CHAPTER SEVEN

"The Stories Will Never Be Forgotten": Reframing Contemporaneity and Authenticity in Western Arnhem Land Paintings

[redacted]

Our art and our culture are not separate; they are a part of us: one country, one skin, one blood.[1]

—Gabriel Maralngurra, Manager, Injalak Arts and Crafts Association

Since the explosion of Aboriginal art onto the Western art market in the 1980s and 1990s, scholars have struggled to reconcile contemporary Aboriginal art-making with current conceptions of contemporary and modern art. While acrylic painting from Western Desert centers like Papunya were quickly embraced by the market, it was slower to welcome media categorized as non-Western, including bark paintings.[2] Market reception has been dependent on the perceived authenticity of the artworks. Acrylic painting was praised for its similarity to abstraction found in the Western contemporary art world, while objects like bark paintings and ceremonial objects were viewed as cultural artifacts. Linking specific media to notions of authenticity or tradition not only denies the presence of Aboriginal epistemologies in acrylic painting, but also characterizes art made in non-Western media as emerging out of the murky waters of the distant past rather than as evidence of a vibrant, creative present tradition.[3] Art and life in western Arnhem Land are inextricably layered realities. Contemporary Aboriginal art can be interpreted as a continuation of a historical tradition, as well as an active negotiation with and reformulation of that tradition. This essay aims to redress such disregard for ongoing Aboriginal artistic creativity and the imposition of Western primitivist views of media onto Aboriginal art. Viewing tradition as an ever-generative, ever-present activity expands interpretations of "authentic" art-making to a wide variety of innovative media and styles. This essay will first explore the contemporaneity and historicity of western Arnhem

Land art in order to then counteract the long history of collectors, anthropologists, and museums casting western Arnhem Land bark painting as representative of a disappearing traditional past. The latter half of this essay will look at two specific works both featured in *Beyond Dreamings* and originating from the Injalak Arts and Crafts Association in Kunbarrllanjnja (Gunbalanya): Djakala's *Kangaroo of the Ubarr Ceremony* (circa 1987–1989) and Thompson Yulidjirri's *Ngurlmarrk—The Ubarr Ceremony* (1991), from the John W. Kluge commission of works on paper from Injalak in 1991–1992. Encapsulating different approaches to media, style, and the market, these two works embody the multiple and active contemporaneities operating in western Arnhem Land art-making. By rooting authenticity in people and practices rather than in the works' media, this paper strives to highlight Aboriginal agency and creativity.

Aboriginal Contemporaneity

Debates about the contemporary or modern nature of Aboriginal art join broader postcolonial meditations on how to incorporate "outsiders" into the history of modern art without erasing important and integral distinctions. Applications of "multiple modernities" to Aboriginal contexts would necessitate a clear rupture between a traditional past and the development of a desacralized present.[4] By contrast, "contemporaneity," as Terry Smith defines it, allows for more complex and multivalent interpretations of Aboriginal art, artistic practices, and temporalities. Instead of insisting upon an absolute break with the past, contemporaneity indicates an understanding of temporality as relational and situational. In Smith's words, this shift allows a consideration of "ways of being *in* or *with* time, even of being *in* and *out* of time at the same time."[5] The "presentness" of contemporaneity complements the active formulation and reformulation of Aboriginal tradition and worldviews via art-making. Rather than a "singular simplicity of distanced reflection" that separates the Aboriginal person from their ruptured past, contemporaneity stresses the "direct experience of multiplicitous complexity."[6]

The Kunwinjku people of western Arnhem Land have a deep sense of history and time that links them directly to the creators of the land. The actions of ancestral beings shaped the earth during the creation period. At the end of this period, these beings transformed into sacred objects or features of the landscape.[7] The land traversed by Kunwinjku peoples today, the sacred objects crafted and used in contemporary ceremony, and the ancestors of today's clan groups were all created by ancestral beings.[8] These creation narratives trace the connections between land, objects, and people as well as relationships between the past, present, and future of Kunwinjku tradition and life. The underlying ancestral framework of Kunwinjku creates a complex and layered world.

Within western Arnhem Land, the passing of knowledge to apprentices and youths serves as a primary catalyst for art-making. Images form an integral component in Kunwinjku epistemology, in which the layering and selective revealing of "inside" and "outside" knowledge is conducted via art practice and apprenticeship.[9] Different members of Kunwinjku society are inaugurated into deeper levels of knowledge and layers of meaning depending on the individual's maturity, moiety, gender, and place of origin.

