

MAINTAINING  
FAMILY  
TRADITION



AUSTRALIA

1994

International  
Year of the Family



INTERNATIONAL YEAR  
OF THE FAMILY

MAINTAINING  
FAMILY  
TRADITION

*An Exhibition of work by*  
WARMUN COMMUNITY ARTISTS  
*(Turkey Creek)*

KIMBERLEY, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

20TH - 23RD NOVEMBER 1994  
IYF NATIONAL CONFERENCE  
THE ADELAIDE FESTIVAL CENTRE



## FOREWARD

*“Everywhere in the world it has been the role of parents and children to pass on their beliefs, knowledge, customs, law and language to their children. In that way the culture of a group lives on in its distinctiveness, too, and consequently the pride of the people who own it. (Brandl, 1983).”*

For the two hundred odd years since the invasion of this country, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have suffered abuses of our human rights in all areas of our lives. Our lives and lands have been invaded and violated, our life choices controlled and manipulated.

And no where are questions of human rights confronted at a more intimate and practical level than in the family. It is in the daily lives of indigenous children, women and men that rhetorical concepts become lived experiences. It is in the raising of children, the houses people live in, the water they wash babies in, the medical care they receive only too late.


The International Year of the Family, hot on the heels of the International Year of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, provides a catalyst for this country to take seriously the rights of indigenous families.

In recent years, we have seen the first winds of change towards a climate of recognition and respect. However, if this country is genuinely to move towards a just relationship between its indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, the spirit of reconciliation or self-determination must not be allowed to degenerate into words on placards displayed in celebration of International Years. They must be evidenced in every system, policy and practice which concerns indigenous families: appropriate education; economic security; indigenous controlled child care and juvenile justice systems; adequate and appropriate health care and environmental health. The dynamic of the relationship must shift from patronage, control and interference, to support, co-operation and respect.

Ultimately, reconciliation and justice occur between human beings. They occur when each human being can look at the one who they think of as “other” and say: “Ah ha. Now I can start to see what they mean, what they are saying, how they feel about the world.” Start to recognise that they are not the same. And that they are neither worse nor better. Start to recognise and honour difference within the context of shared humanity.

If this is genuinely to be the “Decade of Reconciliation”, it must begin with an open dialogue between peoples. A dialogue which allows peoples to come into the room as they are; a dialogue based on a genuine attempt by non-indigenous Australians to see this country with the eyes of our peoples and to listen to our stories; a dialogue where indigenous peoples are able to say who we are and to determine the parameters of both what and how we will communicate.

Since first contact with the invaders of this country, we have been the object of a continual flow of commentary, classification and representation. Laws, paintings, films, books and minds are filled with images made about us by all those experts who have claimed the authority of knowledge. All except those who had the expertise of their own lives.



Our voices, our visions, our perspectives are notable by their absence. Our public images and identities have not been our own. Even today, when indigenous peoples and all things indigenous have become “trendy”, our own perspectives are still relegated to the margins of representation. It remains the exception and not the rule that we enjoy that basic human right to say who we are, and represent our lives and worlds from our own cultural perspectives.

Through the art works which we create in our communities the voices of indigenous peoples find expression. And through the paintings, the songs, the photographs and films of indigenous peoples, non-indigenous Australians have an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of how we experience the world, and what is important to us. This applies not just to those interested in “art”, but to policy makers, health workers, mining company executives and economists. Because for indigenous peoples, “art” is not something that belongs in a specifically designed building to be visited on specifically designated days. It is an integral part of our life experience, linked in with and reflecting our family relations, our relationship with the land, our politics, our economics, our spirituality.

In particular, paintings and the teaching of painting techniques are not merely artistic practices. They are an occasion for the transmission of our cultures. As old people teach the young how to paint with traditional ochres they tell the stories, teach responsibilities and pass on the knowledge which they were given by their elders.

The paintings in this exhibition are the symbols of the relationships and cultures of the people of the Warmun community. They are a precious invitation to participate in the lives and worlds of the Warmun people. I trust that they will be received in this spirit of respect.

The exhibition is well placed in the context of the International Year of the Family Conference, because it serves to remind us all what we are all about. The recognition of the rights of all peoples cannot come without understanding, and real understanding cannot come without listening. The ultimate point of talking and telling is to enable the experience of peoples to be acknowledged. Financial compensation may be given for loss of land. But justice and reconciliation can only occur through the opening of hearts.

When the rhetoric and openings are over, and the committees have stopped meeting, we all go home to our own lives and face the bottom line reality which tells us whether we have achieved our high ideals of justice and human rights. When indigenous families can say that we enjoy the security, health and cultural integrity which is our right, and non-indigenous people can look with open hearts into the mirror of this country, we can all move with clear conscience to the next International Year.

**Mick Dodson**

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Social Justice Commissioner*

*Brandl, M, “A Certain Heritage: Women and Their Children In North Australia”, in Gale, F (ed), We are bosses ourselves: the Status and Role of Aboriginal Women today, Canberra ACT, AIAS, 1983.*



**21. Mabel Juli**

Nyawooroo

Ochre on Linen

760 x 600

**Untitled**

A story of an old woman that was digging bush potato and the killing of two women. Mabel's mother told her this story.



**22. Queenie McKenzie**

Nakarra

76 years

Ochre on Linen

1060 x 1060

**Koora Koora Dreamtime**

Bird put all the stones on this hill, the crane bird. This is a story Queenie tells her children.



Mabel Juli, Deorme Patrick, Shirley Purdie, Sandra Malay and Madigan Thomas.  
Seated: Queenie McKenzie and Rover Thomas.





ABORIGINAL ART  
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