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Becoming art: some relationships between Pacific art and Western culture

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BECOMING ART:
SOME RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PACIFIC ART
AND WESTERN CULTURE

by

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CHAPTER 4: 'REGIMES OF VALUE'\(^1\)

Bokken ngarribimbun dorlobbo: ngarrikarrme gunwok kunmurrngayek ngadberre ngarribimbun dja mak kunwarnde kne ngarribimbun. (There are two reasons why we do our art: the first is to maintain our culture, the second is to earn money).

Injalak Arts and Crafts Corporate Plan

INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter, the example of bark paintings was used to test Western categories for indigenous art. Reference was also made to Aboriginal systems of classification, in particular the ways Yolngu people classify painting, including bark painting. Morphy's concept, that Aboriginal art exists in two 'frames', was briefly introduced, and his view was cited that Yolngu artists increasingly operate within both 'frames', the Aboriginal frame and the European frame (Morphy 1991:26).

This chapter develops the theme of how indigenous art objects are valued, both within the creator society and when they enter the Western art-culture system. When aesthetic objects move between cultures the values attached to them may change. In order to illuminate this claim it is necessary to

\(^1\) The title of this chapter is after Appadurai (1986).
establish what is meant by ‘values’ and describe what concepts of values are useful in this context. The overall aim of the chapter is to establish that ‘regimes of value’ exist in both indigenous and Western societies. As objects move within and between ‘regimes of value’, they acquire their own ‘cultural biographies’; they may become commodities following an exchange or they may be deliberately acquired for a new context which shields them from commoditisation.

The theses of a number of authors are discussed and case studies presented to uphold the claims they make about values and the value systems of different cultures. The authors and their claims which are central to the aims of this chapter are the following.

(i) The basic definition of values drawn from Norman Feather’s (1975) study. Of particular interest is the relationship perceived between person values and object values.

(ii) Arjun Appadurai’s (1986:3ff) claim that, during their lifetime, objects may pass through several ‘regimes of value’, whether in indigenous culture or Western culture, or both. His observation that specific objects have specific values in different cultural and historical milieus provides the model for this chapter.

(iii) Igor Kopytoff’s (1986:64ff) claim that ‘things’ (objects) have a ‘cultural life’ and that the ‘biography of things’ may be perceived and written or known in oral history. Kopytoff’s claim is accepted by Appadurai and William Davenport (1986) and strong evidence for it is produced in the case studies discussed below. The example of Maori taonga (treasured
objects), drawn from Sidney Moko Mead (1984) also supports this claim.

(iv) Appadurai, Kopytoff, Davenport and Morphy recognise that, in some circumstances, objects have economic value (that is, are commodities), but that this is not the only value they may have. Some valuable and prestigious objects may never become commoditised, whether they exist for the time being in indigenous or Western 'regimes of value'.

(v) James Clifford (1988:212ff) devised a model for the movement of indigenous objects through several 'semantic zones' in what he calls the 'Western art-culture system' (see Chapter 1). This model is found to be compatible with Appadurai's model of 'regimes of value'.

(vi) It is also recognised by Appadurai and Kopytoff that there is a different emphasis on commodity value in large-scale, highly commercialised Western societies than there is in small-scale, non-commercially oriented societies which tend to emphasise the local socio-cultural value of treasured objects.

(vii) The various authors recognise that human actors create the values in objects, and that exchanges illuminate both the value of the object and the values held by the persons engaged in the exchange.

Following this introductory section, a brief exposition of the main points of each author's claim(s) will be made. Then case studies will be presented to demonstrate that 'regimes of value' exist within indigenous societies as well as within the Western art-culture system. The exchange of shell valuables in
the *kula* ceremonial exchange cycle in the Massim area of south-east Papua New Guinea exemplifies a 'regime of values' in an indigenous society. In fact, Appadurai (1986:21) finds the politics of value in the *kula* so complex, that he regards the kula as a 'tournament of value'.

Other kinds of value, including commodity value, exist in both indigenous and Western societies. Davenport's (1986) example of presentation vessels from Aroiki in the Solomon Islands is one where precious objects have remained non-commoditised in both indigenous and Western milieus. Mead's (1984) description of the 'transcendental' value acquired by certain Maori *taonga* (treasured objects) indicates another type of non-commodity value appreciated by members of a particular society. Both examples also demonstrate how objects acquire what Kopytoff calls a 'cultural biography'.

Morphy's (1991) concept of Yolngu art existing in two 'frames', an Aboriginal frame and a Western frame, and how they overlap, is compatible with Appadurai's, Davenport's and Kopytoff's theses. Each 'frame' has its own set of values, and this case study also considers what values may be important to both.

Clifford's model demonstrates how art objects may pass through several 'semantic zones' in the Western art-culture system, and are differently perceived and valued in each zone. The varying levels of appreciation and acceptance of the art of Aboriginal painter Albert Namatjira by Australia's white society, over the decades 1940s to 1990s, is used to illustrate Clifford's model.
Both Kopytoff and Appadurai stress the tendency in Western societies, with their large-scale, commercialised and monetised economies, to be 'swamped by commoditization' (Kopytoff 1986:87). In their cross-cultural exchanges with small-scale, non-commercialised and non-monetised indigenous societies, Westerners tend to emphasise the commodity value of things and, understanding the value of money best, offer it in exchange for indigenous art objects.

The models proposed by Appadurai and Clifford, and the claims made by the various authors (cited above and further explained below) are not contradictory, but complementary. They are explanations of the same phenomenon, viz that objects may move within and between cultures and the values attached to them may change when they move.

ON THE NATURE OF VALUE AND THE OPERATION OF VALUE SYSTEMS

Feather: the nature of value(s)

The concept of value is a concern of a number of disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. As Feather perceives: of value

(i)ts ubiquitous nature indicates that it is an important concept, one that many disciplines have found necessary to invent when coming to grips . . . with the ways in which man is moulded by his culture and its social institutions, and, more widely, with the distinctive characteristics of societies or cultures (Feather 1975:2).
Feather's findings resulted from a value survey conducted among students at Flinders University in South Australia. In the first chapter of his book (Feather 1975:3ff) he reviews the literature on the nature of human values, in particular drawing on the contribution of Milton Rokeach. Feather comments that Rokeach indicates that the value concept has been used in two distinctively different ways. One might say that a person has a value - that [they] value honesty or equality or salvation. And one might say that an object possesses value - that it is worth a certain amount of money or preferred to other objects according to some index of utility . . . . According to Rokeach it is important to decide whether the systematic study of values will proceed more heuristically if it focuses upon the values that persons are said to have or upon the values that objects are said to have . . . .

Values do not exist independently of persons; nor do they exist independently of objects. They are influenced both by the properties of the person engaged in valuing - properties that relate especially to [their] background of experience - and by the characteristics of the object being valued (Feather 1975:3).

According to Feather (1975:4), Rokeach believed that there were compelling reasons to slant the study of values more to the 'person pole' than the 'object pole' because 'values are central, dynamic and economical units influencing a person's attitudes and behaviour'. Because of the nature of his study Feather concentrates on personal values. In this chapter, in contrast, the concentration is on the dynamic relationship between persons and objects. However, there are a number of useful distinctions Feather (and Rokeach) have made about the
essential nature of value(s). Only a very brief precis of these is
given here, as this is not the main topic of this chapter. These
researchers (and others referred to in Feather's study) have
found that:
(i) values are assumed to be enduring or stable structures,
providing continuity amid changing circumstances;
(ii) values can be defined in terms of one's belief about the
desirable;
(iii) value is a preference as well as a conception of the
desirable;
(iv) values are assumed to become organised into hierarchies of
importance, that is, into value systems;
(v) the function that values serve is to provide standards, and
(vi) values may be seen as the products of cultural,
institutional and personal forces acting upon the individual
(Feather 1975:5-11).
For the purposes of this chapter Feather's findings on the
properties of values as described in (i) to (vi) above, and that
values have 'person poles' and 'object poles' are accepted.

Appadurai, Kopytoff, Davenport, Morphy and Clifford
consider, through different perspectives, the values adhering to
objects in different cultural systems.

Kopytoff: the 'cultural biography of things

The two concepts of Kopytoff's found useful for the purposes of
this chapter are that of the 'cultural biography of things' and
the different relationships between people and things in small-
scale, uncommercialised societies and large-scale, commercialised societies. His 'biographical approach' to objects considers where a thing comes from and who made it; what has been its career so far; what possibilities are inherent in its status and how such cultural markers are arrived at; and the effect of age on the object and its usefulness (Kopytoff 1986:66-67). The culture within which an object is in demand provides the classifications and commonly held values for it.

Kopytoff explains how commodities, which he defines as 'an item with use value that also has exchange value', must be culturally defined:

Commodities must be not only produced materially as things, but also culturally marked as being a certain kind of thing. Out of the total range of things available in a society, only some of them are considered appropriate for marking as commodities. Moreover, the same thing may be treated as a commodity at one time and not at another. And finally, the same thing may be treated as a commodity by one person and as something else by another. Such shifts and differences in whether and when a thing is a commodity reveal a moral economy that stands behind the objective economy of visible transactions (Kopytoff 1986:64).

He also recognises that some things are publicly precluded from being commoditised, and that when this occurs, such prohibitions are cultural and upheld collectively (1986:73).¹

¹ See discussion of Solomon Islands presentation vessels precluded from becoming commodities later in the chapter.
Kopytoff perceives Western society as representative of 'an ideal type of highly commercialised and monetized society'. In his opinion

one of the predispositions [of Western society] is conceptually separating people from things, and of seeing people as the natural preserve of individuation . . . and things as the natural preserve for commodification . . . .

Whatever the complex reasons, the conceptual distinction between the universe of people and the universe of objects had become culturally axiomatic in the West by the mid-twentieth century (Kopytoff 1986:84).

He claims that in large-scale, commercialised and monetised societies, such as Western societies today, money and commodities ‘tend to invade almost every aspect of existence’, leading to a ‘flattening of values’ (this has already been commented on in Chapter 3). He also claims that, in Western societies, the only reliable, readily understood, public valuation which exists is money exchanged for commodities. This is because Western societies are large and complex and within their composite societies people have conflicting social values, lack a clear hierarchy of loyalties and a specific cultural identity (1986:88-89).

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1 I prefer not to follow the Americanised spelling used by Appadurai and Kopytoff, e.g. 'monetized', but have not altered it when citing them.

2 But he notes that, throughout history people have been commoditised, in slavery, prostitution and the sale of infants.

3 By uncertainty of identity he means the mobility of the individual in Western society, their freedom to adhere to any number of political, cultural or religious groups and to change their adherence and the fact that an individual may select their particular set of values from an extensive field.
In contrast to Western societies, the structure of the economies of small-scale, uncommercialised societies (especially in the past), 'resulted in a relative consonance of economic, cultural and private valuations' (Kopytoff 1986:88). As Kopytoff notes (1986:89), 'What one glimpses through the biographies of both people and things in these [small-scale] societies is, above all, the social system and the collective understanding on which it rests'.

**Appadurai: 'regimes of value'**

Appadurai uses the same definition of commodity as Kopytoff (an item of use value that also has exchange value) and attributes this definition to George Simmel. But what we ought to mean by value is, according to Simmel, 'never an inherent property of objects, but a judgement made about them from time to time by different people in different circumstances' (Simmel 1907 trans.1978, quoted in Appadurai 1986:4). Simmel's view that 'exchange is the source of economic value', underwrites the remainder of Appadurai's theses (Appadurai 1986:3ff). Appadurai gives a further exposition of Simmel's theory of economic value and applies it to Marxist economics, which is not relevant here. He then takes Simmel's observations in another direction, drawing his idea of the existence of 'regimes of value' from them. As Appadurai explains:

This alternative direction . . . entails exploring the conditions under which economic objects circulate in different regimes of value in
Specific things circulate in specific cultural and historical milieus. Desire and demand, reciprocal sacrifice and power interact to create economic value in specific social situations (Appadurai 1986:4).

Later in the same article, Appadurai acknowledges and uses Kopytoff's concept of the 'cultural biography of things', in particular emphasising that things can move in and out of the commodity state:

I propose that the commodity situation in the social life of any 'thing' be defined as the situation in which its exchangability (past, present or future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature. Further, the commodity situation, defined this way, can be disaggregated into: (1) the commodity phase in the social life of any thing; (2) the commodity candidacy of any thing; and (3) the commodity context in which any thing may be placed (Appadurai 1986:13 his emphasis).

A crucial point that Appadurai makes is that, although there may be a cultural framework which admits the commodity candidacy of certain things, 'some exchange situations, both inter- and intracultural, are characterised by a shallower set of shared standards than others'. Because of this, he writes:

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1 Kopytoff's essay appears in the volume edited by Appadurai (1986), who remarks, 'Of the many virtues of Kopytoff's model the most important, in my view, is that it proposes a general processual model of commoditization, in which objects may be moved both into and out of the commodity state' (Appadurai 1986:17).

2 Appadurai refers to Maquet's (1979) distinctions between commodities, viz (1) commodities by destination; (2) commodities by metamorphosis; (3) commodities by diversion and (4) ex-commodities, as being relevant to his own distinctions.
I prefer to use the term *regimes of value*, which does not imply that every act of commodity exchange presupposes a complete cultural sharing of assumptions, but rather that the degree of value coherence may be highly variable from situation to situation, and from commodity to commodity. A regime of value, in this sense, is consistent with both very high and very low sharing of standards by the parties to a particular commodity exchange. Such regimes of value account for the constant transcendence of cultural boundaries by the flow of commodities, where culture is understood as a bounded and localised system of meanings (Appadurai 1986:15 his emphasis).

For example, Appadurai refers to the commodity context where ‘dealings with strangers might provide contexts for the commoditization of things which are otherwise protected from commoditisation’. Also the commodity context may bring together people from quite different cultural systems who share only the minimal understandings about the objects in question and agree only about the terms of trade (1986:15).

Appadurai finds that the *kula* system of ceremonial exchanges, which are a feature of Massim society (south-east Papua New Guinea), provides evidence of a ‘regime of value’ in an indigenous small-scale society. This is discussed below.

*Clifford: movement of objects within the Western art-culture system*

In comparison to Appadurai’s theory of objects moving through
'regimes of value', both within indigenous cultural systems and from indigenous into Western cultural systems, Clifford's theory concentrates on the movement of objects in the 'Western art-culture system' (Clifford 1988:215, see model in Chapter 1). According to Clifford, 'Western museums, exchange systems, disciplinary archives and discursive traditions form the Western 'art-culture system' . . . through which in the last century exotic objects have been contextualised and given value in the West'.

In Clifford's model of the movement of objects in the Western art-culture system, objects from indigenous cultures travel around a 'field of meanings and institutions'. Entering the art market, images and objects from indigenous societies become commodities in one or more strata of the Western market economy; some may be accepted into what he terms the 'zone of art'. Each of the 'semantic zones', viz 'art' and 'non-art'; 'authentic' and 'inauthentic', identified by Clifford, has its own value system, but objects may be transferred between them. Clifford finds the Western trait of collecting a 'crucial process of Western identity formation', and writes that

(g)athered artifacts - whether they find their way into curio cabinets,

private living rooms, museums of ethnography, folklore or

1 Maquet's (1979) 'theory of metamorphosis' is an earlier, widely known, conceptualisation of the different paths indigenous art objects moved on into Western culture. For example, they may be art objects by destination, having been made specifically for the art market, or art by metamorphosis, that is having arrived in the Western art-culture system from a different regime of value. Although his theory is relevant, it has often been cited and the ones selected here represent later research into the phenomenon of the transference or non-transference of value across cultures.
fine art - function within a developing capitalist "system of objects" [Baudrillard 1968]. By virtue of this system a world of value is created and a meaningful deployment and circulation of artifacts maintained (Clifford 1988:220).

In this statement similarities between Clifford’s ‘zones’ and Appadurai’s ‘regimes of value’ can be detected, suggesting that their models are complementary. This is an example where scholars from different disciplines (art history and economics respectively), have invented their own models to describe essentially the same phenomenon.

Later in the chapter, Clifford’s model of the movement of art objects through ‘semantic zones’ in the Western art-culture system is applied to the art of Aboriginal artist Albert Namatjira.¹

THE CASE STUDIES

The five case studies which appear below support the claims made by the various theorists above by giving actual examples where their models or claims may be tested. First, the existence of an identifiable ‘regime of values’ within an indigenous society is discerned in the study of the kula. Appadurai discusses the kula in terms of a ‘regime of values’ and a ‘tournament of values’ and information from other scholars supports his argument. Also in the context of the kula, an example is given of how an object from Western society may move into an indigenous ‘regime of values’. The case of giant
presentation vessels from Aoriki, Solomon Islands, and Maori taonga, illustrate Kopytoff's concept of the 'cultural biography of things, and his assertion that some things are shielded from commoditisation. The Western emphasis on the commodity value of art objects is illustrated when the way Yolngu people value their art is contrasted with the values of the Western art market. Finally, Clifford's model is tested with the art of the Aboriginal artist Albert Namatjira. Namatjira's art is found to have moved through various 'semantic zones' in the Western art-culture system in the past few decades. These 'semantic zones' may also be viewed as 'regimes of value' in Western society. Aboriginal society has developed its own 'regime of value' to encompass Namatjira and his art.

The kula: a 'regime of value'

According to Appadurai's model, an object of value can be seen as being in a state of procession, with its trajectory being redirected from time to time by those who are temporarily in possession of it. As he comments:

it is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things. Thus, even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context (Appadurai 1986:5).

A particular object circulating in a specific cultural and historical milieu can have one or more sets of values attached
to it, such as will be described for *kula* valuables from the Massim culture, located in what is now known as the Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea.

The kind of value an object may have often rests on the particular context in which it is used for the time being. In Massim culture, two types of shell valuables known as *bagi* (necklaces) and *mwali* (armshells), feature in the complex ceremonial exchange rituals of *kula*.1 When these shell valuables are given to a partner in the context of *kula* exchange reciprocal obligations are established, forming a continual chain of giving and receiving. Successful participants in *kula* rituals are rewarded by a number of factors, one of the most important being the accrual of prestige (Firth 1983:89ff). And, as Nancy Munn noted

\[(\text{a})\text{though men appear to be the agents in defining shell value, in fact, without shells, men cannot define their own value; in this respect, shells and men are reciprocally agents of each other's value definition (Munn 1983:283).}\]

Delayed exchange is often a feature of reciprocal gifting systems, the accrual of prestige resting with the donor until their partner attempts to outdo the previous achievement.2 In the *kula*, transactions are made more complex by the continual

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1 *The kula* is one of the most well described exchange cycles in ethnography and economic anthropology, from Malinowski (1922) to Leach and Leach 1983. See Martha McIntyre (1983), *The Kula: A Bibliography*, Cambridge University Press.

2 Another example of a complex delayed exchange system in New Guinea, where one of the main motivations is the accrual of prestige, is the *moka* ceremony of the Melpa people in the Western Highlands. See A. Strathern (1972).
movement of *bagi* and *mwali* in opposite directions, as well as competitive negotiations between rival partners, and the donor partner's calculations of exchanges which would maximise his short- and/or long-term interests. J.W. Leach (1983:2-4) presents twenty-two points necessary to construct the fundamental structure and logic of *kula* exchanges. However, from time to time the holders of *bagi* and *mwali* may withdraw their objects from *kula* exchange, making them *kitoum*, that is, functioning in domains of exchange other than *kula*. This may occur when *bagi* and *mwali* are required for mortuary ceremonies or affinal gifts. In some circumstances *bagi* and *mwali* may have exchange value outside of *kula* transactions between partners, for example, when used as part payment in the agreed price for a *kula* canoe (Campbell 1983:203-4).

Bronislaw Malinowski's studies of Trobriand Islanders' social and economic systems established that there was a distinction between ordinary commodities, which could be exchanged in conventional markets, and valuables, which could only be exchanged for one another in restricted, ritualised contexts in Trobriands society (Malinowski 1922). In G. Mauss's analysis of exchange systems in small-scale societies, such as the Trobriand Islands, commodity exchange (for example, payment of shell money, greenstone axe blades, etc. for a canoe) and barter (exchange of food products) are described as relatively impersonal, whereas gift exchange is intensely socialised (Mauss 1976).

These complexities have serious implications in the management of shell valuables. Because of this, Appadurai
(1986:21, his emphasis) identifies the kula as 'the paradigm of what I propose to call tournaments of value':

> Tournaments of value are complex periodic events that are removed in some culturally-defined way from the routines of economic life. Participation in them is likely to be both a privilege of those in power and an instrument of status contests between them . . . . Finally, what is at issue in such tournaments is not just status, rank, fame or reputation of actors, but the disposition of the central tokens of value in the society in question (Appadurai 1986:21).