Smith's understanding of contemporaneity acknowledges the continued existence and navigation of disjunctures of perspectives and asynchronous temporalities.[10] Kunwinjku art practice inherently contains combatting and multiple layers—this very "jostling contingency of various cultural and social multiplicities" ensures its continued contemporaneity.[11] Aboriginal artists are consistently relating themselves to the world around them by means of their cultural practices, including art. Art-making is significant not because of the authenticity of any particular material, but because the continued encoding and dissemination of Indigenous traditions via art practice guarantees this tradition's vitality. Tradition becomes contemporary by its continuous renewal and re-creation. In the words of Marc Augé, "the world's diversity is recomposed every moment; this is the paradox of our day."[12]

Back to the Beginning: Twentieth-Century Reception

Twentieth-century Western ideas about the primitive and ahistorical character of Aboriginal art were first overlaid onto the art of western Arnhem Land by the anthropologist Baldwin Spencer, whose collections of, and publications on, western Arnhem Land art prompted institutional interest in bark painting for its supposed highly authentic nature (and thus, ethnological value). Upon his visit to Kunbarrllanjnja (Oenpelli) in 1911–1912 during his tenure as the Chief Protector of Aborigines, Spencer became interested in the paintings on rock and bark done in the region. Before commissioning new works from local artists, he excised several bark paintings "incidentally" from the walls of bark shelters.[13] This removal of artistic forms from the immediate living environment of the Indigenous peoples evocatively demonstrates how twentieth-century anthropologists appropriated and extracted artistic and cultural expressions from contemporary Aboriginal life.[14]

In addition to exporting existing designs, Spencer also commissioned "portable" barks: strips of bark with images meant to mimic those of the existing rock and bark art. Over a period of eight years and with the assistance of Paddy Cahill, Spencer collected around two hundred examples of western Arnhem Land art for the Museum of Victoria.[15] Despite the commission of new works, the same writings and publications that bolstered interest in the market for Aboriginal art characterized these works, as well as Aboriginal peoples, as primitive and representative of the first stages of the evolutionary development of humans. Therefore, in the same moment that museums began to collect bark paintings, the very medium of bark paintings (and the rock paintings which they were assumed to mimic) came to signal their primitive nature.[16] In this framework, Aboriginal peoples' agency can only prove the authenticity of their culture and work in terms of past tradition. Spencer claimed the bark paintings he commissioned were products of traditional and internal cultural work in order to avoid claims of inauthenticity by institutions collecting these works.[17] As much as Spencer wanted to suppress any changes in subject matter or style due to intercultural communication and encounter, the bark paintings were inevitably a result of negotiations between Spencer and the Aboriginal artists, whether consciously or unconsciously.[18] Commissioning new art, rather than continuing to cut out portions of existing bark shelters or removing slabs from the decorated rock faces, automatically situated the resulting work in a contemporary,

Rock art on Injalak Hill, Kunbarrllanjnja. Photograph courtesy of Injalak Arts.

intercultural dialectic. By ignoring the contemporaneity of the art-making he was commissioning, Spencer created an ahistorical time frame for the resulting work.[19] This separated Aboriginal culture from the broader world, but also encouraged the understanding of Aboriginal society as static. Extracting art from its context, whether physically removing it from bark shelters or textually evacuating its historicity and interculturation in scholarly publications and exhibitions, denies contemporary Aboriginal peoples access to the lived, active history of their lands and culture—and, more distressingly, the agency to engage with and enact it in the present.

Subsequent collectors and anthropologists, particularly Ronald and Catherine Berndt who visited the region in 1949, conducted more thorough research that spoke to the broader lived experience of the Kunwinjku peoples. This shift in scholarship, however, was still primarily bound by the disciplinary assumptions of anthropology, and therefore characterized the art and culture of western Arnhem Land Aboriginal peoples as cultural artifacts.[20] Despite the positive attention it drew to Aboriginal Australian art, *Dreamings*, for example, still classified bark painting from western Arnhem Land as representative of a relatively passive and constant tradition.[21] The 1988 exhibition and catalog featured many bark paintings from the 1980s, but, like Spencer's characterization of his commissions, bark artworks from western Arnhem Land were received by the broader public as ahistorical cultural artifacts. In a *New York Times*

review of *Dreamings*, for example, Roberta Smith argued that the bark paintings granted the acrylic works in the show "a necessary degree of credibility."[22] Smith viewed the introduction of new materials to these communities as inauthentic, an opinion echoed widely in the art market.[23] Bark remained an indicator of cultural authenticity. In the catalog, these objects were scientifically mined for visual information, such as curator Peter Sutton's classification of the typical portrayals of various species, which he then attached to a string of images: for example, "Birds are shown in profile, wings folded."[24] The bird representations Sutton cited span the entire Arnhem Land region and encompass a range of works from 1877 to 1967. This range is not necessarily shocking in a section that offers a general treatment of Arnhem Land bark paintings, but the implied conflation and lack of differentiation amongst them further implies that there is a lack of diversity or creativity across time and space.

