Sculpture installation		
Taryn Simon	B. 1975	F	United States	New York (US)	photography sculpture performance		
Lorna Simpson	B. 1960	F	United States	New York (US)	photography multimedia		
Robert Smithson	B. 1938 – D. 1973	M	United States		photography sculpture		
Mikhael Subotzky	B. 1981	M	South Africa	Johannesburg (SA)	installation film video		
Mariam Suhail	B. 1979	F	Pakistan	Bangalore (PK)	sculpture video drawing multimedia		
Sarah Sze	B. 1969	F	United States	New York (US)	sculpture installation		
The Propeller Group	Collective Founded 2006	n/a	Vietnam/US	Ho Chi Minh City (VT)	installation film multimedia		
The Tomorrow	Founded 2014	n/a	Italy	Milan (IT)	A Journal		
Rirkrit Tiravanija	B. 1961	M	Thailand	New York (US) Berlin (DE) Chiang Mai (TH)	installation sculpture		

Barthélémy Toguo	B. 1967	M	Cameroon	Paris (FR) Bandjoun (CM)	painter performance		
Xu Bing	B. 1955	M	China	Beijing (CN)	installation work on paper		
Ala Younis	B. 1974	F	Jordan	Amman (JO)	installation video		

Data: *All the World's Futures'* catalogue book (2015)