*Bagi* and *mwali* move through systems of exchange and regimes of value within Massim society according to principles developed by that society. They can be the focus of ceremonial exchange in *kula*, represent kinship sets of relationships and obligations and can also be used in specific types of commodity exchanges. *Bagi* and *mwali* can also be withdrawn from circulation by being sold to European collectors. Collections of Massim material culture, including *bagi* and *mwali*, exist in many Western museums. But it is most likely that these objects were sold or bartered for other goods, rather than by the Europeans who collected them being engaged in *kula* or other traditional forms of exchange operating in Massim society.

The changing status of objects is observable within the original environment as well as when it moves out into the

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1 For example, some collected by Malinowski are in the South Australian Museum, but it is not known whether these particular *bagi* and *mwali* were circulating in *kula* or *kitoum* when Malinowski acquired them.

2 Bill Rudd, a long-term expatriate resident of Kiriwina in the Trobriand Islands, is an active *kula* participant. It is unlikely that he sells *kula* items, but information is insufficient. He appears taking part in *kula* in the film, *Rings of Power* (Jutta Malnic (dir.) 1993).
wider world. Different aesthetic, economic, social, and even political attachments are made to it according to the convictions and values shaping the opinions of those who consider it as a thing worthy of admiration and/or desire (Appadurai 1986:5). Shell is not regarded as an aesthetic substance in Western culture, nor are shells regarded as valuable (except those shell valuables which are collector's items). However, anthropologists, students of indigenous art and others who understand the significance of kula admire kula valuables in museums collections, and they may be sought after by collectors of indigenous art. Should a shell valuable change hands among Western collectors of indigenous art, it is not likely that the 'biography' acquired by the piece while it was a kula valuable will be known, but its monetary value partly depends on its history, if known, including which Western collectors have owned it.

The most common cases of traditionally significant and valued objects moving from indigenous contexts into Western contexts is when items are sold to dealers or collectors. Western objects are also frequently transferred into indigenous cultures, and the values attached to various items range from superficial to meaningful. At the superficial level, for example, a number of authors have commented on and photographed Papua New Guineans who have taken a fancy to all kinds of cast-off Western objects - tin lids, bottle caps, strips of rag, buttons, casters, etc. - and fashioned them into headresses and other items of adornment (Berman 1990; Kirk and Strathern 1984). However, although Western objects
incorporated into adornment may have temporary appeal, or even some value, they generally do not have the symbolic and prestige value of indigenous objects used in the assemblage, such as certain feathers in the headress, pig tallies or kina shells.

An example of where Western objects have entered an indigenous 'regime of value', and become important within this context, was related to me by the Trobriand Islander, John Kasaipwalova, a senior *kula* participant and well known writer. He recounted that, before any European navigators had explored the southernmost archipelagoes of Papua New Guinea, a ship was wrecked on what became called Chinaman's Beach on Rossel Island. Although there is no written record of this shipwreck, oral evidence suggests that the ship was a Spanish one, returning Chinese indentured labourers from a colony in South America to China. The Rossel Islanders were cannibals. They apparently lured the crew and Chinese one by one to an isolated beach and feasted on them. A number of coins, struck with the image of the Spanish Emperor of Mexico, Maximillian 1, were kept by the Rossel Islanders and became attached to *kula* valuables by them. Over time the *kula* valuables incorporating these coins became one of the rarest and most prestigious items in circulation (Kasaipwalova pers. comm. 1993).\(^1\)

\(^1\) In 1994 Beran (who was familiar with Kasaipwalova's story) sent me an extract from W.E. Armstrong's (1928) book, *Rossel Island*. Armstrong recounts that a vessel, the St Paul, was wrecked on a reef near Rossel Island. The captain and officers abandoned the wreck, leaving the Chinese coolies who were being taken to Australia abandoned. The fate of most of the Chinese, was that they were eaten by cannibals (Armstrong 1928:108-110).
Presentation vessels from Aoriki, Solomon Islands, moving through non-commoditised regimes of value

If a specific kind of object is appropriated into a new cultural and/or historical context, another differently rationalised set of values will be attached to it. An aesthetic object may travel through several 'regimes of value' during its existence, and according to the time and place of its trajectory, the values people attach to it will be based on different premises. In the following example from Aoriki, (Santa Catalina, East Solomon Islands), William Davenport (1986) investigated the movement of set of valued objects from their traditional context into the cultural domain of museums. Both the traditional cultural context and museum context had established regimes of values which precluded the objects from becoming commoditised. According to Davenport (1986:95), certain types of presentation vessels and bonito canoes were made on Aoriki for memorials. Such objects were, 'beyond the potential of exchangability and therefore outside the category of commodities'.

Until the mid-1960s, when the Aoriki people converted to Christianity, a series of memorials was used to commemorate the death of a member of the community. Of the first two kinds of memorial ceremony, owota honoured any deceased person and rate matau fa commemorated an important member of the social

Nothing is said about the coins, but that does not disprove that such coins exist and entered circulation in the kula.
hierarchy. The third type of memorial, -murina, was held much less frequently and took several years to plan and execute. -murina asserted the political and economic strength and reputation of a particular community to others in the region. On the spiritual plane it demonstrated the efficacy of the relationship between humans and deities by elevating a select few of the deceased to the company of spirits who control the destinies of the living (Davenport 1986:104). The community holding the -murina commissioned special items to be made by the exceptional artists and master craftsmen of the region. These were great wooden presentation vessels four to five metres long, elegant structures to display food presentations, and sacred bonito canoes. Davenport comments that

an exceptional work is thought to be due to more than human talent. There must be inspiration and assistance than can only come from tutelary deities. Thus, in every truly great work of art there is a connection with the supernatural, an element of the spiritual . . . .

The use of exceptional talent is confined to a limited set of objects for use only in ritualised or sacred contexts . . . afterward (the object) becomes a memento of the event for which it was created . . . . Once the object has been used in a ritual it is never sold or exchanged again. Canoes for bonito fishing are used repeatedly, but they are kept in the sacred precincts of a canoe house . . . . When these canoes become old or unserviceable they must be allowed to rot away in the house with other cast off sacra (Davenport 1986:105-6).

Davenport argues that the use of exceptional skills designates certain objects apart from ordinary things, committing them to a 'decommoditised' domain in which social
and religious values prevail over economic ones. But what occurs to such objects when they are removed from their customary setting, and how is this likely to occur? Davenport refers to a specific set of 'ritual communion bowls' which he obtained in 1964 from Nagatera, Santa Ana, Solomon Islands, from a community which had recently accepted Christianity. Half of the set he acquired was placed, with the concurrence of the community, at the University Museum, Pennsylvania, and half at the Solomon Islands National Museum, Honiara. The undertaking was given that they were going into museum collections and would never be sold (Davenport 1986:107).

In this example nothing was given to the community by the museum in exchange for the vessels, because the objects were never used for exchange in their traditional context. However, the museums concerned made a commitment to preserve and guard the items as part of the Aoriki peoples' cultural heritage. Donating important objects to museums precludes them from becoming commoditised. It was the practise of Aoriki society to set aside culturally important objects in the canoe house and members of Aoriki society were willing to adapt this practise to that of placing their important objects in museums for safe-keeping.

These two examples presented support for Appadurai's theory that aesthetic objects move through 'regimes of value'. This is observable in the case of kula valuables, which can move from one traditional context to another. The giant presentation vessels from Santa Catalina provided an example where objects of ritual, symbolic and heritage value moved
from their original context to the National Museum of the Solomon Islands, where they became part of the national heritage. At the same time, similar vessels moved into a museum in the U.S.A., where they may be esteemed for their value as cultural artifacts, provide evidence of the skills and beliefs of the Aoriki people, and contribute to the universal heritage of humankind. In both museum contexts such treasured objects are shielded from commodification.

*Transcendental value*

Kopytoff supports Davenport's point that societies set apart a certain portion of their material culture by singularising it and sacralising it in a special context. In Kopytoff's, assessment, certain (types of) objects thus become

> the symbolic inventory of a society . . . . Power often asserts itself symbolically precisely by insisting on the right to singularise an object, or a set or class of objects (Kopytoff 1986:73).

Singular objects which are regarded as powerful cultural and/or sacred symbols, can have another dimension, a transcendental quality, which heightens its value within the community that perceives this quality. For New Zealand Maoris and other Polynesian societies, this extra essence or aura attached to an object is its *mana*, inseparably infused into the object by the power of its associations.

Mead describes the transcendental value of *mana* in relation to a Maori carved treasure box:
A lump of wood . . . is thus transformed through the art process, by building words (*korero* [= text or story]) into it and by contact with people, into a thing Maoris class as *taonga*, or in full, *taonga tuku iho* . . . a highly prized object that has been handed down from the ancestors . . . .

It must be made clear that a *taonga tuku iho* is not the equivalent of 'art object' even though it embraces the latter. If we want to be specific we must add the qualifier *whakairo*; hence, *taonga whakairo* (prized decorated object [*whakairo* is quality, the difference between crudity and elegance] . . . .

The *mana* of the personalities [of the artists, chiefly people and others associated with the art] together with the power of the words and of the form created by the artist conspire to produce a powerful *taonga* - a *taonga* with *mana*, a *taonga* with imminent power, an object that has within it a hidden force (Mead 1984:20-21).

Mead considers William Fagg's (1950) observations of the power charged into African art by the use of appropriate rituals and social context as similar to the *mana* inherent in Maori *taonga*. From the Maori point of view a *taonga* is not static and inert: the power it has to move the viewer emotionally and physically is intentionally charged into the piece by the artist who strives, 'to imbue his work with *ihi* [power], *wehi* [fear] and *wana* [authority]' (Mead 1984:21). The Maori audience viewing such work identifies with its affirmation of Maori cultural values. The Maori belief of the *mana* inherent in *taonga* is still recognised by later generations, who also venerate such objects as a physical reminder of their ancestral heritage (Mead 1984:23).
However, belief in the effective power of objects is not a requirement or asset in calculations of value in the Western art-culture system. And while they may be considered rare and valuable items of Maori material culture, the mana of many taonga has gone unnoticed when they have been transferred to the custody of Western museums. A number of taonga were displayed at the exhibition Watu Ahu Rua during the 1992 Adelaide Festival. Most viewers found the taonga awe-inspiring examples of Maori woodcarvers skills, but were not aware of the special esteem their mana held for Maori people. Some fortunate visitors (including the writer) were present at the daily opening time of the exhibition and observed a short formal ceremony where the Maori caretakers invoked the mana of the taonga and placed a fresh fern underneath each as a token of respect.

Two 'frames' for Aboriginal art

This case study considers the 'regimes of value', or what Morphy terms, 'frames', for Aboriginal art. When Aboriginal groups produce art for their own use it maintains their own cultural values. The Western art market has a radically different set of values for dealing with what it views as significant Aboriginal art. But Morphy perceives that there are some interests and values which overlap (apart from the self-interest of the art market for profit, and the willingness of Aboriginal artists to sell paintings), in which the interests and values of both Aboriginal and Western cultures are articulated.
Analyses of the production, circulation and display of Aboriginal art recognise that it circulates in two different socio-cultural systems or ‘regimes of value’, an Aboriginal one and a Western one. Morphy calls these ‘frames’. As he explains (1991:21), ‘I use frame here to refer to the encompassing set of cultural practices and understandings that defines the meaning of an object in a particular context’. His concept is compatible with, and complementary to, Appadurai’s ‘regimes of value’.

In Aboriginal society the process and production of art for internal use upholds and affirms the knowledge and values held by that society. But Yolngu also make ceremonial and ritual objects that are solely for use within their own society and are not made for sale. Morphy comments that paintings are part of a clan’s ancestral inheritance, and painting is a ritual act surrounded by rules and restrictions (Morphy 1991:21). Thus, Aboriginal objects with religious/ceremonial importance have other significant types of value including transcendental value, symbolic value, ceremonial value and heritage value which exist outside the market system and market values. What is most prestigious and meaningful about certain objects and the ways in which they are displayed/performed, may be of little importance in the Western art-culture system (Appadurai 1986; Mead 1984).

The Western ‘frame’, or ‘regime of value’ for Aboriginal art has developed considerably in recent years. As Morphy notes (s)ince the late 1960s and early 1970s, the change in the status of Aboriginal art has been remarkable (Morphy 1987). Exhibitions of Aboriginal art . . . are now a regular occurrence. Art galleries . . .
have increased their collections impressively . . . . Individual artists are gaining renown, and their works are highly sought after. Works by leading Aboriginal artists sell for prices within the same range as works by white Australian artists working within the European tradition. Aboriginal art has been discovered by the market, and around it is developing that whole system of enterprise that surrounds the sale and promotion of art (Morphy 1991:23-24).

Although there are two 'frames' for Aboriginal art, Morphy acknowledges that there are some interests and values which overlap (1991:24). There is usually some overlap between the 'regimes of value' of different cultures. Here, the overlap between the Aboriginal and Western frames for Aboriginal art is demonstrated in terms of economic interests and as an area where Aboriginal people assert their cultural identity to Western audiences.

In the 1990s in Central Arnhem Land, many tradition-oriented Aboriginal communities live on outstations in their own homelands,\(^1\) preferring to retain a degree of autonomy over their lifestyles. However, even the most remote communities engage with external concerns and the mainstream economy. But economic opportunities are few: people earn cash income from employment in community services or the sale of art and craft, otherwise they receive welfare payments. There is no

\(^1\) In particular in remote regions of Arnhem Land, Central and Western Australia. Entry to homelands area is restricted to outsiders who must have a contract of employment or permit to reside or visit there. Community councils and ATSIC regional councils represent the interests of the communities to the outside world. Aboriginal people now participate, to a greater or lesser extent, in the mainstream Australian economy. However, for remote communities many of the social and cultural structures of their small-scale, non-monetised cultures still exist at the local level.
mining industry in Central Arnhem Land and only one cattle station. For the 3000 plus Aboriginal people in Central Arnhem Land who do not seek work in Darwin, or elsewhere in the Northern Territory on cattle stations or in the mining industry, making 'arts and crafts' for sale is often the only source of earnt income. In Central Arnhem Land, tradition-oriented Yolngu people make bark paintings and other objects for sale, some of which are 'culture paintings' (pers. comm. Wululu 1993),\(^1\) meaningful to the local community, and others which have little significance. Significant paintings are well documented and sold to major public and private collections, while less important works enter a more general market, usually through retail outlets which attract tourists and casual buyers. Aboriginal people thus participate in the wider Australian market-based economy if tradition-oriented Aborigines wish to satisfy material wants or obtain goods (cars, clothing, building materials, etc.) from the mainstream Australian economy and are not willing to exploit natural resources (for example, mining on their land), they have to create other resources which they are willing to exchange for Western commodities and increase production of them to meet the demands of outside markets. In recent years Aboriginal people have increased their production of art, in part to satisfy their wants for Western commodities.

\(^1\)Jimmy Wululu, a senior artist describes some of the major paintings marketed by the Bulabula Arts Centre at Ramingining as 'culture paintings', i.e. those which portray a significant story which cannot be fully divulged to outsiders.
As well, when significant Aboriginal art enters into circulation in the wider world, it represent the creator group in particular, and Aboriginal people in general, to outside audiences. In the Western art-culture system, Aboriginal art may serve didactic purposes (to educate non-Aborigines about Aboriginal societies). It is increasingly recognised as part of the national heritage and emblems of Australian culture. Morphy (1991:17) discerns that 'by the mid-1950s Yolngu had begun to appreciate the value of their art as a means of both asserting cultural identity and attempting to get Europeans to negotiate with them on their own terms'. The 1963 bark petition to the Commonwealth government in Canberra, asserting Yolngu land rights at Yirrkala, is evidence of this. On the other hand, Morphy observes that

by absorbing the paintings, Europeans are bringing to mind the culture that lies behind them . . . . Part of the value of Aboriginal art to European audiences is its meaning and significance to Aborigines. Aboriginal art has become accepted as art which tells a story, art which represents Aboriginal culture (Morphy 1991:24).

Movement through ‘regimes of value’ in the Western art-culture system: the art of Albert Namatjira

Before he proposes his model for the movement of objects between zones of value in the Western art-culture system, Clifford (1988:221) asks, 'What criteria validate an authentic, cultural or artistic product'? Questions about 'authenticity' or
'inauthenticity', 'art' or non-art', have revolved around the paintings of Albert Namatjira since the 1940s. This case study demonstrates how Namatjira's paintings have moved between what Clifford calls the zones of 'art' and 'non-art' and back again in the past few decades.

In Clifford's analysis aesthetic objects entering the Western Art-culture system may be considered 'inauthentic', either because they are 'new' or 'uncommon' or 'commercial'. Such objects are placed, for the time being, in the zones of 'not-culture' or 'not-art' until criteria are developed in the Western art-culture system which enable such objects to be reassessed and revalued. The following case study outlines how Namatjira's art has been variously perceived as 'inauthentic' and 'authentic', as 'non-art' and 'art' and how the criteria for evaluating it has been reassessed. In recent years many 'new' or 'uncommon' or 'commercial' types of Aboriginal objects have been collected, exhibited and published in contexts which establish them as 'art' (see chapter 6).

Namatjira's case also supports Appadurai's theory that, from time to time, objects can be seen to be on different trajectories within a particular culture. In the following discussion it will be demonstrated that, in the 1940s to 1950s, the artistic value of Namatjira's work was assessed favourably by his patrons and supporters, the popular press and general Australian public (Burdett 1937; Barnard 1941; Mountford 1944; Preston 1945; Battarbee 1951). On the other hand, some influential modernist art critics were unimpressed by it (Bell 1951, Haefliger 1945, McQueen 1979). From the mid-1980s, a
number of scholars and curators have been engaged with reassessing his contribution to Aboriginal and Australian art as well as analysing the predominant social, cultural and aesthetic values of the 1940s-50s which contributed to the different popular and elite preceptions of Namatjira and his art (Burn and Stephen 1986; Amadio 1986; Macinolty 1988; Hardy, Megaw & Megaw 1992).¹

Albert Namatjira entered Australian’s consciousness in newspaper headlines (Burdett 1937) as ‘Our First Native Artist’: this suggests that all other Aboriginal art was not art, and to be an authentic artist one must work in a recognisable Western style using Western materials. Rex Battarbee’s sentiments at discovering Namatjira’s talent encapsulates the incredulous attitude of white Australians towards Namatjira’s talent:

My greatest surprise came after we had been out for two weeks and were painting at Palm Valley. Albert brought along a painting of the Ampitheatre to which I had not even seen him put a brush. I immediately saw his talent. Here was a man, a full-blooded member of a race considered the lowest type in the world, who had in two weeks absorbed my colour sense. I felt he had done the job so well that he had nothing more to learn from me about colour . . . .

¹ As Sylvia Kleinert (1992:219) observes, ‘Namatjira was presented as the noble savage whose talent enabled him to bridge the gap between prehistory and the contemporary world. To this day, Albert Namatjira remains a popular hero, confirming the egalitarian myths of an Australian ethos. However, this kind of historical construct is also flawed because it explained Namatjira’s artistic success and failure through the events of his personal life rather than locating him in the context of the political, economic and cultural reality of the Western Aranda people’. 


The leading South Australian artist, Hans Heysen, bought some of Albert’s early work, including the painting of a gum tree. I asked Heysen if it would be wise for Albert to go down to Adelaide to improve his knowledge of art. “Definitely not”, was the reply. “Why, Albert knows too much already”! (Battarbee 1951:11).

Namatjira was promoted by the artist Battarbee, the popularist anthropologist, C.P. Mountford (Mountford 1944),1 and favourably considered by a group of established artists including Hans Heysen and William Dargie (Kleinert 1992). Exhibitions of Namatjira’s work were held in Melbourne and Adelaide in 1938-9. The exhibitions were sell-outs, but only one work, Haast’s Bluff (Alumbura) was purchased by an art gallery, the Art Gallery of South Australia, most probably because of its regional interest. During the war years (1940-45) Namatjira did not exhibit, but many of his paintings were sold to servicemen stationed at Alice Springs, which helped to popularise them around Australia. Subsequent exhibitions in the late 1940s increased Namatjira’s fame, but these were all managed without any input from the artist. Battarbee (1951:18) commented that ‘one of the most amazing things in this amazing story is that Albert Namatjira has gained world-wide fame without ever having seen an art gallery’.

Other Arrernte men, including Albert’s sons and his cousins the three Pareoultja brothers became interested and took up water colour painting. But media attention was focused on Namatjira and he was singled out for celebrity status. Under

1 C.P. Mountford’s The Art of Albert Namatjira, Bread and Cheese Club, Melbourne, 1944, was re-printed four times.
the patronage of Lady Huntingfield (the wife of the Governor of
Victoria at the time), Namatjira was lionised by 'society' and
became well known through the popular press. In 1954
Namatjira was presented to the Queen in Canberra, where he
was awarded a Coronation Medal, and went to Sydney where he
was feted by the Royal Art Society of NSW. In 1956 he was the
guest of honour at a reception in Adelaide and was made an
Associate of the Royal Art Society. In 1957 he became the first
Aboriginal to be granted Australian citizenship. But the
laudatory treatment and granting of citizenship were a mirage
and Namatjira was not a beneficiary in fact of the rights and
privileges he had bestowed on him.