Twenty-First-Century Reception of Western Arnhem Land Art

While more recent work has acknowledged the efforts and creativity of contemporary Aboriginal artists and makers, several exhibitions from the last twenty years have continued to elevate bark painting as the most authentic form of Aboriginal art.[25] Restricting authenticity to a single medium disregards the power of art-making to enact tradition. Such an exaltation of bark is found in the 2004 exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, *Crossing Country: The Alchemy of Western Arnhem Land Art* and its associated catalog. This exhibition traced the evolution of bark painting from a figurative, narrative style to contemporary abstracted paintings by Kuninjku artists like John Mawurndjul.[26] *Crossing Country* acknowledged inventiveness within Aboriginal art-making, and therefore veered away from Spencer's ahistoricization. However, in its celebration of the material of bark, *Crossing Country* continued to elevate particular media like bark as more authentic.[27] This present essay is not a denial of the power of media in Aboriginal art-making, but rather a re-orientation toward the production of art and the actions of the artists in diverse media. *Crossing Country* does important recuperative work on the contemporaneity of bark, yet by tracing the evolution of bark painting style from figuration to abstraction, the exhibition and catalog undervalue the history of art-making in other media in western Arnhem Land. The John W. Kluge Commission of works on paper from Injalak in 1991–1992, for example, is largely overlooked in this narrative because it contrasts the shift toward abstraction noticeable in other works in the 1990s and 2000s that were featured in the exhibition.

Privileging one medium or style over another ignores the complementary and contrasting multiplicities operative in Aboriginal contemporaneity and epistemologies. The strict assignation of authenticity to bark also contradicts conversations within the broader contemporary art world regarding medium. Contemporary art has recently been defined by its engagement with difference, often through hybridity or transcultural conversations. The act of revealing and reveling in the jostling multiplicities and differences of the contemporary condition is a central feature, regardless of the use of typically contemporary or non-contemporary media.[28] Consigning Aboriginal art to medium specificity—something that is a hallmark of modern art—thereby excises it from the contemporary art world and also ignores the internal

DICK DJAKALA, *Kangaroo of the Ubarr Ceremony*, c.1988. Natural pigments on bark, 49 x 27 in. (124.5 x 68.6 cm). Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection. Gift of John W. Kluge, 1997.

complexity of Aboriginal art. In Kunwinjku society both past and present, artwork visually maps out and enacts these competing levels of Aboriginal epistemology. The act of painting serves as a way to convey cultural and spiritual knowledge, critically linked to other modes of knowledge including oral history, ceremonial performance, and sacred objects.[29] Shifting focus away from the passive presence of a "traditional" material such as bark and toward artistic production and creativity might allow the bounds of contemporary art to expand and embrace Aboriginal art across varied media.

Injalak Arts and Crafts: A Counter-Narrative

Since its official formation in 1989, the Injalak Arts and Crafts Association has fostered Kunwinjku artistic output in varied media while maintaining a focus on community and cultural development. Injalak began as a screen printing workshop in Kunbarrllanjnja in 1986 and metamorphosed into an art center that now supports the production of bark paintings, works on paper, limited-edition prints, jewelry, screen-printed fabrics and clothing, fiber products, didjeridus, and artifacts.[30] The art center has provided the space for artistic innovation—innovation wrought through community building and new collectives.[31] Fueled by the relationship between painting and education in Kunwinjku society, Injalak has become a center for training and education related to both art and cultural knowledge.[32]

Since the early 1990s, the innovation and experimentation at Injalak has been overseen by senior artists, a practice that emulates the traditional apprenticeship system of painting in Kunwinjku society. In the late 1980s bark painting became more prevalent at the center and several young painters began painting imagery in the style of older painters of the region, instead of more communally-shared images not related to sacred knowledge, lands, or ceremonies held by particular regional groups. This caused tension and confrontations, as this new practice was violating long-held cultural and artistic protocols concerning who had the right to depict certain images.[33] Thompson Yulidjirri (c.1932–2009), painter of five of the forty-five works featured in the John W. Kluge Commission of works on paper from Injalak in 1991–1992, including *Ngurlmarrk—The Ubarr Ceremony* (1991), played a major role in monitoring this new compromise between experimentation and tradition.

Yulidjirri came to Injalak in the early 1990s and began to work there. Following the long tradition of teaching through painting, Yulidjirri started to teach the young men gathered around him as he painted, including those with no close blood relation to him or his country. Gabriel Maralngurra remembers this period at Injalak:

> His [Yulidjirri's] role was he was a senior artist. He taught us how to cut bark and prepare it, how to use ochre; that's what he's been doing at the time. He was the only old man who came down to the arts center—outside the verandah he sat and paint. That's how he started. A bunch of artists coming in and paint, so today.[34]

Installation image at the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection showing works by **DICK DJAKALA, THOMPSON YULIDJIRRI** and **ROVER THOMAS JOOLAMA**.

As Yulidjirri painted, cultural stories and protocols were passed along to the burgeoning artists at the center—protocols taught to Yulidjirri by Paddy Compass Namatbara (c.1890–1973), a famed western Arnhem Land bark and rock painter.[35] Yulidjirri taught these young men how to paint both for the market and as a mode of cultural development. For Yulidjirri: "...the physical painting is simply a gateway to the stories—in an apparently simple depiction of an animal may lie an important story of ancestors, cultural protocols, and land—as also depicted in dance and song."[36] In the process of painting, these stories and their layered meanings are gradually divulged.

Yulidjirri was prolific, commercially successful, and showed no preference for a specific medium or format. The meaning and significance of his works are not found in the specificity of the medium (be it bark, paper or rock), but in the community and culture formed and reaffirmed through his art production. This community radiates outward, into the past and into the future. Maralngurra recounts how Yulidjirri learned from Namatbara and subsequently taught Maralngurra: "I watched him paint and tell the stories...so I learned from him and he gave me all that to understand. That's what I've been taught. Now I'm passing it on to my kids."[37] This is the act that makes tradition contemporaneous—a tradition interactive with its people and its environment, with the market and with traditional epistemologies, and adaptable to media ranging from rock to dance to paper.

Stories of the lives of ancestral beings are characterized by arrival, encounter, and either departure or transmutation into the landscape or another form.[38] The Ubarr ceremony is one of these stories characterized by ancestral arrival; depending on the specific group, it was either established by the ancestral kangaroo being Nadulmi, or the ancestral snake being Yirrbardbard.[39] As one of the important ceremonies of the Kunwinjku people, this subject was depicted many times in various media. Djakala's bark painting *Kangaroo of the Ubarr Ceremony* (circa 1987–1989) attests to the production of such work at Kunbarrllanjnja before the Kluge Commission and provides a contrasting representation to Thompson Yulidjirri's work on paper.

Diverse approaches to style and medium at Injalak demonstrate ongoing conversations about how to represent and convey traditional knowledge. Paper was introduced to Kunbarrllanjnja as part of the Kluge Commission, largely for pragmatic reasons. Whereas bark is primarily harvested in the rainy season and only available to artists for around half the year, paper is easy to handle, access, and transport. This medium was also looked favorably upon for the ease in framing and conserving works on paper as opposed to paintings on bark. Like bark, the surface texture of paper is receptive to the ochre paints used by Kunwinjku artists.[40] In addition to pragmatic concerns, the artists applied backgrounds to emulate the surfaces of the region's rock art galleries. The paper was dampened with water, then layered initially with dark coatings of gouache and followed subsequently with lighter coatings to build up a unique, mottled surface.[41] The apprenticeship system that guaranteed the transmission of cultural knowledge was deeply entangled with these more pragmatic, technical concerns. Young artists at the time of the commission who were observing their teachers, such as Maralngurra learning from Yulidjirri, listened to the stories told by their elders about the sacred content while also learning artistic techniques, including how to mix ochre and helping to prepare and create the backgrounds.[42] Teaching and art-making serve as the unbreakable links between technical and sacred (and market) concerns—paper was accepted at Injalak because it fit into this system. Characterizing his choice of media in his own practice, Maralngurra explains, "I paint both [bark and paper], even log coffin, didjeridu. I really like doing what I really like doing; but I paint, even on canvas sometimes."[43] Medium serves as the vehicle for telling, teaching, painting, and selling stories. The stories themselves endure with the people, even when the paintings are sent to the market or collecting institutions, as attested by Maralngurra:

> The land and the country belongs to my people. Stories stays in the country, in the land itself....Tradition is important because...my uncle's background [Thompson Yulidjirri] was that he tells the stories and he kept it in the mind for himself from his father who taught him those stories, kept not in books but in mind. We still can tell those same stories to the young, the kids, and to the families so that stories won't be forgotten....It will be kept in an archive or put in a place or something where it is kept safe. That's all. These days now these stories have to be written and kept in a safe place. But the stories are still in our head, our heart, and our mind. So the stories will never be forgotten.[44]

The ontological meaning remains stable between media because it is constructed in the process of art and memory making. Shared knowledge is inherent in and emanates from the artists and their actions, not from the materials.