Sylvia Kleinert has detailed the critical response to
Namatjira's work, explaining that Burdett, Bell and Haefliger
were among the critics who supported Australian modernism
and criticised Namatjira. During his lifetime and following his
death, Namatjira's watercolours were dismissed by influential
artists and critics as a derivative, awkward imitation of white
art and false to his own culture (therefore 'non-authentic' and
'non-art' in Clifford's terms). The prevailing debate in
Australian art circles from 1937 into the 1950s was, as

1 In a 1988 interview the art critic Robert Hughes admitted:
I have not thought a great deal about Namatjira since the time of
his death. As far as I am concerned, its not that interesting a
subject. You have, in truth, a painter who was not very gifted
made into a cult figure for largely commercial interests. He was
treated incredibly shabbily by his white promoters and
eventually, ground down between the requirements of his own
tribal identity and the unreal demands made on him by the
mechanisms of being a white celebrity in Australia. . . . It would
be very nice to say, well, this was doubly bad because he was a
genius, but he was not a genius (Sydney Morning Herald 1988).
Kleinert notes, a polarisation between artists and other supporters of a proposed Academy of Australian Art and the contemporary (modernist) artists who believed that Academic naturalism would stifle originality and the progress of modernism (Kleinert 1990:225). The Australian art societies which upheld traditionalist, academician views (the Royal Art Society of NSW and the Royal Art Society in Adelaide) were opposed by emerging contemporary art societies devoted to the radical ideas of modern art and modernism. Terry Smith explains that

Namatjira . . . is presented as a traditional white Australian painter, an inheritor of the Landscape School of Australian Painting of Heysen, Streeton and countless others. (The Landscape School) was the dominating tendency in Australian painting between the wars and into the 1950s . . . Namatjira becomes here a national painter par excellence, a supporter of the conservative values of pastoral Australia . . . .

But when modernism triumphed over this tradition after World War II, Namatjira was devalued to ‘popular taste’ (T. Smith 1990: 2).

Roslyn Poignant confirms this view:

(Namatjira's) entry into the art market coincided with the rise of a Modernist aesthetic that considered the ‘gum-tree’ art typified by Heysen's landscapes as an anathema, and situated Aboriginal art within the discourses of primitivism. According to both these
canons, Namatjira's art was both bad and inauthentic (Poignant 1993:89).¹

The perspective of art historians has substantially changed since the 1940s to the 50s. In a major reappraisal of Namatjira's art, Daniel Thomas, then Director of the Art Gallery of South Australia, enumerated eight reasons for the dismissal of Namatjira's art by his Australian artist contemporaries and critics (Thomas 1986). Thomas's reasons include that Namatjira's paintings were promoted by 'official society', a social stratum which bypassed the normal processes of peer review; that they were trivialised, in the view of elite art circles, by being popular among servicemen and the general public; that collectors of primitive art preferred 'authentic' Aboriginal art, such as bark paintings, and that the medium of water colour was associated with amateur practitioners (Thomas 1986:26f).²

Recent revaluations have recontextualised Namatjira's contribution to Australian art. An important exhibition, The Heritage of Namatjira, curated by Vincent Megaw and Ruth Megaw, toured Australia in 1992-1993. In the book released at

¹ Roslyn Poignant's husband, Axel Poignant, a reknowned photograher of Aboriginal subjects, was involved (officially as cameraman) with the making of the 1946 film Namatjira the Painter. Being familiar with the contemporary events, she mentions that the Contemporary Art Society (CAS) was established in Melbourne in 1938, the same year as Namatjira's exhibition in that city. The CAS was to become a very influential voice in Australian art and cultural politics, and in 1946 its founder, John Reed, attempted to dissuade the Minister for Information from approving the making of the film Namatjira the Painter (Poignant 1993:89-90).

² For the remainder of his reasons see Thomas (1986). In the most recent volume reappraising Albert Namatjira's status Thomas (1992:201ff) increases the reasons for Australian art history being 'unhelpful to his (Namatjira's) reputation to eleven'.
the same time (Hardy, Megaw and Megaw 1992) a number of scholars investigated the changing responses to Namatjira's art, his position as an Aboriginal artist and his place in Australian art history. This volume emphasised how much perceptions of what Aboriginal art is have shifted in the past few decades.

Namatjira's art also has a place in an Aboriginal 'regime of value'. From the Aboriginal viewpoint, Wenten Rubuntja (quoted in Green 1988:13) declares that Namatjira's art, and the water-colour landscape painting style adopted by Namatjira, his relatives and descendents, is an important expression of their country, 'the landscape painting is country itself'. Namatjira's paintings were a new way of affirming knowledge and custodianship of land, and a way of attempting to share this knowledge with outsiders (Jones 1992:99f). ¹ His descendents have made water-colour painting a way of keeping and expressing their dreaming stories, building on the value Namatjira's paintings established among the Arrernte people.

Aboriginal attitudes towards Namatjira should be taken into consideration when assessing his place in Australian art history. Namatjira is now considered a folk hero by Aborigines. Later Aboriginal artists celebrate him as being the first to penetrate the white art world, and pay tribute to him in their own images, such as Trevor Nickoll's *Namatjira Dreaming 1*,

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¹ From the 1940s until recently, white Australians were receptive to the beauty of Namatjira's landscapes but oblivious to the meaning (knowledge about land) they held for Aranda people.
1990. The third generation of Arrernte water colour painters affirm that water colour painting is one of their ways of painting their country. As Lucy Namatjira (grand-daughter of Albert) asserted

(we) have two ways of painting: sand painting and landscapes. For all of us they both have the same dreaming story. This landscape painting we do, it shows the country. We don't just paint anything, that's not our way . . . . They used to paint a lot out there. My grandfather and the others, the Pareroultja brothers, they used to go out on camels and paint . . . . The younger kids watch and learn so that we all won't forget; so that we'll keep on with the landscape painting tradition and hold onto the country.

When we paint landscapes we paint the dreaming and the stories of creation . . . landscape painting . . . keeps the dreaming strong (L. Namatjira quoted in C. Macinolty 1988:18-19).

Recognition that Namatjira’s water-colour paintings (and those of his descendants) have meaning for Aboriginal people has been one of the key aspects in the re-evaluation of the work of individual artists and the genre of Arrernte water-colour painting. Lucy Namatjira’s statement demonstrates that water-colour painting now has heritage and symbolic value, having

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1 Arrernte is now the most commonly used spelling of Aranda. Since the Hermannsberg mission ceased operating the term ‘Hermannsburg painters’ has assumed an historical connection with the Arrernte artists of Namatjira’s generation. The present generation call themselves Arrernte painters (Macinolty 1988).

2 The term ‘sand paintings’ is sometimes used to refer to acrylic dot and circle paintings because of one aspect of their origin in the local Aboriginal cultures; similarly acrylic paintings often go under the name of Papunya paintings, although this should only refer to paintings made by people at the settlement of Papunya.
become one of the traditions of the Arrernte people over the past fifty years. More than just superficial and pretty landscapes, these paintings represent Arrernte custodianship and links to the country they depict.

DISCUSSION

This chapter has provided evidence that 'regimes of value' exist in both indigenous and Western cultures. Despite the various theories developed by scholars of different disciplines to explain this phenomenon, a commonality of endeavour is observable and the theories have been shown to be compatible. The terms the scholars have elected to use, among them Appadurai's 'regimes of value', Clifford's 'semantic zones' and Morphy's 'frames', all recognise that specific objects have specific values in different cultural and historical milieus. As well, they recognise that human actors create the values in objects, and that exchanges illuminate both the value of the object and values held by the persons engaged in the exchange.

Appadurai's theory of objects moving through 'regimes of values' was accepted as being useful and appropriate to describe the movements of objects within indigenous cultural systems, from indigenous culture into Western culture, and within the Western art-culture system. Each of the other scholar's theories and terms have been related to Appadurai's

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1 Respectively, the disciplines of the theorists cited in this chapter are Feather, psychology; Appadurai and Kopytoff, economics; Morphy and Davenport, anthropology; Mead and Clifford, art history.
theory of ‘regimes of value’. Each case study illustrated a different aspect of the movement of objects through ‘regimes of value’. The *kula* system of ceremonial exchanges, a feature of Massim society, provided evidence of a ‘regime of value’ in an indigenous society, and also gave an example of objects valued in the West (Maximillian gold coins) moving into the *kula*’s ‘regime of values’. Davenport’s example of the Aoriki presentation vessels illustrated that valued objects are not always commodities and may move from a non-commodity zone in indigenous culture to a non-commodity zone in Western culture. Mead recognised the transcendental value of the *mana* of Maori treasured objects and this example showed that a value such as this was not necessarily apparent to people outside Maori culture. The case study of Aboriginal art having different values for Aboriginal people in their own culture, as opposed to its value in the international art world was illustrated using Morphy’s concept of ‘frames’: this case study also indicated how the two ‘frames’, or ‘regimes of value’, may overlap with each other to some degree. Finally, the art of Albert Namatjira was used to demonstrate Clifford’s theory of the movement of indigenous art objects between semantic zones, or ‘regimes of value’ in the Western art-culture system.

The majority of people living in Western societies are unfamiliar with indigenous art in any contexts other than those they discover, from time to time, at their own cultural institutions. Those who have a particular interest in indigenous art may frequent galleries and auctions, with those who have an interest in collecting going to showings more persistently than
others. An occasional interest, or more serious collecting passion, may be followed up by travelling to acquire art objects at, or as close as possible to, the community they originate from.

As Kopytoff noted, the general commodity for exchange for these types of transactions, from the side of Western culture, is money. Although this chapter has indicated that other types of negotiated exchanges take place between indigenous and Western cultures, such as museum custodianship for the Aoriki treasured objects, and gifts for the purposes of advocacy and diplomacy, such as the 1963 Yirrkala bark petition to the Australian Commonwealth government, money for art is the most usual transaction. It is, of course, recognised that indigenous people now have many opportunities to fully participate in, or engage to some degree with, the global monetary economy and its values.
CHAPTER 5: THE CONTINUITY OF TRADITIONAL FORMS OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION IN INDIGENOUS SOCIETIES

Yet why, why, why? Why are the wooden faces so real? Why?

John Kasiapwalova (1970:3)

INTRODUCTION

The extinction of indigenous customs and art forms has been a common occurrence in the period of rapid cultural change following European contact. But, as the story of developments in Aboriginal and South Pacific art since the time of contact unfolds, it also reveals a wealth of responses by indigenous people to new avenues of artistic expression. In many instances this has led to innovations, whether within existing art forms (as already described with regard to some bark paintings from Arnhem Land), or experimentation with new media and subject matter (as with contemporary Papua New Guinean art, see Chapter 7).

Other chapters in this thesis concentrate on the reception of indigenous art in the Western art-culture system and focus on the emergence of contemporary art movements within the region. But in this chapter three indigenous art forms have been selected to demonstrate that some South Pacific artistic traditions continue to be socially significant and culturally
relevant to the people of the communities who create them. In keeping with the concept of tradition found valid in Chapter 3, the case studies of traditional art forms in this chapter provide further evidence that tradition is the sound and positive basis on which the original identity and continuing development of a particular society is formed. Indigenous peoples' viewpoint of what is regarded as traditional for their own societies is taken into account.

The selected examples are carvings on *kula* canoes from the Trobriand Islands, Papua New Guinea; body decoration in Central Arnhem Land, Northern Australia and Mt Hagen, Papua New Guinea, and decorated bark cloth (*tapa*)\(^1\) in Tonga and some other Polynesian societies. Each of these art forms was being practised at the time of first contact with Europeans, has remained significant, and is currently used for important community occasions.

The chapter will demonstrate, albeit briefly, how art forms have meaning within their culture of origin and signify the constant re-creation and regeneration of the identity of the creator group. It is not intended to go into great detail and a

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1 The origin of the word *tapa* is variously credited. Kaeppler (1978), uses no Polynesian word, staying with the English term bark cloth. Leonard, & Terell (1980:2), in their exhibition catalogue attribute it to the English word derived from the Hawaiian word *kapa* (bark cloth). Wendy Cowling, an anthropologist from Macquarie University (Sydney) informed me of an anecdote where it was misapplied to Tongan *ngatu* when a missionary, seeking name for bark cloth pointed to the border on a piece of *ngatu* and was given the name *tapa* which means a section of border decoration in Tongan. Cowling also refers to the *Tongan/English, English/Tongan Dictionary* compiled by C.M. Churchwood (1959:455) where he describes *tapa* as an edge, rim, or border, but later when defining *ngatu* says it is 'tapa cloth made by Tongan women from the bark of *hiapo* (paper mulberry)'. Here *tapa* is used as it is commonly used in English to mean decorated bark cloth.
limited selection has been made which is indicative of general
tendencies. For example, a lot more detail could be covered in
relation to each of the selected art forms, but it would not be
relevant to the aim of the chapter or the aims of the thesis.
Where possible, the discussion will focus on those aspects of
tradition which demonstrate the falsity of the paradigm of
primitive art.

Within the structure of this thesis, this chapter could
have been placed after Chapter 2, 'The Paradigm of Primitive
Art'. An immediate contrast would have been apparent then,
between Western interests and interpretations (or lack of
interest and interpretation) vis-a-vis the traditional art of
indigenous societies, and the meaning of those art forms to the
society concerned. But it was considered that the reader may
benefit from a fuller exposition of the changes in Western
attitudes towards indigenous people and their art which was
explored in Chapter 3 through the framework of the Western
categorisation of indigenous art. Also, an appreciation that
different systems of value exist in different cultures, and the
bases on which value systems are structured (as outlined in
Chapter 4), may make the material in this chapter more vivid to
the reader.

Raymond Firth (1951:159-61) maintains that, since
European contact, changes have often occurred to the outward
form or in the processes of production of traditional art forms,
but such changes have not affected the essential role(s) of
these art forms within the originating society. Making
traditional art forms continues to sustain the ideology of the
group which, in turn, motivates the continuity of production. In the words of the Samoan artist Fatu Fe'eu (1993:1), 'The Samoan traditional artist's \textit{(tufuga)} function is to create art that will give power \textit{(mana)} to his/her people or the community'.

Dawson, Fredrickson and Graburn (1974:17) point out that, in the circumstances of North American Indians, many well-meaning efforts to reverse the decline of traditions, or ensure their continuation, have failed. They write that

(a)lmost all have failed because the advocates failed to take into account the complexity of the underpinnings which supported these traditions in their former cultural settings . . . (Art forms) are not isolated components of culture, but subtly integrated with many aspects of a people's total social experience. Some of the usual supports that maintain traditional crafts include: 1) needs and uses for the products, 2) the ready availability of materials . . . 5) competent knowledge of the craft and opportunities for learning, 6) reward of status . . . in the eyes of other in-group members, 7) connections and rationale within the belief and value systems, 8) role of the products in the internal gifts-exchange systems, or the external trading systems of the people.

The examples below demonstrate that these 'complex underpinnings' exist in the societies in question, providing a substantial basis for the maintenance of the traditional art forms discussed here. It is recognised that, while these particular art forms survive well, other customs and art forms have declined or been discontinued in the same societies, but it is not the aim of this chapter or this thesis to investigate this phenomenon.
THE CONTINUITY OF TRADITIONAL FORMS OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION IN INDIGENOUS SOCIETIES

Despite their relationships and interactions with Europeans and other non-indigenous people for the last two hundred years or so, many indigenous societies in the South Pacific region have retained, to some degree, their particular forms of social organisation and continue to adhere to an inherited body of knowledge and patterns of behaviour which gives meaning to their world and supports their self-image. In the customs of many Aboriginal and South Pacific societies, the creation of art is the enactment of living history. The visual and performing arts - in both permanent or ephemeral forms - record and display individual roles, clan achievements, cosmic knowledge and the relationship between the people, their land and their ancestral past. Each significant art form and creative act communicates a wealth of knowledge to the acculturated person, and is often inseparable from other ways in which knowledge is performed and the individual and communal identity celebrated. When groups plan and participate in such ceremonies the people are reaffirming and renewing their cultural traditions.1

1 Many ethnographic texts describe the relationships between the material and non-material expressions of culture, the forms of cultural expression of a particular society and rituals or ceremonies in which this knowledge is expressed. A few examples of such studies of Papua New Guinean societies are B. Malinowski (1922); Gregory Bateson (1973), F.E. Williams (1940); Andrew and Marylin Strathern (1971); E. Schefflin (1977).
The processes involved with the manufacture of culturally significant objects often have their own rules and conventions. The entitlement to make certain types of objects may be restricted to persons who know how to interpret and portray the knowledge the item must bear. This will become evident in the examples discussed below.

**Carving**

Wood is the main medium used for carving, although carvers in many South Pacific cultures fashioned significant items in stone and other materials. These include Maori *hei-tiki* carved in nephrite; Easter Island *moai* carved from volcanic rock; Fijian *tabua* and Fijian and Marquesan minature god figures carved in ivory; Torres Strait masks and New Ireland *kap kap* made partially from turtleshell.\(^1\) Before contact with Western cultures introduced metal tools, and other European technological solutions to carving, it is most probable that the distinctive characteristics of carved objects represented solutions to the particular problems of shaping the available materials with tools devised from local materials - stone axes and adzes, pump drills, slivers of obsidian, animal teeth, shell scrapers, sharkskin and abrasive leaves.\(^2\)

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1 Maori stone and ivory carvings illustrated in Barrow (1979); Torres Strait masks and New Ireland *kap kap* illustrated in Rockefeller (1978).

2 Local in the sense of being available from the local environment or through traditional regional trade networks. It is well established that flints, obsidian and other materials for carving or being carved were exchanged in trading networks prior to European contact. For example see E. Schwimmer (1973) for trade and exchange in Orokaiva society, I. Hughes (1977) for pre-contact trade in the New Guinea Highlands.
Indigenous art makers (most often men in the field of carving) generally produced objects sanctioned by local conventions and decorated with designs belonging to their clan or moiety. Among the Kaluli people of the Papuan Plateau all men of a clan could carve and decorate implements for their own use such as weapons, head rests and hand drums (Schieffelin 1977). Elsewhere, as with the Gogodala people of the Gulf of Papua, carving is traditionally the province of old men (Crawford 1981). In the Trobriand Islands, one village (Boitalu) specialised in carving utilitarian objects (Austen 1945), while the making of specific categories of carved objects was restricted to a few master carvers who had served long apprenticeships and were privileged to carve specific items, in particular kula canoe prow boards and chiefs' yam house boards (Campbell 1984).

Commitment to memory of the elements of design and their proper configuration was, and is, a necessary skill in carving. The ability to carve from memory, starting from a few marks on the surface to indicate key areas, was noted by George Archey (1877:60-63), an early observer of Maori carving, and is perpetuated to the present day.¹ Often, the execution of a traditional object leaves scope for the expression of the carver's individuality, which may enable experts to recognise the artist's hand.

¹ This ability was observed by the writer in Fiji at the workshop of Jonati, master carver from Lau. On another occasion two carvers from Rapanui Easter Island were observed carving a moai figure from wood at the Pacific Festival of Arts in Townsville, 1988.
In the period of rapid change following European contact many carving styles died out, while in others an efflorescence and embellishment of style occurred, as Simmons (1984:105-7) describes in the case of Maori wood carving.

The maintenance of a tradition becomes more clearly apparent when it is contrasted with other art forms from the same society which, in the same period of time, have been discontinued. In the Massim area, many types of artifacts made at the time of contact are no longer made, or made in very small quantities. The distinctive oval Trobriand Islands shield which Beran (1980:12, cat. no. 85) describes as ‘unique among Massim artifacts in having a surface design which is painted but not carved’ ceased to be made when European administrators discouraged warfare early this century. Although betel chewing remains a popular passtime for Trobriand Islanders, very few of the intricately carved lime spatulas are still made in comparison to the numbers which were made in the past, as people have found knives make a convenient replacement.

*Kula canoe carvings*

The art style known in the Western art world as Massim (an area closely approximate to the present Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea), was first described by A.C. Haddon (1894:10).1 C.G. Seligman (1910) recognised a stylistic

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1 Haddon (1884) credits himself with the first definition of the area and the name Massim, a corruption of the local name for one of the main islands in the area, Misima. The British New Guinea administration’s official name
distinction between north and south Massim art styles, although he acknowledged an overall homogeneity in the art style of the Massim region.¹ Trobriand Islands canoe prow carvings are one manifestation of the northern Massim art style. It will be demonstrated that canoe prow carvings are integrated into the totality of Trobriand Islanders' forms of creative expression and systems of knowledge, and how such information is communicated through the medium of canoe prows.