Unlike media, the divergent choices in style evident in Yulidjirri and Djakala's respective presentations of the *Ubarr* ceremony makes a statement about the artist's relationship to the market and contemporaneity in Kunwinjku society. Yulidjirri's style, sometimes associated with the family of artists around Barrdjaray Bobby Nganjmirra (c.1915–1992), who were also heavily involved in the Kluge Commission, is characterized by multi-colored bands of *rarrk* (cross-hatching) and long-limbed figures with beak-like mouths. *Rarrk* is derived from the designs painted on the body during the Mardayin ceremony, which consist of geometric patterns of dotted, dividing lines populated with multi-colored crosshatched lines.[45] The incorporation of this *rarrk* style into contemporary art-making is traced to experimentation with bark painting by this senior group of artists in the 1970s.[46] The "Yulidjirri mode" is the most pervasive style at Kunbarrllanjanja today, as many of the practicing senior artists today were trained by Yulidjirri in this style, including Maralngurra.[47] Yulidjirri's crosshatching relates to the Mardayin ceremony; therefore, its presence in works like *Ngurlmarrk—The Ubarr Ceremony* indicates underlying, encoded meaning about the artist's clan lands.[48] Ancestral beings wore these crosshatched designs on their own bodies and transmitted them to humans to ensure correct ceremonial performance.

The *rarrk* designs point to an intertwined, charged historical power, recognized in Yulidjirri's representation by the shared space of ancestral beings, contemporary ceremonial participants, and stencils of the artist's hands.[49] The *rarrk* designs on the body of Nadulmi the kangaroo, the ceremonial participants, the ceremonial implements, and the other featured ancestral beings creates a unity across Yulidjirri's *Ngurlmarrk—The Ubarr Ceremony*. While the commission was underway, Dorothy Bennett, an ethnological researcher, visited with the artists at Injalak and recorded the stories associated with their paintings as told by the artist.[50] Yulidjirri's accounting of the Ubarr ceremony speaks to the entwined nature of art-making and ceremonial performance, as well as the interconnectivity between ancestral beings, the landscape, and contemporary Aboriginal peoples. Plotting to kill his wife and mother-in-law during the creation time, the hunter and magician Yirrbardbard "went up into a cave in the escarpments of Gunbalanya and drew a large figure of his wife on the wall, with a smaller one of her mother alongside. A snake in the act of striking was depicted at the foot of each woman." Yirrbardbard then transforms into a snake and murders them—afterwards he decides to start "planning a new ceremony to commemorate his actions" and calls upon Nadulmi, a kangaroo, to become the "Keeper of the new ceremony, which would be called 'Ubarr.'" Yulidjirri continues: "During the ceremony the sound of the stick tapping the drum would simulate the scratching of a goanna or bandicoot in a hollow log [how Yirrbardbard had tricked and subsequently murdered his wife and mother-in-law in his snake form]....The ceremony was to begin at the end of the dry season."[51] Yulidjirri's oral recounting of the Ubarr ceremony highlights how the ancestral beings themselves created art and enacted ceremonies simulating past actions. The inclusion of contemporary ceremonial participants in his painting conflate the contemporary moment with this ancestral time. Yirrbardbard as a snake, Nadulmi the kangaroo, the ceremonial implements, and the

contemporary ceremonial participants are all depicted on the same plane in Yulidjirri's *Ngurlmarrk—The Ubarr Ceremony*. Using *rarrk* designs as the unifying factor points toward the critical role art plays in engaging these temporalities. Yulidjirri's art practice resonates with Terry Smith's conception of contemporaneity as a "direct experience of multiplicitous complexity"—art, ceremony, indeed the everyday life of western Arnhem Land Aboriginal peoples consist of intertwined contemporaneities.[52]

Djakala's *Kangaroo of the Ubarr Ceremony* speaks to a different way to manifest Kunwinjku contemporaneity. Djakala's depiction of the Ubarr ceremony lacks the distinctive *rarrk* crosshatching seen in Yulidjirri's work. The figures in Djakala's painting instead feature parallel-lined *rarrk*. His style aligns him with other artists including Bardayal "Lofty" Nadjamerrek (c.1926–2009) and Dick Ngulangulei Murrumurru (c.1920–1988), who were inspired by the styles of painting found in rock art.[53] The distinction between these two groups, represented by Yulidjirri and Djakala, asserts the ongoing development and differentiation of styles within western Arnhem Land art. Tradition is both a continued presentation of knowledge and a continued negotiation of how to present and frame that knowledge. Djakala chooses to engage with the market by removing sacred material from his work. Whereas Yulidjirri's style connotes the layered temporalities operative within the Kunwinjku landscape, Djakala's style attests to the layered epistemologies present in Kunwinjku society. By removing sacred *rarrk* designs, Djakala places the market, and its largely Western audience, on similar grounds as those in the Kunwinjku community excluded from certain levels of sacred knowledge—young people, women, uninitiated men, and so on. Deeper meanings about the Ubarr ceremony are concealed from view. In this manner, Djakala activates Indigenous understandings of "inside" and "outside" knowledge and applies them to the market, enfolding non-Indigenous audiences into a Kunwinjku worldview.[54]

The Ubarr ceremony has not been conducted in western Arnhem Land since the mid-twentieth century.[55] Bark and paper paintings are now the main source of its stories and lessons, guaranteeing its transmission to the next generation.[56] The performance of the ceremony both recalls the time of the ancestral beings, but also ensures the continued fertility of their world. The Ubarr ceremony was linked to the cycles of seasonal rejuvenation enacted by Ngalyod (the Rainbow Serpent).[57] Kunwinjku temporality is not linear, but rather a "sedimentation of the past in the thickened present."[58] Past, present, and future are all activated in this ceremonial sequence. As the snake of Djakala's representation seems to wind around the kangaroo Nadulmi and as the participants of Yulidjirri's depiction encircle the ancestral beings and ongoing ceremony, tradition (this "sedimentation") is continually concealed and revealed, activated and re-activated, untangled and re-tangled. The world is continually made anew, evidenced by the continuing arrival of the wet monsoon season and the dry season. Aboriginal art-making enfolds these jostling temporalities into an enlivened and contemporaneous world-view. Yulidjirri and Djakala's different presentations of the Ubarr ceremony demonstrate Terry Smith's interpretation of contemporaneity as "the acceleration, ubiquity, and constancy of radical disjunctures of perception, of mismatching ways of seeing and valuing the same world."[59] While activating different ontologies and epistemologies, both Yulidjirri and Djakala negotiate their contemporary experience and relationship with the world around them through their art-making. As performances of the Ubarr ceremony disappear from

Kunwinjku society, the drawing and telling of the stories by artists like Thompson Yulidjirri and Djakala become the performance. From a Kunwinjku perspective, tradition, by its very nature, adapts, grows, and becomes contemporaneous continually. The key to tradition is not the specificity of the material, but the people and their practice.

NOTES

[1] Gabriel Maralngurra, quoted in Henry F. Skerritt, "Is Art History Any Use to Aboriginal Artists? Gabriel Maralngurra's *Contact Paintings*," in *Double Desire: Transculturation and Indigenous Contemporary Art*, ed. Ian McLean, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 239.

[2] Quentin Sprague, "Why Bark Painting is Contemporary Art," In *Art Collector: 2013 Guide to Indigenous Art Centres*, 20–21 (Art Edited Pty: 2013), 20–21.

[3] Fred Myers has since reasserted the authenticity of Western Desert acrylic painting, arguing that while the medium of expression has shifted, the ontologies have remained steeped in the land; Fred Myers, "Emplacement and Displacement: Perceiving the Landscape through Aboriginal Australian Acrylic Painting," *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 78, no. 4 (2013): 441.

[4] Scholars including Ian McLean and Partha Mitter have argued that modernism marked a singular temporal rupture; Ian McLean, "Aboriginal Modernism in Central Australia," in *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers*, ed. Kobena Mercer, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), 72–93; Partha Mitter, "Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery," *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (December 2008): 531–548.

[5] Terry Smith, "Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question," in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 7.

[6] Ibid., 8.

[7] Luke Taylor, "Flesh, Bone, and Spirit: Western Arnhem Land Bark Painting," in *Art from the Land: Dialogues with the Kluge-Ruhe Collection of Australian Aboriginal Art*, ed. Howard Morphy and Margo Smith Boles (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1999), 28.

[8] Luke Taylor, "Seeing the 'Inside': Kunwinjku Paintings and the Symbol of the Divided Body," in *Animals Into Art*, ed. Howard Morphy, (London, Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 377.

[9] Ibid., 371.

[10] Smith, "Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question," 8–9.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Marc Augé, quoted in Smith, "Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question," 10.

[13] Luke Taylor, "From Rock to Bark: Art from Western Arnhem Land," in *They Are Meditating: Bark Paintings from the MCA's Arnott's Collection*, ed. Linda Michael and Djon Mundine, (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), 147; "They were so interesting that, after collecting some from their studios, which meant taking down the slabs on which they were drawn, that formed, incidentally, the walls of their Mia-mias, I commissioned two or three of the best artists to paint me a series of canvases, or rather 'barks,' the price of which was governed by size…." Baldwin Spencer, *Wanderings in Wild Australia*, vol. II, (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1928), 793–794.

[14] This was not an unprecedented move—the earliest collections of bark paintings consisted of panels cut out from unused wet-season bark shelters. These include bark panels acquired by Foelsche in the Port Essington region in 1878 and Carrington in Field Island in 1887; Sally K. May, "Learning Art, Learning Culture: Art, Education, and the Formation of New Artistic Identities in Arnhem Land, Australia," in *Archaeologies of Art: Time, Place, and Identity*, ed. Inés Domingo Sanz, Dánae Fiore, and Sally K. May, (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2008), 174–175.