Trobriand Islanders have developed an hierarchical society, based on hereditary chieftainship. As well, a high degree of specialisation in roles and occupations has occurred. Only those who have been selected and undergone years of training in rituals and magic and become highly technically skilled could undertake a specific role. Master carvers, tokabitam, possess the special knowledge of carving certain objects, while others, such as garden sorcerers have their own kabitam knowledge. Kabitam identifies the entire body of knowledge which is most highly valued (Campbell 1978:5-6).

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¹ Seligman (1910) differentiated the northern and southern Massim on several ethnographic grounds, including differences in physique and facial features; forms of social organisation, especially the hereditary chieftainship of the north and cannibalism in the south. Major features held in common between the northern and southern Massim were the matrilineal descent recognised throughout the area; the network of trade and cultural relationships maintained by long sea voyages, and the homogeneity of the art forms of the area.
The knowledge of *kula* canoes, including all of the magic and technical information required for its construction is called *kabitam masawa*. There is no express word in the Trobriand language (Kiriwinan) for 'art', instead there are particular terms which describe types of carving and qualify the degree of skill and ritual knowledge of the carver. Trobriand aesthetic terms given by Chief Narabutau (elsewhere spelt Narabutal) include *bitilari* - any kind of carving activity; *lelai* - to carve and decorate; *ginigini* - to incise fine lines (Narabutau 1975:1). *Kabitam ginigini* is the knowledge of what is necessary for the execution of carvings for *kula* canoes. The word *kabitam* implies the acquired ability to exercise the knowledge at a given time. According to Chief Narabutau, the carver prepares the wood and the magic knowledge he has imbibed guides his hand and unleashes its power into the image he is creating (Narabutau 1975:1).

As far back as memory goes or has been recorded there have been two main classes of carvers in Trobriand society: those who carve with magic, *tokabitam*, and those who carve without magic, *tokataraki*. The latter carve items for personal use or pleasure. *Tokabitam* carvers receive their specialised

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1 Apart from objects carved by *tokabitam* and *tokataraki*, excellent functional items come from the village of Boitalu, where the clan who are considered the outcasts of Trobriand society live. Boitalu carvers specialised in wooden bowls with incised rims, hair comb, mortars and pestles for crushing betel nut and lime spatulas sought after for personal use or solictary gifts to partners before a *kula* transaction (Austen 1945:7). Suggestions of what type of carvings would appeal to Europeans were made by Amy (Ma) Lumley in the early 1920's (Ma Lumley was a resident trader in the islands from the late 1890's to 1960). She encouraged Boitalu carvers to make an extended range of platters and extend the size of the human and animal figures (*tokwalu*) they made until they were two feet high and formed the stand for table tops (Cochrane n.d.:4).
training by serving a long apprenticeship to a master carver, gaining their skills and knowledge by following the master’s instruction in design and technique and by imbibing magical potions, both elements being essential (Campbell 1984:122). The apprentice learns the rules of conduct, techniques, designs and conventions in the system as well as the character, form, patterning and placement of the motifs in the kabitam repertoire and why they are kabitam.

The title of tokabitam denotes a person’s possession of the specific knowledge of the rules and patterns of a characteristic school of carving, sopila. Each sopila should have a limited number of representatives at any time, the master and his apprentice(s).1 When the apprentice has completed his training he may practise his skills and receive the payments due to a specialist, but while his master lives, the apprentice must pass over to him most of the proceeds from carving commissions. The two main categories of carvings commissioned from tokabitam are chief’s yam dwelling boards and the sets of prow boards (lagim and tabuya) for ocean going canoes (masawa) which will participate in kula voyages. (Malinowski 1922, Austen 1945, Campbell 1984).

The distinction of roles among carvers in the Trobriand Islands has been maintained, to a significant extent, until the present. Campbell was able to locate four sopila (schools) of

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1 Austen describes the training of tokabitam in his 1945 article. In the late 1970s to early 1980s Campbell describes essentially the same procedures. However, Campbell recounts difficulties where there were more than one apprentice at sopila Vakuta - see later in this chapter (Campbell 1983:201ff); Scodotti describes the apprenticeship system at sopila Kitava at about the same time (Scodotti 1983:249ff).
master carvers on Vakuta, an island in the Trobriands, in 1976 to 1977. The master carvers possess a certain repertoire of kabitam motifs in common, although each school possesses specific designs and arrangements. In her thesis Campbell (1984:122-40) gives a analysis of the kabitam carvings on the canoe prow boards of masawa canoes from Vakuta. Two other researchers, Harry Beran and Jutta Malnic, have field work records of kula canoes being made in the Trobriand Islands and other atoll groups in the late 1980s to early 1990s (pers. comm. Beran 1993; pers. comm. Malnic 1993).1 A film directed by Malnic, *Kula, Ring of Power* (1993), shows the continuity in the styles of canoes and their carvings when compared to those photographed by Malinowski (see also Simons 1986a). Canoe carvings collected by Beran in the Trobriand Islands and Marshall Bennett group in the late 1980s show a continuous use of the styles of canoe carvings when compared to earlier records (Seligman 1909, Newton 1975, Narabutau 1975, 1979), but also show variations in the overall design and motifs which indicate the hand of individual carvers.

The carving of particular types of canoe prows, as an intrinsic part of the ceremonial exchange system of kula, has remained important in Trobriand Islands culture. As with many Polynesian and coastal Melanesian island communities, the Trobrianders' orientation towards seafaring tends to heighten

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1 Beran, while researching his Mutuaga book and kula-related artifacts, recorded kula canoes being made in the Trobriand Islands, Marshall Bennett group and on Egum Atoll in the late 1980s to early 1990s. Malnic had been filming and recording kula activities throughout the Massim area for ten years (1980s) with Trobriand Islands poet John Kasaipwalova and has extensive photographic records of canoe building.
the concentration of aesthetic senses to the challenges offered by the sea. Bronislaw Malinowski emphasised the social and cultural importance of *kula* canoes

to the native, not less than to a white seaman, a craft is surrounded by an atmosphere of romance, built up of tradition and personal experience. It is an object of cult and admiration, a living thing, possessing its own individuality . . . . He has spun a tradition around it, and he adorns it with his best carvings, he colours and decorates it. It is to him a contrivance for the mastery of nature . . . . It is associated with threatening dangers . . . living hopes and desires which he gives expression in song and story (Malinowski 1922:105-6).

Campbell (1984) explored the iconography of canoe prow carvings and found that the designs on them, individually and in combination, encode layers of meaning relating to *kula* activities, symbolising gender and age relationships and refering to the natural and supernatural worlds. Layers of meaning are encoded within a system of representation based on body parts, *kabitam* 'animals', and colours. The body part and 'animal' motifs and colours are incorporated into the design of the *lagim* (washboard) and *tabuya* (prowboard) of a *masawa* canoe.

Each canoe has two sets of prow boards and washboards. The ends of the hull are distinguishable visually and linguistically in male/female terminology. The *dogina* (male) end is cut from the branching end of the tree which faced the elements and now faces Dobu, to which destination voyages over perilous seas must be taken during the season of the northeast wind. The *uuna* (female) end, which, when
the tree was in its natural state was rooted in the ground, is associated more with the feminine characteristics of being earth-bound and fertile (Campbell 1984:225). Regardless of whichever way the canoe is facing at sea,¹ to land the canoe it is always turned to its dogina end, so that the voyagers, ‘arriving at the shores of their partner’s land . . . pierce the beach with the dogina tabuya, laden with its male symbolism and powers of attraction and seduction’ (Campbell 1984:227).²

The canoe prow boards, lagim and tabuya, are internally composed of several sections which are interpreted as parts of the body. Another layer of representation involves the kabitam repertoire of ‘animals’: two birds, a mollusc, a shellfish, an insect, two mammals, several plants, the moon and mythical or imaginary creatures. Rather than representing the ‘animal’ as an end in itself, the system encodes attributes of the animals which are relevant to the system of meaning associated with kula (Campbell 1984:170-90).³

¹ A verse of the song Usituma, also recorded by Baldwin in the early 1940s, refers to the direction of the prow. The canoe named Losaia is turned so its uuna end faces the sea
   I put my boat about
   Prepared for the ocean
   With delight in my heart
   I put my canoe about
   Losaia, aligned with royal shells


² The sight of sea going canoes drawn up on a beach with their sleek lines and thrusting prows, or cleaving the waves under full sail, is suggestive of an aggressive male image of lithe strength, power and assertion. The designs on the lagim and tabuya, though not explicit, are also inherently sexual symbols.

³ Campbell includes line drawings of the kabitam ‘animals’ and conceptualised body parts appearing on lagim and tabuya.
After the prow boards are carved they must be painted. Colour is another essential element and carries its own symbolism in association with other components of design. Red, white and black are the only colours used, each occupying specific areas known as the path of the red, the path of the black and the path of the white. The colours highlight the conceptualisation realised on the *lagim* and *tabuya*. Campbell emphasises that colour is overwhelmingly associated with stages in the physiological life cycle of men and other organisms, and in the course of nature: white = new born/uncontaminated/day; red = youth/growth/sexual attraction/sunrise and sunset; black = age/maturity/death/night (Campbell 1984:134).

Fluttering pandanus streamers and rows of white cowrie shells, each with their implicit symbolism, attached before the canoe is ready to sail. By decorating the canoe with the emblems of supernatural beings, culture heroes, birds and animals the canoe owner provides a medium which, when activated by magic, provides a channel through which these symbols can activate their power and which allays the fears of the crew and the dangers facing them. At various times in the making of the canoe and its preparation for sailing magic and rituals must be performed over it.

*Kula* activities and ceremonies have their own entire repertoire of body decoration, songs and dances, myths and legends as well as specific terminology in the language and philosophical interpretation of natural and supernatural
phenomena. The extent to which the visual imagery of *kula* canoes is repeated or referred to in the legends, myths and songs of *kula* communities has been noted by several authors. Malinowski described five basic categories of oral tradition in the Trobriands:

First of all there is what the natives call *libogwo*, "old talk", but what we would call tradition; secondly *Kuk wanebu*, fairy tales, recited for amusement, at definite seasons, and relating to avowedly untrue events; thirdly, *wosi*, the various songs, and *vinavina*, ditties, chanted at play or under special circumstances; and last, but not least, *megwa* or *yopa*, the magical spells. All these classes are strictly distinguished from one another by name, function, social setting, and by certain formal characteristics (Malinowski 1922:299).

Twenty years later the Rev. B. Baldwin recorded *wosi* in which individual *kula* canoes and incidents of actual *kula* voyages were celebrated:

With cowries aligned,
And lintel carved,
Prowboard painted,
They gather wealth,
With cowries aligned by Uweilasi,
With lintel carved by Galawai,
And known to Tobauwola of Gumasila,
They gather and hang their wealth

(Baldwin 1949-50:277).  

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1 Verse from *Usitama*, a Trobriand *wosi* (contemporary song) performed with dancing and drumming, recorded and translated by Baldwin.
J.W. Leach's investigations, carried out a further thirty years later, in the late 1970s, further classified *libwoga* narratives into two sub-types. Firstly *lirereni*, narratives which revolve around an explicit pedigree or genealogy linking what someone has in the present (magic, ornamentation rights, etc) with a line of transmission to their origin. Secondly, *libwoga*, narratives of cultural significance used for educating children, solving disputes, and as metaphoric references, including the stories of legendary *kula* heroes such as Tuvada and Kasabwaybwayreta. He adds a third category of *livau*, narratives regarded as true accounts of actual people within living memory (Leach 1981:57).

Campbell (1984:29) describes how a dispute she unintentionally started in 1980 was resolved by reference to *lirereni* (narratives of genealogy). She commissioned two *kabitam* carvers to make canoe prows for her to test the theory that they should be identical because both carvers had been trained by the same master, but an argument arose over which carver had the right to be the recognised practitioner of his school. The outcome was based on the genealogy of the *dala* (sub-clan) of the carvers and their master, and the loser could not then practise his craft until the death of the winner.¹

All categories of oral tradition carry implicit messages about social life which often have a serious message under a humorous guise. Malinowski (1920:220) quoted a popular tale

¹ The master had allegedly broken tradition by training two apprentices within the same generation.
which Leach later discovered conveys a specific message about *kula* behaviour. In Leach's version:

A louse and a butterfly embark on a bit of aviation, the louse as passenger, the butterfly as aeroplane and pilot. In the middle of the performance, while flying overseas between the beach of Wawela and the island of Kitava, the louse emits a loud shriek (in the version recorded by Leach, a fart), the butterfly is shaken, and the louse falls off and drowns (Leach 1981:53).

The meanings in this humorous tale are, on the first level, to beware of alienating people by antisocial behaviour; deeper and more interesting meanings are associated with perceptions of the characteristics of the insects involved. The carved and painted washboard of a canoe (*lagim*) has two lobes which are called *beba* (butterfly), and a canoe sailing in the distance is likened to a canoe's dancing flight. There are no lice on butterflies, only on humans, therefore the louse represents a man. The louse falls off the butterfly and drowns because of its behaviour, so the underlying meaning of the tale is 'don't act improperly towards a canoe which protects you' (Leach 1981:53-4).

In the myth of Ksabwaybwayreta the hero possesses magic which enables his canoe to fly, and he can thus outdistance his competitors and arrive at the destination first. Although he is old and has a diseased skin, Ksabwaybwayreta also possesses powerful beauty magic which enables him to slough off his old skin and appear radiant and irresistible to his *kula* partners who will be induced to give him the best valuables. His brothers and sisters, jealous of his powers,
persuade him to teach them his magic before killing him, but Ksabwaybwayreta takes the most valuable ornament, Gomarakeda (Monitor Lizard), with him as he ascends the heavens where its tail can still be seen trailing down from the stars. His brother, and thus all men, soon learn that he had not taught them the flying canoe magic and they must continually attempt to regain it. His sisters, who are recognised as witches, retain the power of flight as do (potentially) all women. The symbolism in the myth of the flying canoe is constantly referred to, both directly and indirectly, in the stories, spells and carvings associated with kula canoes. The conventionalised representation which often appears in the centre of the lobes of the lagim of nagega canoes represents Gomayawa (the stellar group Pleiades) which assisted Ksabwaybwayreta on his sky journey, as well as other stars used for navigation (Leach 1981:50-54).

Malnic's film, Kula: Ring of Power (1993), provides the most recent evidence of the continuity of kula in the Massim area over the past ten years. In the 1970s to early 1980s a number of scholars conducted intensive research into many of the cultural, social, economic and political nuances of the kula (published in Leach and Leach 1983). From this recent evidence it is apparent that kula is still a vital and relevant force and an important feature of Massim societies. The construction of kula canoes with their elaborately carved lagim and tabuya are

\[[1] This is a type of kula canoe still made in the Marshall Bennett and Woodlark Islands. Nagega canoes were also made in the Trobriands in the nineteenth century.\]
instances of an ongoing tradition which maintains high standards in its form of expression, especially in the parts of the Massim area where they are still made. This brief exposition, based mostly on the findings of recent research, has demonstrated that the carved panels of *kula* canoes, as well as being singularly aesthetic, carry a load of cultural knowledge. They are representative of how a specific art form may encode historical and mystical knowledge, represent social and cultural norms and ideals, and reveal familiarity with the natural and supernatural worlds. The extent of this cultural knowledge, and its permeation into all aspects of the community's life, are the basic reasons for the *kula*'s continued resilience and vitality in the face of over one hundred years of outside pressure to change.

*Body decoration*

Body decoration is perhaps one of the most important expressive forms in the social and ceremonial contexts of many Aboriginal and South Pacific cultures. Among the most frequently reproduced images by European artists in the early contact period are portraits of Aborigines and South Pacific Islanders which record characteristic body decoration and adornment at the time (B. Smith 1960, plates 31 and 32, 81 and 83).¹ However, while the visual impact of such portraits may

¹ Plate 31 *Head of a New Zealander*, engraving after Sydney Parkinson; Plate 32 *Portrait of a New Zealand Man*, pen and wash, Sydney Parkinson; Plate 80 *Ban Nel Lang meeting the Governor by appointment after he was wounded by Willa Ma Ring in Spetember 1790*, water colour, Port Jackson Painter; *Balloderree*, water colour, Port Jackson painter (B. Smith 1960).
have been appreciated, the iconography of body decoration was not so well understood. Recent studies, such as those on body decoration in the Papua New Guinea Highlands (Strathern and Strathern 1978; Kirk and Strathern 1981; O'Hanlon 1989), have begun to redress this.

Body decoration is an elaborate form of communication which has been practised to some degree by every human society up to the present day. As Victoria Ebin (1979) demonstrates, body decoration and self adornment fulfil the same basic purposes in all societies. Each culture group has developed forms of decoration and adornment as part of its own communication code. The selection of materials for body decoration, the choice of designs and what they symbolise, and the methods of application differ from group to group. Ebin (1979:6) comments that the body is the medium through which we project ourselves in social life, and our use and presentation of it say precise things about the society in which we live, the degree of our integration in that society, and the controls which society exerts over the individual. One of the purposes of body decoration is to demonstrate one's identity as a member of a particular society. Secondly, self adornment is a means of marking individual social status or allegiance to a group, or denoting achievement. Thirdly, the body can be used as a medium, especially in ceremonial contexts, to display wealth and convey power, or to transform oneself into a conceived ideal state. Finally, body decoration and adornment can ritually
denote the individual's progression in a society from infancy to puberty to adulthood.

The enhancement of an individual's features to achieve the group's perception of classic beauty may involve permanent scarring, marking or deformation. Cicatrices incised on the upper chest or back (as practised by Central Arnhem Land clans) were a common part of initiation until recently. At present (1993) older men at Ramingining in Central Arnhem Land have horizontal cicatrices across their chest. Fewer men under forty have them and, although initiation rites, including circumcision and scarring, are still practiced, the initiate can decline from having cicatrices incised, or withdraw from the process if they find it too painful (pers. comm. Ray Munyal, Djardie Ashley, Ramingining 1993). Elongation of the skull by binding babies' heads was practised in the Torres Strait Islands (Australia)\(^1\) and West New Britain (Papua New Guinea), but the practice apparently ceased early this century. Tattooing is the only form of permanent marking still practised by several Polynesian and Melanesian societies, notably Samoans and Marquesans in Polynesia. The practise of tattooing is again growing in popularity among Samoans and Maori (men in particular) to emphasise their cultural identity. Three tattooing specialists were offering their services at the Pacific Festival of Arts in Rarotonga in 1992 (K. Stevenson 1993a and b, Lewis-Harris 1994). Tattooing has become infrequent since the 1960s in

\(^1\) Described in Haddon (1935) Vol. 5.
Papuan societies from the Central Province (Mekeo, Roro) to Suau (Milne Bay Province).¹

Ephemeral forms of body decoration are strongly evident in Highlands societies in Papua New Guinea today. In the Southern, Eastern and Western Highlands, many tribesmen wear some item of traditional adornment every day such as woven armbands, nose quills or wigs, as observed driving between Goroka and Kainantu in the Eastern Highlands in 1994. People living in towns are less inclined to wear traditional adornments, mainly because their jobs require practical Western-style work clothes. Full body decorations are made and worn for gala occasions of clan ceremonies and *singsings*, such as the Goroka Show.² For Papua New Guinea Highlands clans full body decoration may include painting the face with charcoal and/or ochres or poster paint; oiling the body with pig grease or oil extracted from plants; wearing elaborate wigs, spectacular feather headresses, or towering constructions of cane and barkcloth; adorning oneself in a specially prepared costume complete with valuables denoting status. Each of the approximately sixty elaborately costumed *singsing*-groups at the 1994 Goroka Show (which I attended) were identifiable as coming from the Eastern Highlands, Simbu, Murik Lakes, or

¹ Dobi Kidu (eldest daughter of Papua New Guinea's first indigenous supreme court judge) decided to have full Motu body tattoos executed by her aunt (mother's sister) despite being discouraged by other well-educated Papuan women of her generation. She wished to have the tattoos because she was proud of her heritage and did not think the tattoos would disadvantage her in her choice of employment (pers. comm. at Pacific Festival of Arts, Rarotonga, October 1992).

² *Singsing* is a Tok Pisin word for public ceremonies: the Mt. Hagen and Goroka Shows are the largest *singsings* in the Highlands region.
elsewhere, by the particular elements of their costume and body decoration. Kirk and Strathern describe body decoration in Highlands societies as 'living art' (1981:16). Fully decorated, the human body is not just a colourful canvas but, for a short time, the embodiment of the individual's and clan's concepts of themselves and one of their greatest aesthetic achievements.