[15] Taylor, "From Rock to Bark: Art from Western Arnhem Land," 147; Two of these barks were included in *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia*, one collected by Spencer in 1912 (*Spirit Called Auuenau*, Fig. 55, cat. 9) and another collected in 1914 by Cahill for Spencer (*A Spirit Being*, Fig. 56, cat. 10); Peter Sutton, ed. *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia* (New York: G. Braziller, 1988), 40–41, 216–217.

[16] Taylor, "Flesh, Bone, and Spirit: Western Arnhem Land Bark Painting," 29.

[17] Spencer, *Wanderings in Wild Australia*, 793–794.

[18] Henry F. Skerritt, "Seeing Through Spencer: Gabriel Maralngurra's Paintings of Baldwin Spencer," *Pacific Arts: The Journal of the Pacific Arts Association* 14, no. 1–2 (2015): 112.

[19] Indeed, there are major differences between the latest phases of rock paintings in the western Arnhem Land escarpments and those works acquired by Spencer—they were not copies of rock art, but a new combination of styles. The x-ray paintings collected by Spencer suggest movement and narrative scenes, whereas x-ray rock paintings generally have a more isolated, static quality; May, "Learning Art, Learning Culture: Art, Education, and the Formation of New Artistic Identities in Arnhem Land, Australia," 176–177.

[20] Taylor, "Flesh, Bone, and Spirit: Western Arnhem Land Bark Painting," 30.

[21] Sutton, *Dreamings*, "Chapter II: Responding to Aboriginal Art"; "Chapter III: The Morphology of Feeling," 64–79.

[22] Roberta Smith also asserted that paintings on bark could be distinguished from acrylic works on canvas because the former were completed before 1970, ignoring the fact that many were made in the 1980s; Roberta Smith, "From Alien to Familiar," *New York Times* (December 16, 1988): 1–2.

[23] The exhibition organizers' emphasis on the traditional content of Aboriginal acrylic painting did little to counter this view.

[24] Sutton, *Dreamings*, 65.

[25] The most egregious example was the 2013 *Australia* exhibition held at the Royal Academy in London, which, unfortunately, harkened back to the display practice solidified by the exhibition of Spencer's commissions at the Museum of Modern Art's 1941 *Art of Australia 1788–1941*. Organized temporally, both of these institutions staged bark paintings at the beginning of their exhibitions, regardless of the date of their creation. These featured bark paintings were produced in the twentieth century; Henry F. Skerritt, "New Lines of Flight: Bark Painting as Contemporary Encounter," *Art Guide Australia* (January/February 2014), 63.

[26] Kunwinjku and Kuninjku are both dialects of the Binninj-Kunwok chain of languages and are closely related languages; Luke Taylor, "Fire in the Water: Inspiration from Country," in *Crossing Country: The Alchemy of Western Arnhem Land Art*, ed. Hetti Perkins, 115–130 (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2004), 126.

[27] "Any excursion into Kuninjku art requires an attempt to define some of the attributes that contribute to its greatness. A key consideration is that the work is produced with ochres and pigments on bark. Such works may have some unfortunate connotations in a market that is more conducive to acrylic on canvas or works on paper. For some, it is easy to slip into an identification of bark with mission regulation and promulgation of a traditional and 'primitive' form, in contrast to 'contemporary' works produced with contemporary materials. Yet for Kuninjku, the media of ochre and bark bespeaks their independence, their control over all stages of the production of their work, and their self-reliance on materials derived from their country"; Ibid., 128–129.

[28] Sprague, 21.

[29] Adrian Parker, *Images in Ochre: The Art and Craft of the Kunwinjku* (Roseville: Kangaroo Press, 1997), 15.

[30] Felicity Wright, *Contemporary Paintings from Western Arnhem Land: A Significant Collection of Recent Works on Paper by Kunwinjku: Flinders Art Museum, Flinders University, Adelaide, City Gallery, 5 June – 18 July 1999* (Adelaide: Flinders Art Museum, Flinders University, 1999), 6.

[31] Artists at Injalak come from many different regional clans, and the production of art at the center has served as the catalyst and medium for the construction of new individual and group identities; May, "Learning Art, Learning Culture: Art, Education, and the Formation of New Artistic Identities in Arnhem Land, Australia," 171, 188.

[32] Sally K. May, "Started Down at the Little Shed," in *Twined Together: Kunmadj Njalehnjaleken*, ed. Louise Hamby, (Gunbalanya: Injalak Arts and Crafts, 2005), 191.

[33] Ibid., 190.