Among Highlands societies of Papua New Guinea and West Irian body decoration has reached a high level of specialisation. The Melpa people of Mt Hagen, Papua New Guinea, do not make elaborate representations of their spirits and ancestors in permanent art forms. Andrew and Marylin Strathern, reason that this is because Hageners, rather than making figures or paintings to represent their ideals, transform themselves into an ideal state by self decoration . . . their aim is not the impersonation of some other identity but aggrandisement of their own (Strathern and Strathern 1978:171).

For example, when Hageners wish to associate themselves, say, with a particular bird, they do not carve or impersonate it, but take part of the bird (feathers) to enhance their own attractiveness. Different sets of decorations designate the role of an individual and contain a message (for example 'warrior setting out on revenge'). Strathern and Strathern write that sets of decorations may also demonstrate abstract and ideal qualities and social values - when men blacken their faces and wear similar ornaments they are expressing their aggressiveness and clan solidarity (Strathern and Strathern 1978:173).
Highlands societies are essentially egalitarian and consensual, but the constant effort to achieve status and renown among rival clans is a prime motivator for the members of a particular clan - the prestige of the clan is only equal to the excellence of the individuals within it. Self decoration and dancing provide an excellent opportunity to demonstrate clan solidarity and individual excellence (Strathern and Strathern 1978:175).

Decorations are valuables and men dominate the production and consumption of important goods (bird plumes, animal skins, shell ornaments, pigments and oils) in the Papua New Guinea Highlands. Luxury crops like pandanus, which is grown for the oil used for ceremonial purposes, are men's crops. Women assist by making string bags and aprons and are the main labour force in raising the pigs required for exchanges and presentations. However, on special occasions women wear or display part of their bride wealth or their husband's ornaments and pig tallies, enhancing personal and clan prestige. In 1994 at Goroka bride wealth exchanges were still occurring. As well, some new contexts had arisen in the Papua New Guinea Highlands for defining groups, such as the formation of women's community groups. As well as their other concerns, several women's community groups found the Goroka Show a good occasion to demonstrate their solidarity, and one for which new regalia had to be designed and proudly worn.

1 A trip planned by me with Chris Issac, Director of the J.K. McCarthy Museum at Goroka, to visit the new Asaro cultural centre had to be cancelled because the manager of the Asaro centre had to attend a bride price ceremony.
Some individual elements favoured for self decoration in Melpa culture have changed perceptibly since the people's first contact with Europeans. After the Leahy brothers penetrated the Highlands in the 1930s they required labourers to construct roads and airstrips to make these newly discovered valleys more accessible for the white man's purposes. Shell was a form of payment initially favoured by the Highlanders as it was traditionally highly valued by Highlands societies. Because of the distance from the coast and the complexity of traditional trade networks between coastal and highlands societies shells were comparatively rare and, in more remote areas of increasingly poorer quality (Hughes 1981:21-27). The sudden and plentiful supply of shells following European contact increased the Hageners' preference for large shells, especially gold lipped pearl shell, which they edged with red ochre or made into crescent shaped pendants (kina), and large bailer shells, as evidenced in the film First Contact.

In many South Pacific cultures shell valuables are a feature of costume regalia and often the most prestigious objects one can possess. Shell jewellery and valuables have generally only received attention in the West in anthropological studies concerned with the accumulation and distribution of wealth. Rarely have the aesthetic qualities of shell and shell valuables been commented on by Europeans because shell is not

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1 Film footage of these contacts, including shells being given by the Leahys to Highlanders in payment, is contained in the film First Contact.
highly regarded as a highly aesthetic substance in Western culture.\textsuperscript{1}

As well as traditional elements made from natural materials which have been refined, such as shells, Highlanders and other Papua New Guineans have often incorporated new decorative elements from Western society's artifacts into their sets of decorations. Shiny bits of tin, labels, beads, buttons, bits of material - at first any strange and new item may have attracted, but then definite preferences developed along with the increased availability of new materials. Certain elements, for example trade beads, may eventually become fully integrated into a group's forms of ceremonial adornment, as they have with the Mekeo and Rigo people of the central Papuan coast.\textsuperscript{2} As with all other forms of art, body adornment is subject to changing tastes and fashions, as evidenced by the increased use of large shell items in New Guinea Highlands culture, and the incorporation of armbands and belts made from trade beads by the Mekeo and Rigo peoples of central Papua.

Specific designs painted on the body indicate a wealth of information to acculturated persons. In Central Arnhem Land, at

\textsuperscript{1} Strathern and Strathern (1978) describe the perceived aesthetic qualities of pearlshell. See also Battaglia (1983). A publication describing the aesthetic qualities of shell for Aborigines of the Kimberley area of north-western Australia is forthcoming - Kim Akerman and John Stanton, \textit{Tjakolyi: Kimberley Pearlshell in Aboriginal Australia} (draft manuscript kindly supplied by the authors).

\textsuperscript{2} For example, having obtained a constant supply of colourful trade beads from the Sacred Heart Mission established on Yule Island in the 1880s, the Mekeo people developed their own style of weaving bands of these and incorporating them into their distinctive style of body decoration, so much so that they are now regarded as an intrinsic part of Mekeo style. Documented by photographs of Mekeo body decorations in Cochrane PNG Archive, Wollongong University.
the time of their dapi (initiation at the age of 10 to 12) boys are gifted with a design of their moiety which is painted on the chest. The design painted represents one of the principal mythic ancestors and clan sites of the boy's clan and moiety and possessing it incurs privileges and obligations thereafter (pers. comm. Djardie Ashley and Bobby Bunuggurr at the time of their sons' dapi, Ramingining, September 1993). These designs occur elsewhere in the clan's art, for example on bark paintings, but can only be painted by those who have the proper custodianship of them. Jimmy Madjuri was responsible for Bobby Bunuggurr's son Andrew and painted his chest with what is commonly called Bari (crocodile fire story), more correctly, Baruwungu Wanga Mala Mala Bunhawuy (The Lands Created by the Crocodile). This is a clan design of the Ganalbingu and Daabi people and designated Andrew's kinship associations. Each clan has its specific designs that are used in bark paintings and body designs and identified in a song series (mannikay). Clans using the Bari theme are associated with the same wangaar (spirit being).

Stephen Wilde explains another clan design, Wild Honey, painted on the face of a girl from Anbarra, also in Arnhem Land. Wild Honey comes within the Djambidj group of mannikay (song series) and among its associations symbolises reproduction and fertility. The girl in the photograph is entitled to wear the Wild Honey design because she belongs to the clan associated with the Djambidj mannikay. This association also connects her to other Djambidj subjects apart from Wild Honey. The designs she can wear on her body identify her and signify her rights to
share in the common heritage of her clan and moiety. In Aboriginal societies, each group of people recognises a particular set of symbols, adherence to which is implicit in the definition of their own culture (Wilde 1980:13).

Several clans around the Ramingining area in Central Arnhem Land have honey stories and totems. For the Djinang people of the Dhuwa moiety the story is colloquially called ‘Dhuwa Sugarbag Story’. In March to July 1994 Ray Munyal, Jimmy Moduk and Andrew Margalulu were completing a set of ‘Sugarbag’ paintings commissioned by the Childrens’ Museum, a division of the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Four of the paintings commissioned by the Tropenmuseum featured the designs painted on participant’s chests for ceremonies when the Dhuwa Sugarbag Story is performed. The three artists mentioned, as the clan custodians of this story, have been invited to go to Amsterdam when the exhibition opens in 1995 to perform a Maradjuri ceremony, a ritual of diplomatic exchange.¹ All the art and objects for this ceremony are associated with the Dhuwa Sugarbag Story, but, in contrast to the bark paintings, the maradjuri pole and objects associated with it for the ceremony must be made by Yirritja people, in this case George Milpurrurrnu and his sons (Ganalbingu people, Yirritja moiety). Yirritja moieties also have their own honey stories.²

¹ There was a Maradjuri ceremony last year at Gat’ji (Munyal’s homeland) and in October 1993 a group from Maningrida took one of these ceremonies to Ujung Padang on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, to renew their contacts with the Macassans.

² Jimmy Wululu is presently the senior custodian/main painter of Yirritja Niwuda Honey Story (Yirritja moiety, Gupaypungu people) in the
Self decoration and adornment serve as important personal and cultural identifiers. At the present time, throughout the South Pacific region, many communities maintain the practise of significant cultural and religious ceremonies which require specific sets of body decorations. The local (acculturated) audience appreciates the meaning of each element in the set of decorations as well as its overall effect. Many non-indigenous people have only seen the magnificent spectacle of *singsings* through the medium of film and photography, or at major festivals like the Pacific Festival of Arts, and are only aware of body decoration as spectacle.

Some studies, such as those of Strathern and Strathern (1978) and O'Hanlon (1989), on the iconography of Western Highlands clans' body decorations, give an outside audience the opportunity to grasp the significance of this cultural practise. At major public *singsings* and festivals, body decoration demonstrates the cultural identity and social cohesion of a group. For members of a particular indigenous society, body decoration acknowledges their status and integration within that society.

Ramingining area. In 1993 the Linden Museum, Stuttgart, Germany commissioned Wululu to make a major painting of this story. Apart from painting these stories on commission for museums, ceremonies featuring them are still regularly held in this area.
Decorated bark cloth is widely used by Polynesian and Melanesian societies across the South Pacific. In recorded history most of the utilitarian uses of (especially plain) bark cloth, such as everyday clothing, bedding and curtains or partitions for the interior of houses, ceased with the introduction of cloth. But in many societies decorated bark cloth has retained its significance for ceremonial occasions.

The distinguishing features of local styles show how this art form has evolved in the cultures that use it. In the catalogue essay of a comprehensive exhibition of *tapa* from the Pacific region, A. Leonard and J. Terrell commented that depending on time and culture, bark cloth has been watermarked, ribbed, stained, painted, ruled, printed, stamped, oiled, rubbed, and marked with snapped cords wet with colour. In its finished form it has been pleated, draped, stitched, gathered, blocked, appliqued, embroidered, layered, fringed, and fitted over wooden frameworks (Leonard and Terrell 1980:3).

To this can be added the technique of smoking fine bark cloth for decorating a chief's sitting place and making streamers for a chief's armbands practised in Fiji.  

1 The central Polynesian name for decorated bark cloth, *tapa*, has become widely used although each society has its own name for its own product. The name *tapa* is used here as an accepted generic term for decorated bark cloth.

2 Leonard and Terrell note an interesting instance, which took place in historic times. When the Bounty mutineers and the Tahitian women who accompanied them found a new home on the isolated island of Pitcairn, the Tahitian women carried on their skills in the new community, among them making *tapa*. Whatever European clothes the group once possessed must have worn out, and when the community was re-discovered in 1808 all their bedding and clothing was made of *tapa*.

Tapa specifically refers to cloth made of the bark of paper mulberry or breadfruit trees which has been soften and stretched by a process of beating with anvils.¹ Bark beaters or anvils are most frequently made of wood with one or more of their surfaces carved with an elaborate grooved, cross hatched or serrated so that they are often attractive objects in themselves (Leonard and Terrell 1980:8).

After it has been shaped into the desired form bark cloth can be left in its natural whitish shade or coloured by dyeing. Surface patterns are applied in colours extracted from various plant berries, roots and saps, earth pigments, charcoal, burnt lime, and, in the case of the Baining men of New Britain, with blood obtained by piercing the tongue (Bateson 1935). The surface can be painted with brushes made of twigs or coconut fibres or colour can be rubbed through cut out stencils or applied with ferns or other desired shapes dipped in dye.

Europeans first became aware of some of the uses of tapa from the paintings and drawings of artists accompanying early voyages of exploration, illustrating various ways which tapa was worn by people of rank in the Society Islands (Smith 1960, see plates 11 and 34 by Sydney Parkinson, plate 70 by John

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¹ Paper mulberry [Broussonetia papyrifera], species of breadfruit [Artocarpus spp.] and fig [Ficus] and the mamaki shrub of Hawaii [Pipturus albidus] (Leonard and Terrell, 1980:6). Even the musical quality of a tapa beater can be considered as part of its aesthetic appeal. As Brigham noted on Oahu (Hawaii) his impending arrival was telegraphed from village to village by the ringing of tapa anvils - (Brigham 1911). In Tonga women harmonise and syncopate their rhythmic beats during communal tapa making ceremonies. In Polynesian mythology the goddess Hina was banished to the moon because the god Tangaroa became annoyed with the incessant sound of her beating tapa which disturbed his relaxed enjoyment of kava drinking (Leonard & Terrell 1980:8).
Webber). Tapa (called ahu by the Tahitians) was prized by Polynesians for bodily adornment. At the time of European contact it was also used as a covering for god images, as a item of chiefly wealth and a prestigious item for ceremonial exchange, tribute and religious offerings. Processing bark cloth was a time consuming communal activity undertaken by women, with women of rank presiding.

The practise of making kapa (the Hawaiian word for bark cloth) in Hawai‘i diminished after the Kamehameha dynasty was replaced by rapidly increasing European domination. Imported clothing replaced the traditional garments and land used for cultivating paper mulberry was taken over for commercial plantations. Quilting and embroidery, introduced by missionaries' wives as a community activity and creative outlet for women, took over from the activity of making kapa (Hammond 1986:15).

Tapa was also esteemed in the Cook Islands where it also had many uses until the twentieth century. The centre portion of the elongated staff gods of Rarotonga were wrapped in layers of tapa, giving these objects unusual but still aesthetic

1 However many of the illustrations (or more accurately, engravings made at a later date), romanticised the nature of the Pacific Islands landscape and created fanciful versions of the people's dress. George Forster, who was on Captain James Cook's second voyage of discovery, criticised the engravings made by the expedition's artist, William Hodges, after their return. Forster wrote:

It is also greatly to be feared that Mr Hodges has lost the sketches and drawings which he made from NATURE in the course of the voyage, and supplied the deficience in this case, from his own elegant ideas. The connoisseur will find Greek contours and features in this picture, which have never existed in the South Sea. He will admire an elegant flowing robe which involves the whole head and body, in an island where the women very rarely cover the shoulders and breast (Forster cited in Smith 1960:53).
proportions. If a staff was four metres long, the *tapa* wrapped section could be one half to one metre in diameter. Unfortunately, the rapid conversion to Christianity of the Cook Islanders in the 1870s, and the lack of curiosity by the missionaries as to exactly what these 'idols' represented, means that little has been recorded about the staff gods nor the possible symbolic significance of their *tapa* wrapping and the designs on the wrapping (Barrow 1979:85, plates 92 and 94).

*Tapa* robes are still used for the investiture of *ariki* (chiefs) in the Cook Islands. One of the main exhibitions at the opening of the Sir Geoffrey Henry Cultural Centre in Avarua, Rarotonga, in 1992 was a display of life size figures, one for each of the present *ariki*, dressed in the *tapa* robes of their investiture.

Samoans make large sheets of bark cloth, which they call *siapo*, by pasting together strips of processed bark and, in the process, decorate small strips which will make up the repeat pattern when joined. Design tablets (*upeti* in Samoa) were double strips of pandanus leaf stitched together with raised designs built up on the surface by sewing strips of bamboo, sennit or plaited pandanus onto it.¹ These have been replaced by small carved boards which are manipulated by a few women working together to apply the design. *Siapo* may also be painted freehand in distinctive linear designs. Western Samoan artist Fatu Fe'eu (1993:1) says of the present circumstances in Samoa, where *siapo* is still frequently made, 'the art of *siapo*

¹ A recent development, demonstrated at the 1988 Festival of Pacific Arts by American Samoans, is the practise of hand painting "*tapa* boards", small squares of *tapa* mounted on a firm backing, with attractive designs as an updated form of interior decor.
(siapo tasina, siapo mamanu) . . . (is) performed mainly by very skilled women in the village'.

Feu'u comments on the hold of tradition in Western Samoa, or more precisely that elders are wary of new uses of traditional and meaningful tapa designs. There is some resistance to contemporary artists using traditional Samoan motifs, many of them drawn from classic siapo designs, in their work, or the display of siapo in non-conventional settings. He writes that there is strong resistance from some sections of the Samoan community (particularly the elders) to view the traditional images of tattoo or siapo in a new environment e.g. museum, gallery exhibition. There is resistance or reluctance to view the same motifs and symbols on art paper and on canvas with oil or acrylic (Feu'u 1993:4).

Even though Samoan elders feel their art forms and culture are threatened by 'the commercialisation of Pacific art for monetary gain' and the inappropriate use of traditional motifs on commercial products (Feu'u 1993:4), pressure has been placed on them to negotiate what is acceptable for Samoan artists wishing to use Samoan designs in contemporary contexts. As Feu'u reports, the elders have instructed that, before attempting any derivation of Samoan motifs and symbols, Samoan artists must

endeavour to understand the essence of 'Fa'a Samoa'. Fa'a Samoa is everything about Samoan culture: the people, the family, the land and sea and its art forms. The art form to a Samoan is personnified as 'the living art' . . . . It is very difficult for a Samoan artist to separate these two elements, the art and the culture . . . . The Contemporary Samoan Artist or Tufuga has more responsibility to embrace the tradition, to produce new
styles or art forms which promote the strength and diversity of their culture to the world (Feu'u 1993:3-4).1

This example demonstrates the revered place siaipo retains in Samoan society and the prestige of traditional emblems or motifs used in siaipo designs. The conservatism of the Samoan elders is understandable, as they wish to protect their special clan designs from inappropriate use. On the other hand, some Samoan contemporary artists, while respecting the traditions and meaningfulness of siaipo, and the clan designs featured on it, are attempting to negotiate ways to use siaipo designs in new contexts, appropriate to new developments in Samoan art and which continue to express the vitality of Samoan traditions.

Tonga is renowned for the great lengths of ngatu (decorated bark cloth) which have remained an important item for ceremonial presentations in this island kingdom. Wendy Cowling notes that ngatu is distinguished in Tonga from undecorated tapa which serves many utilitarian purposes such as bedding, curtains and room dividers (Cowling forthcoming).

In a continuous exchange system of circulating koloa (items of value), ngatu, certain types of food and kava roots are required. Important community occasions such as church openings, football tournaments, royal visits and noble celebrations, as well as family occasions, especially funerals, marriages and childrens' first and twenty-first birthdays,

1 As his own personal and cultural symbol, Fe'eu has adopted and adapted the frangipani motif which, 'together with geometric motifs of various descriptions are acceptable for general art forms of paintings, drawings and carving' (Fe'eu 1993:5).
require the preparation of feasts and presentations of \textit{koloa}, \textit{kava} and pork on a scale appropriate to the occasion (Cowling, forthcoming 2).

Kerry James explains the lexicology of the word \textit{koloa}, referring to its ancient and modern associations. \textit{Koloa} connotes durable (but not utilitarian) goods made by men or women. James comments that ocean-going canoes would have been included in the category of \textit{koloa}, and in current usage \textit{fale koloa} refers to shops selling durable consumer goods. Children are metaphorically \textit{koloa} as they are made by men and women, but the term generally refers to certain goods made by women. As James explains

\textquote{\textit{koloa}}, used with reference to women's products, refers to certain categories of items which had ceremonial significance in the old order, for example, some kinds of fine mats \textit{fihu}, some kinds of decorated bark cloth \textit{ngatu}, baskets made of coiled vine \textit{kato alu}, and scented coconut oil . . . . The most valuable items were ones exclusive to chiefs, revered and precious: \textit{koloa fakatonga} of the highest order. Such items of \textit{koloa} were also associated, in ways which are not now entirely clear, with the old gods, with their physical emanations as idols, and with their earthly descendents and priestly representatives, the \textit{'eiki} (usually translated as 'chiefs'), particularly chiefly women . . . .

The sacred \textit{'eiki} quality was also associated with the 'feminine' principle of structuring the polity, and differed in essence from notions of authority or secular power which were associated with the 'male' principle (James 1987-8:34).
The Tongan Constitution of 1875 reduced the former absolute rights of the aristocracy by distributing land to commoners, freeing labour relations and introducing a Christian ideology; nevertheless the notion of *anga fakatonga* (the Tongan way or tradition) was maintained. Until Queen Salote's reforms in the 1950s, chiefly women could call upon women lower in the social hierarchy to make *koloa* for them. Women of high rank also designed *kupesi* (stencils used for making the patterns on bark cloth) and made other articles but, for aristocratic women, 'these employments . . . are considered accomplishments, not professions' (Cowling forthcoming:10). The ability to design *kupesi* and own one's own patterns has become more widespread in recent years. Cowling notes that, at present

the preparation of materials and the making of *ngatu* and mats is usually done co-operatively or at least in the company of other women

. . . . The group may comprise mostly related women, or women linked by church affiliation, or by formal membership of a weaving association or village development group, or simply by neighbourhood and friendship (Cowling, forthcoming 18).2

The demand for *ngatu* is continuous and, because of the lengthy process involved in its making (groups of women working together may make only one or two long pieces per year

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1 Cowling here quotes from the account of William Mariner 'several years resident in those islands' which was first published in London in 1817.