[34] Gabriel Maralngurra, interview by [redacted]Audio Recording, March 26, 2018.

[35] May, "Learning Art, Learning Culture: Art, Education, and the Formation of New Artistic Identities in Arnhem Land, Australia," 181–182.

[36] Ibid., 183.

[37] Gabriel Maralngurra, interview by [redacted]March 26, 2018.

[38] The Aboriginal peoples of western Arnhem Land, for example, were born of *Yingarna* who came to their land from the north, across the sea. *Yingarna* is the mother Rainbow Serpent, who transmutes into the Earth Mother, *Waramurungundj*. Upon arrival to the mainland south of Croker Island, she also gave birth to male and female Rainbow Serpents, *Ngalyod* and *Ngalkunburriyaymi*, respectively. As *Waramurungundj* traversed the country, she created the land, flora, fauna, people, and rivers, before heading south beyond the extent of western Arnhem Land; Parker, *Images in Ochre*, 12.

[39] George Chaloupka, *Journey in Time: The World's Longest Continuing Art Tradition: The 50,000 Year Story of the Australian Aboriginal Rock Art of Arnhem Land* (Sydney: Reed New Holland/JB Books, 1999), 228–229.

[40] Wright, *Contemporary Paintings from Western Arnhem Land*, 5.

[41] The specific paper is *Aquarelle Arches 640 gsm* archival paper, produced in France and made from one hundred percent cotton. This is a common paper for other European and Australian contemporary artists as well; David Cossey, "Introduction to the Commission," in *Kunwinjku Art From Injalak 1991–1992: The John W. Kluge Commission*, ed. Christine Adrian Dyer, 12–17 (North Adelaide: Museum Art International, 1994), 12–13.

[42] Gabriel Maralngurra, interview by [redacted]March 26, 2018.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Taylor, "Flesh, Bone, and Spirit: Western Arnhem Land Bark Painting," Note 3, 40.

[46] Ibid., 46.

[47] Henry F. Skerritt, "Is Art History Any Use to Aboriginal Artists? Gabriel Maralngurra's *Contact Paintings*," in *Double Desire: Transculturation and Indigenous Contemporary Art*, ed. Ian McLean (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 231.

[48] Taylor, "Seeing the 'Inside': Kunwinjku Paintings and the Symbol of the Divided Body," 382.

[49] Taylor, "Flesh, Bone, and Spirit: Western Arnhem Land Bark Painting," 50.

[50] These stories accompany images of each commissioned painting, compiled in a catalog for the commission; Cossey, 14–15.

[51] "The Collection of Paintings," in *Kunwinjku Art From Injalak 1991–1992: The John W. Kluge Commission*, ed. Christine Adrian Dyer, 31–123 (North Adelaide: Museum Art International, 1994), 122.

[52] Smith, "Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question," 8.

[53] Taylor, "Flesh, Bone, and Spirit: Western Arnhem Land Bark Painting," 38.

[54] Taylor, "Seeing the 'Inside': Kunwinjku Paintings and the Symbol of the Divided Body," 371.

[55] "The [*Ubarr*] ceremony was at one time also performed in North-East Arnhem Land, where it was referred to by the name *Ngurlmarrk*—an alternative term also used in Western Arnhem Land today, at least by the handful of old men who retain knowledge of the ceremony. Warner, who did fieldwork in the late 1920s, believed the Ngurlmarrk was recently adopted into the ceremonial repertoire of North-East Arnhem Land and at the time was 'still being learned by the older men'. Warner's description of the ceremony and rituals makes it clear that this was a variation of the same ceremony performed in Western Arnhem Land. Also working in North-East Arnhem Land, Ian Keen confirmed the late adoption of the Ngurlmarrk, 'which probably originated from the *Wubarr* of Western Arnhem Land', but by the 1970s it was no longer being performed in the region. Ronald Berndt, writing in 1962, noted that '[t]o the best of my knowledge the *urlmag* has not been performed in full [in North-East Arnhem Land] for about 20 years'. The last performance of the *Wubarr* in Western Arnhem Land is thought to have been about 1975 at Wulwunj near Mount Borradaile, 30 km north-west of Gunbalanya"; Murray Garde, "The Forbidden Gaze: The 1948 *Wubarr* Ceremony Performed for the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land," in *Exploring the Legacy of the 1948 Arnhem Land Expedition*, ed. Martin Thomas and Margo Neale (Canberra, Australian National University Press, 2011), 407.

[56] Luke Taylor, *Seeing the Inside: Bark Painting in Western Arnhem Land* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 87.

[57] Ibid., 123, 237.

[58] Skerritt, "Is Art History Any Use to Aboriginal Artists? Gabriel Maralngurra's *Contact Paintings*," 234.

[59] Smith, "Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question," 8–9.