2 James notes that 'the maker's identities, as distinct from those of their former chiefly rulers, can now be distinctively marked in the cloth through the *kupesi* which they have designed with meanings personal to them and their families' (James 1987:40).
of 40 - 50 sections), requires the constant involvement of a high percentage of the women of Tonga. New ngatu are necessary because existing ones are used for burials, sold to Tongans resident overseas, or deteriorate in the climatic conditions and with the depredations of insect pests. It is essential for every Tongan woman to have ngatu and fine mats on hand at all times in case a death occurs in her family. A high market value has been established for ngatu (around $750 for a 50 section ngatu), not by tourists and art connoisseurs, but by Tongans who have emigrated and women who are wage earners (Cowling, forthcoming:35). The demand for ngatu, by both resident and expatriate Tongans, points to the efficacy of anga fakatonga and the objects which symbolise it for Tongans.

Cowling remarks that the presentation of koloa is one of the few times women receive public recognition for their work. Their ngatu or fine mats, the result of their labour, their ideas for design and fine execution are freely given when needed to uphold the family's prestige and contribute to the kainga (an individual's cognate kin). Thus, making ngatu for koloa is not just a reflection of ancient practises, but, as Cowling notes, it still underpins the four-fold dynamic on which Tongan society is conceived to operate, in particular

notions of obligation, duty, respect and love. These are meshed together under the notion of fulfillment of tradition . . . . By responding to the force of this dynamic individuals are validating themselves and their position in the societal system, while at the same time validating the system itself (Cowling, forthcoming:12).
DISCUSSION

Indigenous societies in Australia and the South Pacific region have responded imaginatively to their environment and have evolved distinctive patterns of belief and systems of social organisation over time. Each society has found original ways to express, in material and non-material forms, the stimuli from ideas and events which have formed their history and collective identity, and they still do so today.

A period of rapid change followed European contact. Many responses to Western influences are detectable in the indigenous art forms of the region; for example, on a very practical level, new tools and materials were found to be useful. For carvers, metal tools were time saving and allowed detail to be carved more easily, as well they allowed an increase of production, at a time when an external market for carvings was developing. But not all traditional art styles have been maintained, in fact more have been discontinued, often irretrievably lost, than those which have persisted. In Chapter 3 an example was given of Maori carving styles, where Simmons identified thirteen eighteenth-century styles of Maori stone carving that died out between 1820 and 1863, but he also noted that in the mid-nineteenth century there were three flourishing schools of wood carving (Simmons 1984:107).

Within the conceptualisation of ‘primitive’ art, many scholars considered tradition to be passive and uninventive, and therefore envisaged that traditional art would die out with the encroachments of civilization, or else that it would be
corrupted by the use of non-traditional elements and could no longer be regarded as 'traditional' art. Changes in the conceptualisation of the term 'traditional' were discussed in Chapter 3, but are again mentioned briefly here to link it with the discussion of continuing traditions in this chapter. Firth (1951) distanced himself from the dominant theories of 'primitive' art by asserting that tradition was, and is, continuous and adaptable. The adoption of an untraditional element, for example steel tools in Maori woodcarving, was a matter of a change in the process only, and in fact stimulated the tradition of woodcarving in new directions. The important factor was, despite changes in its outward form, whether the tradition remained significant to a particular society. The present conceptualisation of 'traditional' as expressed by Morphy (1987, 1991) and Specht (1988) maintains that traditions are continuously evolving and accepts that new ways of doing things and new interpretations of events may be incorporated into a group's traditions. What indigenous people identify as an art form belonging to their traditions when they affirm its continued role in their society, should be acknowledged by others.

The Kula was investigated as a dynamic tradition and kula canoe boards, lagim and tabuya, as a physical manifestation of it. This investigation also showed that various schools of carving still exist and that Trobriand Islanders were aware of the individual hand of the carver (Narabutau 1975, 1979; Campbell 1984), offering more proof that the concept of the
anonymity of artists was a misconception in the paradigm of primitive art.

Also, the previous paradigm excluded references to ephemeral art from what they viewed as the artistic repertoire of 'primitive' people in the South Pacific region. The two examples of body decoration in this chapter indicate that it is has an essential role in Papua New Guinea Highlands societies, and in Yolngu society in Arnhem Land. Moreover, in the Arnhem Land example, body paintings were shown to be an integral part of a ceremony, in this case a maradjuri ceremony featuring the Dhuwa Sugarbag Story of the Djinang people.

Throughout the South Pacific region, many changes have occurred in traditional art styles, as new processes have been discovered and the decorative properties and other advantages of new materials investigated. The creative potential of new methods and materials was explored by art makers to serve the requirements of their own culture, as well as in response to outside interests. However, as Fe'eu describes for Samoa, some societies maintained, and continue to maintain, deep reservations about the inappropriate use of their art forms. This conservatism assists to maintain the value of the art form to the community. In the examples of Tongan ngatu and Samoan siapo, while the form and stylistic devices have remained relatively intact over time, innovation has occurred in the structure of the groups making decorated bark cloth. In Tonga, designing kupetsi and making ngatu have become more widespread since the political reforms of the 1950s. Social change also inspires new roles for artists. Fatu Fe'eu envisions
himself as a contemporary Samoan *tufuga* (artist) but, although he wishes to innovate, he accepts the conventions of tradition and respects the conservatism of the elders who wish to preserve the meaning and aura of traditional Samoan art forms. He must find solutions which do not transgress traditions and social values, but which also respond to the liberty of expression desired by contemporary artists.1

The 'ethnographic present' feature of the paradigm of primitive art considered indigenous societies timeless and unchanging. Although Tonga is one of the most conservative of the South Pacific states, it is evident that Tongan society has undergone profound changes. In Tonga, social and political relationships have changed since the time of first contact with Europeans, for example political leadership has changed from the rule of the Tui Tonga to the present day Constitutional Monarchy. James perceives that changes in the belief system and social relationships in Tonga were matched by changes in the meanings applied to *koloa*, but that *koloa* has remained significant to Tongan society, reflecting present day Tongan values and realities. She writes that

(F)ine mats and ngatu continue, with considerable persistence, to hold deep meaning and to signify for the vast majority of Tongans the re-creation of Tongan society (James 1987-8:34).

The investigation of Tongan ngatu has also emphasised the important role of women in Tongan society, signified by their

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1 Fe’eu now spends most of his time in New Zealand and is achieving a national and international reputation as a painter, printmaker and sculptor. Despite all of his experimentation his images remain distinctively Samoan.
production of *koloa*. Studies such as those of James and Cowling redress the under-representation of women and the significance of their art making as existed in the paradigm of primitive art.

The traditional art forms discussed in this chapter are images of self and collective identity. For both the individual and the group, significant art forms express simultaneously the meaning of being original and of belonging.
CHAPTER 6: INNOVATION IN ABORIGINAL ART

This picture just makes me think.

Daisy Andrews (1994)¹

INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1970s the burgeoning Aboriginal art movement has had a considerable impact on the collective Australian consciousness. It has significantly changed Australian perceptions of Aboriginal art and Aboriginality. And greater interest in their art and vastly expanded opportunities to exhibit and sell it have, in turn, undoubtedly influenced Aboriginal artists in all regions of Australia. The impact of commercialisation is acknowledged and has been discussed previously (see Chapters 3 and 4).

Within the period 1970s to 1990s, an important factor in the growth of appreciation and understanding of Aboriginal art has been the increased involvement of Australia’s public museums and art galleries. They have extended both their collections and their recognition of the contribution of indigenous people to Australia’s artistic heritage. Curators and other museum professionals have enhanced the Australian

¹ Daisy Andrews commenting on the background to her art exhibited in Bush Women at the Fremantle Arts Centre 1994.
public’s knowledge of Aboriginal art through exhibitions, education programs and publications (see Chapter 10).

Also since the mid-1970s, much has been written on contemporary Aboriginal art movements. Many writers have been preoccupied with the impact of Western ideas, tastes and materials on Aboriginal artists and art production and have described it in terms of colonial and post-colonial discourse (among them Maughan et al 1986; Cramer 1989; Fry and Willis 1988-89, 1989 a and b, B. Smith 1988, T. Smith 1991, Hardy Megaw and Megaw 1992). Only a few, in particular John Stanton and Howard Morphy, have consistently upheld the view that Aboriginal art is at least equally inspired and motivated by Aboriginal culture, local perspectives and personal experiences. There are many valid reasons for writers to concentrate on the impact of Europeans and their ideas on Aboriginal art, issues of assimilation and appropriation and non-Aboriginal conceptualisations of Aboriginal art. But one aim of this chapter is to attempt to understand Aboriginal motivations for art production and discover whether this leads to a better conceptualisation of Aboriginal art. The internal factors that motivate Aboriginal artists to continuously explore modes of expression and produce significant art are important. They may be more influential than external factors including the influence of outsiders, whether missionaries or museums, and opportunities for financial gain.

Stanton’s thesis about innovation forms the framework for this chapter, that is, that ‘innovation’ results from the continuity of cultural creativity in Aboriginal art (Stanton
Stanton's thesis about the importance of internal factors resulting in innovation is found to be sustainable. It acknowledges that Aboriginal artists' creativity is a response to their knowledge of their particular culture and beliefs, sense of place, the collective experiences of their group and individual life experience. This does not exclude the influence of external factors, and these are also acknowledged to stimulate innovation, but it emphasises that an account of innovation in Aboriginal art that neglects internal factors is unsound.

The capacity and willingness to change have to be present before any innovation can take place, whether it is due to factors that are internal to Aboriginal culture, or external to it, or a combination of both. Most innovations in Aboriginal art are due to both internal and external factors: examples of innovations in Aboriginal art in this chapter will demonstrate the three possibilities, but no claim is made as to whether, on the whole, internal or external ones are more important.

It is necessary to emphasise from the outset that innovation is not another sub-category of art, additional to those accepted in Chapter 3, because innovation is a process that can occur within most categories of indigenous arts. The final section of this chapter considers whether, and how, the concept of innovation can be related to the categorisation of indigenous art. It also comments on the applicability of

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1As already demonstrated in Chapter 3 with the example of bark paintings, and within the traditional art forms discussed in Chapter 5.
Stanton’s theses about innovation to indigenous cultures other than Aboriginal.¹

**STANTON’S THESIS ABOUT INNOVATION**

Stanton’s concept of ‘innovation’ emphasises the continuity of cultural creativity in Aboriginal art. He acknowledges that outside influences can, and often do, cause change. But he also perceives the processes of change in Aboriginal art as being substantially directed by Aboriginal culture (Stanton 1986, 1988, 1990, 1991). This can be seen in the way he explains his concept of innovation:

Innovation does not just refer to the introduction of new materials and media; rather it is a process of building on what is already embedded within Aboriginal cultures, through the development of new themes and new ways of treating subject matter that represent the worlds of the artists (Stanton 1991:7).

Stanton demonstrates that innovation is occurring in the artforms of the West Australian Aboriginal cultures he has studied, and that many of the innovations taking place are inspired by factors internal to Aboriginal culture. Innovation is observable in the expansion of ‘traditional’ forms of artistic expression, including the Wandjina tradition of the Kimberley (Stanton 1988), and in the emergence of new forms of creative expression related to local events, such as the Krill Krill song

¹ There is little scope for innovation in the category of replicas. Innovative changes would remove the newly created objects from the category of replicas.
cycles, visual art forms and ceremonies which began at Turkey Creek in the mid-1970s.¹ Through examples such as the dream spirit journey depicted in Krill Krill ceremonies, Stanton demonstrates that, for many Aboriginal societies today, the Dreaming contains mechanisms which encourage the emergence of new ideas and new interpretations of existing ideas (Stanton 1988).

The Dreaming is commonly the source for new cycles of ceremonial knowledge or the explanation of events. Stanton commented that

(w)ithin the contemporary context, many Aboriginal people are seeking to reiterate, through the expression of their visual, graphic and aural arts, their continued understanding of an ancient world increasingly influenced by alien, non-Aboriginal factors . . . .

Processes of innovation and experimentation may occur within specific groups (for their own purposes) as well as in the context of external linkages and influences (Stanton 1988:3).

In Stanton's view the increasing diversity of Aboriginal art (referred to later in this chapter and Chapter 8) is a result of the highly disparate personal experiences of Aboriginal people. In some areas of central and north-east Western Australia customary forms of social organisation and cultural expression remain in place and dominate the pattern of life. In south-east and south-west Australia, where Aboriginal heritage has

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¹ The Krill Krill (elsewhere spelt Kuril Kuril) designs depicted in ochres on boards ‘dreamed’ by Paddy Tjumpandji (elsewhere spelt Jaminji) which dancers held above the heads of participants in ceremonies. The painted boards eventually became a success in the art market. For details of the Krill Krill see Ackerman (1989, 164-175). A series of Krill Krill paintings was acquired by the Australian National Gallery.
changed markedly, people are exploring and re-asserting their own socio-cultural identities from their distinctively Aboriginal perspective (Stanton 1991:5).

But innovation is also a response to external demands. As he admits (Stanton 1986:21), ‘individual variability, or idiosyncracy, is promoted by the uneven but extending influence of the cash-based ‘ethnographic’ and ‘tourist’ art market’. The exhibition catalogue, Innovative Aboriginal Art of Western Australia, (Stanton 1988), contains examples by many Aboriginal artists (some now well-known in the art world, some not) who have experimented with traditional and non-traditional media. Some artists, like David Downs, Paddy Jaminji and Rover Thomas, have been accorded recognition by the art world and rewarded with commercial success, but Stanton reminds us that their art reflects other aspects of their life unrelated to the outside estimation of it.

Innovation can include stylistic change, the adoption of new media, changes in the processes of artistic creation, the inclusion of new subject matter or changes in who is authorised to paint important or restricted subjects. In Stanton’s opinion, changes in Aboriginal art should be considered from the point of view of the socio-cultural systems to which this art belongs and the reasons the changes are considered important by the creator group. The following points summarise the major components of Stanton’s thesis.

Innovation in Aboriginal art (whether of the past or the present) occurs:
(i) because Aboriginals have the capacity to re-design subject matter and to create new forms in any available media;
(ii) as the result of dream spirit journeys or other 'mechanisms of the Dreaming'; and
(iii) as the result of culture contact with other Aboriginal or alien cultures.

In Australia this century, innovation in Aboriginal art has been stimulated by a number of factors. Sometimes, inspiration for innovative forms has arisen from dreams or spirit journeys when new material is revealed (Akerman 1989). The secularisation of art has occurred in tradition-oriented societies, even though iconographic structures and stylistic devices remain relatively fixed (Bardon 1979; Morphy 1991). Women have increasingly become painters (Williams 1976; Perkins 1991). Christianity and life on mission stations has had a profound impact on Aboriginal lifestyles and ideas (Sutton and Jones 1986; Hardy, Megaw and Megaw 1992). Access to new media has had extraordinary results (Bardon 1979, 1990; Ryan 1990). Going to school or adult education classes and workshops can inspire, alter and/or add to customary sources of artistic inspiration (Tandanya exhibition catalogues Karrayilli, Ian Abdulla both 1991).

In the process of innovation Aboriginal people have made significant and carefully considered adjustments to their

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1 Ian Abdulla's career as an artist started at a Senior Citizens art workshop in Barmera, SA. A strong group of painters emerged from Karrayili Adult Education Centre at Fitzroy Crossing, WA, first exhibiting at Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute in 1991.
established cultural patterns. In particular, in a number of tradition-oriented communities, Aboriginal artists decided to protect the significant cultural or religious content of their art while taking advantage of external markets for it. This is either done by eliminating certain motifs or by refusing to disclose their meaning (Ryan 1989:25, Morphy 1991:183-213). This 'secularisation' of art forms (as has occurred in the acrylic painting movements of central Australia and bark paintings from Arnhem Land) divorces ritual knowledge from certain art-making practises. Secular projections of forms which are otherwise in a restricted domain protect secret knowledge, allow the adaptation of clan designs for art works that are made to be sold and reflect awareness of what appeals to outside consumers. Such forms of innovation assert that Aboriginal people have the knowledge and the right to re-make their lifestyles and their culture to suit contemporary realities. It also allows them to express, by means of making their art accessible to a wider audience, socio-cultural perspectives fundamental to their own systems of belief.

Art forms can have a political objective, viz. to demonstrate to other Australians direct political messages about continued rights of ownership and usage of land. This objective has been realised by the presentation of bark paintings representing 'title deeds' to clan land to the Commonwealth Government (Morphy's comment that Yolngu people realised they could use their art for advocacy purposes
was previously mentioned in Chapter 4). Warlpiri women demonstrated the importance of their "holding onto country" through their paintings in the widely distributed film *Dreamings* (Riley 1988) which accompanied the international tour of the 1988 exhibition of the same name. For those who are dispossessed of their homelands, strong images are reinforced by stories and songs to reiterate knowledge of country and cultural heritage. In the Kimberley region of Western Australia, where dispossession occurred within living memory, an extraordinary resurgence of artistic activity has been taking place for a decade to reinforce cultural values from one generation to the next and to transfer knowledge of the Kimberley peoples' situation to others. The Kimberley situation experience provides the background for the paintings of Rover Thomas and the Karrayili group, in which connections to country are strongly expressed, and for the successful Aboriginal musical, *Bran Nu Dae*. It is also the subject of local Aboriginal director, Roger Solomon's, 1992 award-winning film *Exiles and the Kingdom*.

Engagement with external audiences for, and consumers of, their art allows Aboriginal art producers to benefit from the income generated by the sale of their art. Thus, economic considerations can also be seen to be an impetus for innovation. Innovation increases the potential of art production to sell to

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1 Yirrkala peoples bark petition presented to the Australian House of Representatives, Canberra, on 28 August, 1963.

2 Devised by Peter Yu and first performed with local Aboriginal cast in Broome, WA, *Bran Nu Dae* has since toured Australia and a concert version was performed at the 6th Festival of Pacific Arts in the Cook Islands.
external markets as well as being made for internal purposes. The income gained is not necessarily spent on subsistence. While working as Arts Adviser at Ramingining in 1993 to 1994, I observed that sometimes income from art was used to pay for charters to ceremonies or funerals and on several occasions financed the dapi (first initiation) ceremony of the sons and grandsons of artists.\(^1\)

In social terms, success in the wider Australian community brings recognition to a community of artists. The first Aboriginal art to have wide appeal to the Australian public, that of Albert Namatjira and the Hermannsburg school of water-colour landscape painters in the 1940s-1950s was decidedly 'innovative', aside from however else it has been categorised. The most obvious innovation of artists of the Hermannsburg school, viz. Aboriginal artists successfully using Western media, was recognised immediately, but it took much longer for it to be recognised by non-Aborigines that these water-colour images of the central Australian landscape were a new way of recording the artist's country and dreaming sites (Rubuntja, Namatjira & Macinolty 1988).

In the last two decades (1970s to the 1990s), innovative art has had a profound impact on non-Aboriginal Australians. It has provided constant and compelling visible evidence of

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\(^1\) In July 1993 the following artists used income from the sales of their paintings to put towards their sons' dapi; Djardie Ashley and Dorothy Djukulul for their son Jacob and Bobby Bunnuggur for his son Andrew. In September 1993 Namiyal Bopirri did the same for her grandson. Each needed a minimum of $1,000 to cover expenses including their son's costume, as part of the obligations to the kin giving the artist's sons (or grandson)their right to clan designs, for food and kava and assistance with guests' travel to the ceremony.
Aboriginal peoples' vision of their land: a vision they have upheld in spite of the deprivation and social traumas affecting many communities (evidenced in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody), and in spite of the intense power plays of mining lobbys and governments over the Mabq issue of native title. The following section reviews how innovations have occurred in the known history of Aboriginal art, at different times, in different places and in response to different stimuli. Evidence that the process of change, or innovation, is internally directed and informed by Aboriginal culture, is cited throughout.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION

In Chapter 3, 'The Categorisation of Indigenous Art', various concepts of 'tradition' and 'traditional' art were discussed at length. Tradition and change in art has already been discussed in the section on bark paintings in Chapter 3. The ways in which specific traditional art forms uphold social and cultural values, and may adapt with changing social and cultural circumstances, has been investigated in Chapters 4 and 5. In this section several examples are given which are indicative of significant innovations arising from recognised Aboriginal traditions. It offers a tentative account of some of the internal and external reasons stimulating the innovations. These include the toas produced in the Lake Eyre region in the late nineteenth century.

1 A substantial part of this section and the next has been published (Cochrane 1993a).
(response to mission influence and secularisation of art); the emergence of acrylic painting movements in the Central and Western Desert region (secularisation of art, access to new media and women becoming painters); the revelations leading to the Krill Krill ceremony and a new art style in the Kimberley (inspiration from dreams and spirit journeys), and the Aboriginal Memorial (advocacy for human rights).

The innovations discussed are the result of culture contact (except the Krill Krill, at least until the paintings of Rover Thomas and Paddy Jaminji were noticed by Europeans). Some preliminary remarks on the nature of contacts between Aborigines and alien cultures occur before the examples of innovation are given.

In traditional Aboriginal culture, significant painting activity refers to the activities of the creation ancestors of the Dreaming and the ways they shaped the earth. On ceremonial occasions the proper custodians can tap into ancestral power through the act of painting. Ceremonial

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1 Of many explanations of the Dreaming, Peter Sutton's (1988:14-15) version is one of the most thorough and complex. Sutton's description of the Dreaming reads (in part):

The imagery of Aboriginal art, and that of the songs, dances and ceremonial paraphernalia, is related to the vast bodies of mythic narrative and to the wider symbolisms of daily life and belief. Together these symbolisms constitute a complex code of interaction that continually remolds, and at the same time reflects, Aboriginal cosmology, sociality, and notions of the person. Reproducing the culture... is... reproducing or 'following up' the Dreaming. . . .

Dreamings are Ancestral Beings. . . . Their spirits are passed on to their descendants. . . . Groups of people who share the same Dreaming may constitute totemic corporations, sets of people bonded by a common link to the spiritual. Particular Dreamings that function in this way as signs of groups, emblems of local and corporate identity, provide much of the spiritual underpinning of traditional communal right to land. To falsely claim the Dreaming of another group is a serious infringement of Aboriginal law.
activity is necessary to maintain the fertility and continuance of the contemporary world. Spiritual beliefs centre on landforms, sites which are venerated as the sacred places of Dreaming ancestors. Each site is the responsibility of particular clans and family groups who are its ritual custodians. Thus, every area of Australia was 'mapped' and connected by dreaming tracks and totemic sites. The knowledge of the ancestral beings, who had created the land and everything inhabiting it, was codified into ritual and ceremonial practices. Ritual and ceremonial objects carried complex symbolism in their form and decoration. They were created to convey information at several levels and, in effect, codified religious principles and history. In many regions the material and non-material art forms which made the greatest demands on their creators' abilities were only displayed to men or women who had the required level of ceremonial knowledge. As they contained spiritual power these objects were held in great respect, viewed in secrecy and often discarded after use. Many secular art forms were also ephemeral (not permanent), as permanence was not a requisite of art in the Aboriginal world view. The accent was on re-enactment and re-creation to constantly demonstrate and generate links between the physical and spiritual world.

Before embarking on the changes which have occurred in painting and other artistic traditions of Aboriginal people, it should be recognised that one of the greatest innovations in Aboriginal culture is in the social role of the artist. In 1976 Nancy Williams wrote about circumstances at Yirrkala that
reflected the general circumstance of Aborigines in remote areas at that time:

There is no 'artist' role, nor is there a word indicating such a role in the Aboriginal dialects spoken at Yirrkala. The artist is a recent phenomenon, an English-labelled role referring to those men designated by whites as artists, that is, to those whose paintings appeal aesthetically to whites and sell well. An Aboriginal artist may or may not be prolific, but typically he has spent enough time producing art so that his work is known to art dealers and there is a specific demand for his work. 'Artist', however, is not a preempting role; a man who may now be an artist is not therefore precluded from other roles in Aboriginal society, he is rather an artist in addition to his Aboriginal-defined roles (Williams 1976:270).

Twenty years later there is still veracity in William's statement about the introduced role of 'artist' in remote Aboriginal communities, except that now many more artists have become recognised than were in the 1970s, and the role of artist is widely understood and engaged in by people from a considerable number of remote communities. As Nigel Lendon (forthcoming 5) comments, 'the role of artist is now much clearer in relation to other aspects of traditional life, and... as a consequence, the painter enjoys enhanced social status'. The role of artist in Western society is, and has been, familiar to those Aborigines living in urban circumstances, even some nineteenth-century Aboriginal artists like William Barak and Tommy McRae (Sayers 1994).

The degree of change within a tradition probably varies among cultures and at different times. Culture contact between
Europeans and indigenous people in the South Pacific region stimulated rapid changes in a relatively short period. But although it is less well known and documented, in the pre-European contact era there were significant contacts between Aborigines and people of alien cultures. For several centuries, in Northern and Western Australia, explorers and traders made contact with Aborigines. Some, including the Chinese, Dutch and Portuguese, left little record. However, after long associations in some coastal areas of Northern Australia, the Macassans (maritime traders from Indonesia) and Melanesians (from the Papuan Coast and Torres Strait Islands), influenced local painting styles, canoe construction techniques and burial customs. Innovations occurred as ideas, beliefs and practices were introduced and absorbed into Aboriginal cultures. Ronald and Catherine Berndt provide evidence of change before European contact in their collection and interpretation of myths, *The Speaking Land* (1989). With regard to the effect of contacts with other races they comment that does not mean there was 'no change' before . . . . Most myths tell of characters who came into a region from somewhere else, and many of them went on to other places, some also beyond the boundaries of known territories. In north coastal areas the

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1 Ronald Berndt cites archaeological evidence of Malay trepang fisherman on the north-west coast of Western Australia: fragments of pottery from Port Bradshaw and Melville Bay (collected in 1946:47); sherds of Philippine native ware and porcelain tentatively dated between 206BC to AD1800 (one porcelain sherd has been tentatively assessed as Ming of either fifteenth or early sixteenth century); at Goulburn Island fish hooks were found and a few mid-eighteenth century coins of Dutch origin. These finds are listed among other archaeological evidence of contacts between Aborigines and people of other races (Berndt 1965:3-4).
overseas places from which some of them came are specified. In Western Arnhem Land, a number of mythic figures came from beyond Bathurst and Melville Islands - from Manggadjara, Macassar. On the Eastern Arnhem Land side, the Djanggau came from an island in the Gulf of Carpentaria . . . and their opposite moiety counterpart Laintjung emerged from the waters of that Gulf . . . . On Cape York Peninsula, influences from the Torres Straits and Papua New Guinea are also reflected in myths (Berndt and Berndt 1989:417).

The most dramatic and enduring changes to Aboriginal societies began when British settlers occupied Australia's south-east coast after 1788. During the sporadic warfare that accompanied European settlement many Aboriginal societies had to cease their cultural practices, abandoned valued objects and sites were destroyed. In the nineteenth century Europeans collected Aboriginal objects as curios, exotic specimens of the country like its flora and fauna. In the prevailing scientific beliefs of the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, Aboriginal material culture was considered to be the work of 'primitive' people and to have little aesthetic value (Jones 1988:143-179).

The 'toas' of the Lake Eyre region

The case of the 'toas' provides an interesting perspective on Western attitudes to an Aboriginal innovation in the nineteenth century.
Few large sculptures in wood originate from central Australia as suitable timber was comparably rare. Men carved sacred boards and engraved stone *tjurungas* (oval shaped sacred objects). For some ceremonies, groups of men or women made complex ground constructions and ceremonial objects from plant fibres, ochres and clay (T.G.H. Strehlow 1947).

One type of sculpture from the Lake Eyre region posed a problem for ethnographers around the turn of the century. In the late 1890s-early 1900s, Pastor Johann Reuther assembled a collection of small sculptures, *toas* (sometimes described as direction markers) and dog sculptures, from the Lake Eyre region where a Lutheran mission had been established in 1867. Earlier ethnographic investigations had revealed no evidence of such objects and, as Sutton, Jones and Hemming (1988:196) record, ‘Reuther’s fellow missionary Otto Siebert, an accomplished ethnographer . . . contended that the Aboriginal people did not make such objects and that the objects were probably a recent innovation’. In 1906 the *toas* were described by the South Australian Museum’s Director and Curator of Ethnology (Stirling 1906 cited in Sutton, Jones, Hemming 1988:195) as ‘a class of objects which are new to this museum and unknown I believe elsewhere’.

Many ethnographers of the time believed Aboriginal culture to be static and timeless, leading to a debate among ethnographers as to whether the *toas* were a ‘hoax’, ‘spurious implements’ or ‘traditional artefacts’ (Sutton, Jones, Hemming 1988:196-7). Later investigations suggest that the *toas* may have been Aboriginal implements, but the type produced
prolifically for museum collections and as curios in the early 1900s could have been influenced by teachers working at the mission at that time (Sutton and Jones 1986: Sutton, Jones, Hemming 1988:196-7). Although the reasons for toas being produced prolifically by Lake Eyre Aborigines around 1900 is now obscured, this incident is evidence of Aboriginal people's preparedness to innovate and adapt objects for new purposes and non-traditional exchange partners.

It is also an early example of mission activities in collecting and encouraging the production of arts and crafts by the local Aborigines. Some missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (including Reuther at Lake Eyre and Strehlow at Hermannsburg) were among the earliest ethnographers in central Australia and some learnt local languages, kept excellent records of Aboriginal life and corresponded with museum directors and influential scholars with similar interests (Sutton and Jones 1986). Reuther's interest in collecting, and in particular in collecting toas, was undoubtably an external influence related to this innovation.

**Acrylic painting movements in central Australia**

Innovation is something that can occur in any artform. If the degree of innovation is relatively modest and the art form long established, then we may speak of it as innovation within a

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1 In particular Sutton and Jones (1986) refer to Harry Hillier, a missionary artist who drew the toas and promoted them through his drawings to ethnographic collections, and Theodor Vogelsang who instructed Aboriginal people in carpentry at the Lake Eyre mission.
tradition. If the innovation is very great it may mean a tradition coming to an end and a new art form being created. The situation of acrylic painting movements is complex: it will be demonstrated that, in this instance, tradition has not inhibited innovation, but found ways to resolve restrictions and provide internal solutions to the secularisation of culturally significant art. One effect of the secularisation of desert painting styles has been its reaffirmation of the value of Aboriginal spiritual and cultural traditions, while finding an entirely new way of representing them (Tjalptjarri Ross 1987:7).1

The entirely new way of representing sites and dreaming stories, in acrylics on canvas, is now perhaps the most prolific contemporary Aboriginal art style. But painting on canvas has not eclipsed the traditions of body painting and ground constructions, from which it takes its iconography. These traditions continue to be important within the rich ceremonial life of Warlpiri, Pintupi, Lurritja and other central Australian tribes: attending ceremonies is sometimes made possible by the sale of canvas paintings.2 Body painting and ground

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1 The landscape of Australia's desert regions is rich in mythological significance. Dreaming trails extends in all directions, 'mapping' the country with episodes from the epic voyages of spirit ancestors and creator beings. The spirit ancestors and totemic ancestors are shared by a number of desert tribes whose land they cross. As Tess Napaljarri Ross describes the land between Papunya and Yuendumu, 'this is the land of the Honey Ant Dreaming. . . . It comes under and across from Papunya, then the Honey Ant emerges east, on this side of Mt. Allen. There are many other Dreamings - Water, Snake, Possum, Kangaroo, Budgerigar, Big and Small Yam, Goanna and many others. These have belonged to our ancestors and hold no lies' (Ross 1987:9).

2 There are a number of examples where money from the sales of paintings is put towards the purchase of a truck, which enables a group to travel further and more frequently to ceremonies and other 'business'
constructions, as a means of expressing relationships to country and dreaming stories are sometimes performed simultaneously with exhibitions of paintings in metropolitan art galleries.

Internal factors first stimulated the painting movement at Papunya, as has been well documented by Bardon (1979, 1986, 1989) and others (Croker 1987, Maughan et al 1986, Ryan 1989). Papunya was a settlement created in the 1960s by the Commonwealth Government to bring together people of different Aboriginal tribes (Pintupi, Luritja, Warlpiri and Anmatjera Arrente) of the Central Desert region for their ‘advancement’. Geoff Bardon, an art teacher at Papunya Special School, made a particular effort to engage with both children and elders at Papunya through art, and an effort which inadvertently facilitated the early development of the Papunya painting movement (Bardon 1979). The attempt to brighten the school premises with mural paintings were taken up with great interest by senior men in the community who had menial jobs such as gardeners and maintenance workers, or were pensioners. From the humble beginning of the murals at Papunya School, these men revealed themselves to be the custodians of knowledge and great interpreters of the art styles of the region. What Bardon calls ‘their visionary power’, came to life:

The painting movement articulated once more with immense brilliance the relationship of these (people) to their land. It gave them a pride of

(Warlukurlangu Artists 1988). The women’s group of artists at Warringari Arts at Kunanurra, has its own truck, always driven by a woman, to enable them to attend ‘women’s business’.
self and let them once more become men and women speaking in their own right and their own traditions . . . .

I sense that 200 years of neglect and discrimination cannot be reversed within one generation or even two, yet the painting movement points for all of us towards a great resurgence of the human spirit in this country . . . . The Western Desert painters have, by their insight of artistic form and towering compassion towards their land, provided for us all, and for all time, a re-perception of the continent (Bardon, public lecture, National Gallery of Victoria, 14 December 1988).

In the early days at Papunya there was some concern among the painters that powerful stories or symbols, restricted to fully initiated men, should be withheld. Agreement was reached among the artists, who had then formed Papunya Tula Artists Co-operative Ltd., that certain objects or symbols should not be depicted, as this new form of art had to be suitable for public viewing. Several artists worked towards ways of concealing ancestral designs. It was generally decided to paint in the background, in contrast to rock surfaces or *tjuringa*, which are left plain. Works by Turkey Tolson Tjupurrula, *Emu Dreaming* (1974) and Charlie Tjaruru Tjungurrayi *Mitukatjirri* (1972) show they were using dotted sections. Dots had been of little importance in desert painting styles, except for the visual effect of making an outline ‘flash’, but they were to become one of the most recognisable features of Papunya art (Ryan 1989:24). Between 1971 and 1974 Johnny Warranula Tjupurrula introduced an innovative style of shifting hues of over-dotting, which proved ideal for the purpose of disguising or concealing secret elements (Ryan 1989:24-32).
As the painting movement progressed, some external factors stimulated further developments. As well as supplying better materials and advising on technical aspects of painting, successive arts advisers helped Papunya Tula artists with improved marketing. Some were not adverse to influencing artists to paint in certain colours, or on a scale that they considered would be readily accepted by the museum world and the art market. By 1980 Andrew Crocker was encouraging a number of artists to paint epic works which encompassed several Dreaming trails. Several artists produced major works on this huge scale (Croker 1987), for example Tim Leurah, assisted by his brother Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, created Napperby Death Spirit Dreaming (1980) which depicted a spiritual journey from west to east and included all of the artists' Dreaming sites as insets.

Painting at Yuendumu, a settlement of Warlpiri people, 120 kilometres north of Papunya, was started by women in 1983 (Ryan 1989). The women managed to save enough money from their painting to buy a vehicle, enabling them to travel to their sacred sites. Warlpiri women have remained prominent in the painting movement which subsequently grew at Yuendumu, a measure of their strength and autonomy. Warlpiri men and women have visually distinctive styles and content in their paintings, although men apparently 'gave' women the right to use dots.

The free-ranging, splashy, vibrant style of Yuendumu first came to national attention with what became known as the Yuendumu Doors (Warlukurlangu Artists 1987). The project to
paint the thirty-six doors at Yuendumu Community School was undertaken by five senior men in 1984 as a way of demonstrating the equivalence of Aboriginal law and knowledge to the Western-style education the children were getting at school. The artists who painted the Yuendumu Doors, Paddy Jupurrula Nelson, Paddy Japaljarri Stewart, Larry Jungarrayi Spencer, Paddy Japaljarri Sims and Roy Jupurrula Curtis, were members of the School Council, and were determined to ensure the survival of their laws and belief systems (Yuendumu Doors, Warlukulangu Artists 1987). Intense colour and gestural freedom distinguished the paintings on the Yuendumu Doors from the more restrained style and colouration favoured by Papunya artists, and these have remained characteristic features of these Warlpiri artists.

In 1984 a number of huge canvases were painted by the same artists who had painted the Doors, and the enterprising Warlpiri artists formed Warlukurlangu Artists' Aboriginal Association, employing an art co-ordinator to assist with marketing, supplies of materials and earnings from the sale of art.

Again, innovative forms at Yuendumu first developed as a response to local contexts and concerns, the main one identified with the painting of the Yuendumu Doors being the maintenance of Aboriginal culture on par with Western learning. The external factors became evident as artists realised the potential of new markets as further outlets for creativity. Both male and female artists represented by Warlukurlangu Artists have maintained a strong presence in acquisitions and
exhibitions in Australian museums and in the commercial gallery circuit since the late 1980s. Warlpiri people have frequently participated in the formulation of exhibitions around their art which have toured internationally (Dreamings 1988; La Reve et la Real 1988, Magiciens de la Terre 1989; Aratjara 1993) and they have travelled extensively to install ground constructions within exhibition spaces. Their spokespersons, well respected artists like Michael Nelson Jakamarra and Dolly Granites, have reiterated on a number of occasions that one of the main reasons for Warlpiri continuing to paint and exhibit so extensively is to communicate the meaning of their land and culture to outside audiences (Granites and Jakamarra in the Dreamings film 1988; Michael Nelson Jakamarra, public lecture 1991).

The Krill Krill and paintings of Rover Thomas

Christian religion is not the only religion which has stimulated innovation in Aboriginal art, Aboriginal religious beliefs continue to inspire art. In the late 1970s to the 1980s a new style of painting emerged at Warmun (Turkey Creek) in the east Kimberley which sought to strengthen Aboriginal religious beliefs in that region. All Australians are familiar with the havoc that Cyclone Tracy caused to the city of Darwin on Christmas Day, 1974. The event had a profound effect on Aboriginal societies over the whole northern portion of Australia as well. Senior Aborigines interpreted the disaster as a manifestation of one of the most powerful and widespread
religious entities in Aboriginal Australia, the Rainbow Serpent who was disturbed at the decline in traditional religious life (Akerman 1989:164).

Shortly after, Geoffrey Mangalamarra received in a dream the songs and dances of the Cyclone Tracy palga (narrative dance cycle) which spread rapidly through the Kimberley. Another man, Rover Thomas at Warmun (Turkey Creek), was visited by the spirit of a deceased woman who gave him details and songs relating to the travels her spirit took after death, one of which related to her viewing of the destruction of Darwin by the Rainbow Serpent in the form of Cyclone Tracy. The travels of this spirit, as revealed to Rover Thomas, became the focus of a cycle of songs and dances called the Krill Krill (elsewhere spelt Kuril Kuril) which linked the Warmun community back with their traditional cosmology. Rover Thomas enlisted his mother's brother Paddy Jaminji to paint the first emblems used in the Krill Krill and Jaminji continued as artist until 1981 when Thomas began painting the emblems (Akerman 1989:165).

In 1980 the art world first saw the paintings, which had been used as emblems in the Krill Krill dance cycle held above the heads of the dancers. The demand for these paintings has led to the production of additional paintings of the same genre, but not associated with Krill Krill. The fame of Rover Thomas' paintings has become such that in 1990 he represented Australia in the Venice Biennale (along with urban Aboriginal artist Trevor Nickolls).
This example provides the strongest evidence for a significant innovation being directed by concerns internal to Aboriginal culture. The song cycles, painted objects and ceremony of the Krill Krill were initially devised to strengthen Aboriginal culture in the Kimberley, not to express it to outsiders.

Following the 'discovery' of this exceptional style, Rover Thomas has achieved international acclaim and his work (and that of other artists in the same genre) is in constant demand for exhibitions. The benefits of his success in the Western art world are uncertain, as he is periodically depressed and alcoholic as a result of the demands and rewards of the Western art world for his art. Although he still produces great paintings he has not, so far, had another visionary journey (pers. comm. Kevin Kelly, arts adviser Warringari Arts 1993).

The Aboriginal Memorial

Some of the largest examples of Aboriginal sculptures originated in Arnhem Land and nearby islands including Elcho Island and Groote Eylandt. Monumental sculpture in Arnhem Land and the surrounding islands is usually associated with funeral ceremonies. Over many centuries carved posts with incised or painted decorations have been used as grave markers, coffins or memorials. In north-eastern Arnhem Land, mokwuy (spirit figures) were set up at grave sites to comfort or distract the spirit of a recently dead person and dupun (hollow log coffins) contained their bones.
The importance of Aboriginal graveposts as memorials, as well as significant art, was recently emphasised in the making of one important set. In Arnhem Land it is customary to make and paint *dupun* for mortuary rights. As a statement against Australia's Bicentennial in 1988, following two centuries of European domination, a number of artists from the Raminginging area of central Arnhem Land made the *Aboriginal Memorial*, comprised of 200 hollow log coffins. One hollow log coffin represents each year of the European occupation of Australia, and together the coffins represent all the Aboriginal people who have died as a result. The *Aboriginal Memorial* is a deep and thoughtful testimony to what has been lost, but it is also a celebration of survival.

The *Aboriginal Memorial* was intentionally created to signify Aboriginal history and values to a non-Aboriginal audience. Aboriginal people have suffered from the intensity and brutality of the first 200 years of white occupation. Many artists, from both tradition-oriented communities and urban environments, find that the Aboriginal history of resistance to colonialism provides a wealth of expression for their art. In the *Aboriginal Memorial* a traditional art form, *dupan* (hollow log coffins), was transformed to carry national and collective significance, an extension of its local and personal purpose. The *dupan* in this collection are still grave posts, but have been newly contextualised as a war memorial. Since 1992 it has been installed in Gallery One of the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, and is the first work of art seen by visitors entering the Gallery. This is an acknowledgement of
the significance of the *Aboriginal Memorial* in terms of Australian, and world art, and a tribute to the artists.

Australia's Bicentennial was intended to be a national celebration of Australia's successes in the first 200 years of its history since British occupation. It was largely funded by the Commonwealth Government. Although it was the Bicentennial which provided the external stimulus for the *Aboriginal Memorial* and funded it, the Bicentennial authorities and the Australian public had to accept that it was intensely critical of the history of white Australia. The artists who contributed to the *Aboriginal Memorial* were making a public statement on behalf of all Aborigines, advocating that their human rights be observed in the future and making a gesture towards the reconciliation with non-Aboriginal Australians.

(RE)VIEWING HISTORY

The reconstruction of Aboriginal history is also a major concern of Aborigines living in the urban and rural areas of Australia. Kooris, Murris, Nungas and Nyoongahs have borne the brunt of enforced dispossession, missionisation and racism. In recent years, a number of innovative artists have emerged who, with great clarity, portray the unwritten side of Australia's history. This section briefly reviews the work of some self-taught Aboriginal artists. These artists have not had the benefit of a strong traditional life, and for several generations their families have lived a marginal existence in the Australian countryside or towns. The works of Ian Abdulla,
Robert Campbell Jr., Harry Wedge and Elaine Russell are often narrative, social history paintings. The internal force motivating such artists is the drive to have their Aboriginality and their people's unwritten history recognised. The acceptance of their art into Australian culture means that Australians now have an increased awareness that 'white Australia has a black history' and appreciate these paintings not only for their highly original nature, but because they are important educational tools.

'Contemporary' is a convenient, cover-all term frequently used to describe recent developments in Aboriginal art. It is generally applied to works by artists who are using non-traditional media, styles and techniques and exploring areas of creativity and self expression which differ from traditional conventions.

Contemporary Aboriginal art is often thought to be 'urban' art, or 'Koori' art. Many 'urban' images carry an important agenda beyond their aesthetic and commercial appeal: collectively they review the Aboriginal history of the last 200 years. They are also a response to the need to find ways for Aboriginal culture to survive, or subvert, the pervasive infiltration of Western popular culture. The work of a number of city-based artists is discussed in Chapter 8, because of a number of issues in addition to innovation are investigated through their work. Nevertheless, urban Aboriginal art is also mentioned here because it is another innovative and inventive response to the past and present circumstances of Aboriginal
people, and the present discussion would not be complete without it.

Aboriginal artists living in country towns and rural areas use contemporary visual art forms (i.e. non-traditional subjects in non-traditional media) to express their experiences of life as Aboriginal people in marginalised communities. Ian Abdulla, a self-taught artist from Barmera, South Australia, illustrates the life of itinerant workers in the Murray Riverland in a clear, direct way that has immediate visual appeal. His paintings are also important as social history documenting the life of rural workers of his generation. In *Cutting apricots at night at Winkle* (1990), *Sheep's head trilogy* (1990), and *The rodeo at Berri Football Oval at night* (1991), Abdulla, while acknowledging hardships, shows people and landscape in equilibrium and captures a sense of achievement and enjoyment. John Kean comments that

(a)s a series, these paintings trace Ian Abdulla's continued association with the area and document some of its recent social history. Many of the works refer to what he calls 'the depression' of the 1950s when he was growing up at Cobdogla. It was a time of few permanent employment opportunities for Nungas (Aboriginal people). During this time his family, like others along the river, relied on traditional Aboriginal skills and knowledge to survive, away from the mission and the prevailing government policy of assimilation (Kean 1991, no page numbers in catalogue).

Abdulla started to paint in his maturity, when he attended an art workshop at the Jerry Mason Centre at Glossop
run by Steve Fox, a printmaker who had been Arts Adviser at Yirrkala in Arnhem Land for several years. Fox records that:

Ian Abdulla . . . started out saying he couldn't draw or his mob didn't have culture left . . . though it all changed the more we talked. I used to wonder why people used to talk like that the same as the guys in jail who used to look at pictures of people in the centre or up north and say they are real Aboriginals not us we have got nothing. I suppose if you grow up hearing us whitefellas talk like that all around you every day you might start to believe it (Fox 1990:68).

At the end of the workshop Abdullah and several other Riverland Nungas were turning out, in Fox's words, 'the freshest most uninhibited prints about country that have come out of the Riverland' (Fox 1990:69). Abdulla, who is supporting his three children as a sole parent, has often said that it is not the recognition he has achieved in the art world that is important to him, it is the pride his children have in his work and what his art was saying (pers. comm. Abdulla 1991).

Robert Campbell Jr., of the Ngaku people of northern New South Wales, worked in the coastal town of Kempsey.¹ Like Abdulla, he is a self-taught artist who began his painting career as an adult. In the 1950s it was quite common for coastal Aboriginal communities in New South Wales to make and decorate artefacts for sale to tourists, and Robert

¹ Robert Campbell Jr. died in 1992.
Campbell's father, Thomas Campbell, was renowned for his poker-work boomerangs (Isaacs 1989:13).¹

Some of Campbell Jr.'s narrative paintings such as *Roped-off at the picture show II* (1986) depict the everyday experiences of segregation commonly shared by Aborigines of his generation, especially before Aborigines gained citizenship rights in 1967. Other paintings are forthright on the psychological damage caused by racial discrimination, such as *Hands of Time (Assimilation and separation)* (1987). Vivid colours, anonymous figures and an overlay of patterning are features of Campbell's style, giving his paintings a decorative quality which attracts before the candid messages contained in his art become clear.

One of Campbell's techniques is to divide his paintings into story panels. It is unclear whether he derived the idea of panels from bark paintings, 'I've seen some Aboriginal drawings in magazines from the Northern Territory and I kept adding and creating my own style - the Aboriginal spirit in me that I'd lost' (Campbell Jr. cited in Isaacs 1987:14). Another explanation Campbell has given is that he found the picture panels in comic strips a likeable and useful way to construct story pictures (public lecture 1991)². Campbell Jr. encouraged a number of other Koori artists from the Kempsey area to

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¹ Several generations of the Timbery family of La Perouse and Jarvis Bay, NSW, similarly made their living from artefact sales. The family of the Victorian Koori painter, Lin Onus, were also well known for their artefacts.

² Speaking about his art in a seminar at the Art Gallery of NSW in the series *Aboriginal Art in New South Wales*, organised by the writer and Bronwyn Bancroft for the Power Institute of Fine Arts, Sydney University.
form Kempsey Aboriginal Artists and undertake a joint exhibition, *Kempsey Kooris*, at Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative in Sydney in 1988. Robert Campbell Jr., Milton Budge and other Kempsey Kooris have discovered the strength of their Aboriginality and connections to their country and history through their art.

**INDIVIDUAL CREATIVITY**

The scope of this area of innovation is too great to be fully encompassed in this thesis. Only a few examples of individual artists have been selected to indicate this aspect of innovation. This section discusses the aspect of individual creativity in the work of some Aboriginal artists from remote areas whose art is radically different in some way from their group's traditional art. Their art is often included in the category of 'contemporary' art in the Australian (Western) conceptualisation of it, but this is considered to be a misconstrual of it, for reasons given below.

As Margo Neale (1994:7) asks, 'How does one reconcile, on the one hand, the . . . marketing drive which packages Rover Thomas as a creative and highly original artist who, by Western logic, 'owns' the images and their creation, with, on the other [hand], the Aboriginal concept of originality?' She explains further

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1 I am grateful to Margo Neale, writer and curator, descendent of the Miming people of WA, for her comments on this issue.
(w)e all know that many of his [Rover Thomas's] images (particularly the Krill Krill) were given to him by the spirit of a deceased classificatory mother and are shared by Paddy Jaminji and many others. Yet on another level he does exercise . . . ownership in Aboriginal terms. Rover, as the receiver or medium of spiritual revelation, translates these into ceremonial images for the purposes of communication and continuity. As a custodian he owns and controls their use in the same way he would for country created by a spirit being . . . for which he also has guardianship rights.

So the essential difference is that traditional artists such as Rover Thomas have an individual responsibility within a collective context for the creation of an 'other' being, whereas the white contemporary artist is prized for his or her originality and has no real responsibility to anyone else, not even the responsibility to communicate (Neale 1994:7).

In Australia over the past two decades, the artworld has elected to honour a number of Aboriginal artists with solo exhibitions, and invited them to participate in openings, functions, make television appearances, and prepared glossy publications about the artists and their art (including Michael Nelson Jakamarra, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, Rover Thomas, Emily Kngwarreye, and Ginger Riley Mundawalawala). These artists, all from remote tradition-oriented communities, have been 'spotlighted' because their artwork is exceptional for its visual impact and stands up to (Western) forms of intellectual appraisal.
Throughout this thesis, in order to disprove the concept of the anonymity of artists in the paradigm of primitive art, the concept of the individual creativity of artists has been upheld. In previous chapters examples have been given where the individual styles of a number artists working on the same types of objects could be distinguished (Gerbrands 1967); where the individual style of a nineteenth century artist could be identified (Beran forthcoming); and, where an indigenous informant could recognise the styles of various artists and their schools in a collection of canoe prows (Narabutau 1975, 1979). In all of these examples, and for all the Aboriginal artists mentioned above, the artists live(d) in communities which function on a collective basis. Taking the example of Rover Thomas's *Krill Krill*, evolving something new would be communicated, explained and discussed with other members of the community because the story would not only be told in painted images, but also in song cycles and performance; it may be a great innovation, but it would have to be 'right' for the community to adopt and use it.

Abie Jangala, Tjungkiya Wukula (Linda Siddick) Napaltjarri demonstrate a specific regionality in their works. Moreover their paintings are distinctive, individual interpretations of important sites, Dreamings and events. They are mature artists whose public careers span well over a decade of artmaking and experimentation in 'new' media. Each of the artists has been personally involved with events in their locality which have stimulated their creativity and expanded the roles for artists. Abie Jangala was part of the community's
first painting enterprise at Lajamanu and among those who resolved what Margie West describes as ‘the problematic of commercial painting and ritual integrity’ (West 1994:10). Since 1986 Jangala has developed and refined a particular style of depicting his Dreamings. In *Ngapa Jukurrpa (Water Dreaming)* the formal central pictographs are enhanced by a field of shimmering white dots. Knowledge and authority over the subjects of paintings and their form of representation has been critical to the integrity of painting movements of Warlpiri people at Yuendemu and Lajamanu, but this has not inhibited the development of an individual style, such as that of Abie Jangala.

Tjungkiya Wukula (Linda Syddick) Napaltjarri, began her instruction in Pintupi art in the 1980s and was taught by her uncle, Nosepeg Tjupurrula, classificatory uncle Uta Uta Jangala and step-father Shorty Lunfkata Tjungarrayi. West notes that Tjunkiya Napaltjarri’s association with the Warlpiri women artists at the Jurrkurpa Arts Centre at Alice Springs also exposed her to different ways of expanding the boundaries of her art. Her most inventive images syncretise Ancestral and Christian beliefs, or the film character ET and ancestral spirits (West 1994:20).

Ken Thaiday, of Erub (Darnley Island) in the Torres Strait, has gained recognition for his intriguing ‘hand-held dance machines’ and dance masks. The dance machines are ingenious constructions of painted plywood silhouettes assembled with bits of plastic, wire and fishing line. *Darnley Island: hand-held dance machine* (1991) shows the profile of the island.
When manipulated, each of its three panels can be drawn up to change the scene as the rising sun emerges from behind the mountain. *Beizam (shark): dance mask* (1991) is crowned with a shark silhouette. Forming the lower half of the mask, to conceal the face of the wearer, are the shark's life size open jaws and rows of razor teeth, which are rendered harmless by the incongruous ruff of feathers surrounding the open jaws.

Although the materials have changed, the method of constructing articulated masks is a traditional art form of the Torres Strait Islanders. The articulated turtleshell masks from the Torres Strait Islands, collected in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century,¹ were treasured by avant-garde European artists and connoisseurs as 'masterpieces of primitive art' (Rockefeller 1978, illustration on p.94). They are justifiably famous and were particularly admired by Andre Breton and other Surrealists. Thaidy's dance masks could well be included in a catalogue of Surrealist objects. But in the context of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander's art the dance masks effectively demonstrate how even radical changes in materials and appearances are only one aspect of how an image or object can be assessed. The ways in which it maintains continuity with a long evolving tradition must also be taken into account.

Innovative paintings and objects by the artists named in this section (as well as many others) have been absorbed into

¹ Documented by A.C. Haddon, ethnographer on the Cambridge Expedition to the Torres Strait Islands.
the Australian and international art world as 'contemporary' art. One of the reasons for their acceptance is that their art is seemingly complementary to major twentieth century movements in Western art; thus Rover Thomas's paintings can be conceptualised as 'minimalist', Emily Kngwarreye's as 'expressionist', Ken Thaiday's as 'surrealist', and so on. As well, as Neale observes, large canvas paintings 'can be easily slotted into the Western tradition as a purely visual experience' (Neale 1994:8). On one hand, the now complete acceptance by the Western art-culture system of magnificent large, highly original, but regionally specific and culturally informed paintings on canvas by Aboriginal artists, represents a significant shift in Western attitudes to indigenous art. On the other hand, there could well be a delusion existing in the Western art-culture system that the Aboriginal artists discussed in this section ever envisage their work in terms of its superficial similarity to some forms of abstraction in Western art, or would wish their work to be related with such a conceptualisation of it. As so frequently reiterated in Aboriginal artist's statements about their work, they are painting 'to keep their culture strong', 'to hold onto country'.

Chapter 8 will consider the work of urban Aboriginal artists who have received their art training in the Western art-culture system. Some, including Richald Bell, Fiona Foley, Gordon Bennett and Bronwyn Bancroft use the knowledge gained from their life experiences and art training to protest against the social and cultural marginalisation of Kooris they
find unacceptable. One of the ways of rejecting cultural marginalisation that photographer/film maker Tracey Moffatt has found effective, is to reject being accepted into an exhibition or publication as an Aboriginal artist, because it may be a tokenistic gesture and not give full credit to the artist's achievement. Being accepted without qualification into the 'mainstream' of contemporary Australian arts practice is as important to some artists of Aboriginal background as purposefully expressing their Aboriginality is to others.

Nevertheless, Aboriginal artists living and working in Australian cities, are far more attuned to Australia's mainstream Westernised culture and its institutions than are Aboriginal artists living in remote communities who have little contact with Western art and its institutions. The achievements of urban Aboriginal artists are in the area of contemporary art as they have no personal foundations in traditional art. They understand the parameters of contemporary arts practice in Australian and international Western art, and may chose to reject them; this is perhaps the chief factor that makes their art decidedly innovative (see Chapter 8).

Aboriginal art by artists from remote communities whose work is highly innovative, and is understood by members of their community to be a new development, but strongly related to their culturally specific style, is categorised as 'contemporary' art in the Australian art world. This may be a misconception by the Australian art world, and should be
rejected on the grounds that it assimilates innovative Aboriginal art into a sphere dominated by Western contemporary art and its concerns, which are very different from Aboriginal concerns.

As well, such innovative Aboriginal art has taken a step away from tradition. Although it is strongly associated with tradition, it is not intended for traditional purposes (although song cycles may be sung while the painting is being prepared, children instructed, and clan relationships of people working on the piece affirmed during its making, as represented in the *Dreamings* film, Riley dir., 1988). It is art for sale, made in introduced media and intended to represent Aboriginal culture to outsiders, as well as bringing prestige and income to its makers. Some new language is necessary in the discourse on art to properly describe the nature of this art.

When Aboriginal artists, like Tracy Moffatt and Trevor Nickolls, are knowledgeable about the issues and concerns and issues of contemporary art in the international sphere, including the issue of the marginalisation of indigenous artists, and they elect to practice within this sphere, then they are participating in ‘mainstream contemporary’ art. In Australia mainstream contemporary art is exemplified by the selection of works exhibited in the *Sydney Biennale* and *Australian Perspecta* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Mainstream contemporary art is always radical and, therefore, because of its very nature, must be innovative.

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1 In a recent study of recent Native American art, Christian Feest (1992:16) categorises some contemporary art as ‘Indian mainstream art’, that is, ‘art . . . produced by artists who happen to be Indians’. 
At the beginning of this chapter it was stated that the capacity and willingness to change have to be present before any innovation can take place, whether it is due to factors that are internal to Aboriginal culture, or external to it, or a combination of both. The internal motivation for innovations by artists such as Michael Nelson Jakamarra, Rover Thomas, Tjungkiya Wukula (Linda Syddick) Napaltjarri, Emily Kngwarreye, Abie Jangala and Ken Thaiday) is that they reaffirm the value of Aboriginal spiritual and cultural traditions, while finding entirely new ways of representing them. Subsequent success (in Western terms) may motivate such artists to keep exploring new dimensions of their creativity.

DISCUSSION

In Chapter 3 various terms and categories were discussed. Some were found to be outmoded or irrelevant to the indigenous art of the South Pacific region. Other terms or categories were found to be useful to some extent. The term 'traditional' has been found useful here to describe an ongoing way of doing something (whether applied to art or other aspects of culture). Traditions may change gradually, come to a sudden end, or inspire a new idea or development. Tradition often forms the basis of developments, whether gradual or sudden, it continues to inform culture and reinvent itself. This view is complemented in this chapter by Stanton's thesis about innovation. The process of innovation can be seen
working within the traditions of a culture, reaffirming its values and keeping the traditions alive and meaningful to the present generation. The examples of the *Aboriginal Memorial*, the acrylic painting movements at Papunya and Yuendumu and the Warmun Krill Krill ceremony, given in this chapter, demonstrate how innovation works in traditional contexts. It has also been demonstrated in this chapter, in the section ‘Individual Creativity’, that it is difficult to classify the outcomes of radical innovations, such as the style of paintings Rover Thomas developed after his revelation and the formulation of it as images for the Krill Krill ceremony.

Stanton found the term ‘innovation’ useful to describe the process of change and to identify new art forms which had arisen as Aboriginal people have responded to new events, ideas and challenges. Stanton’s work in Western Australia, for example the exhibition and catalogue *Innovative Aboriginal Art in Western Australia* (Stanton 1988), provided evidence that the reasons for innovations were often embedded in Aboriginal culture. He does not deny that outside influences also stimulate change, but urges that due consideration be given to recognising internal forces in Aboriginal culture that may promote change.

The main part of this chapter followed Stanton’s view, discovering evidence of innovation in many Aboriginal artforms, even prior to European contact. Innovations continued to occur throughout Australia in response to missionisation, new avenues for trade, the appropriate sharing of cultural knowledge, and so on. Since the early
1970s, Aboriginal art has been the most volatile art movement in Australia and innovations have abounded. New movements in Aboriginal art have made the non-Aboriginal audience aware of vastly different aesthetic systems which express an intimate knowledge of country, issues of racial discrimination and the 'black' history of the dispossession forced upon Aboriginal people. Attempts have been made throughout the chapter to give reasons for the innovations from the Aboriginal viewpoint.

From time to time an innovation in the art of an Aboriginal group becomes highly visible, as all those discussed in this chapter have done. By following Stanton's thesis about innovation we can investigate the social, cultural and individual reasons to which artist(s) responded and which stimulated a particular innovation in an artform. One question which has arisen is whether, after a radical innovation occurs in a 'traditional' practice or artform, does that practice or artform become 'contemporary'?

At present, the Australian and international artworld's favoured term for innovative art (c1970 to 1990s) is 'contemporary', that is, 'the latest', wherever it is from and in whatever materials it is made. A number of other descriptors - region (or urban, rural, remote), gender, style, media - may be added to help define an image or object for a specific purpose, for example for inclusion in a exhibition. But, as has been explained above, the term 'contemporary' art may be misleading when used to describe innovative Aboriginal art forms that are more strongly related to
Aboriginal culture and concerns than they are to the concerns, issues and cultural background of Western contemporary art and artists. It is proposed that this current use of ‘contemporary’ needs to be critically reexamined. Other Aboriginal artists, mostly urban-based, elect to train and practice in the arena of contemporary art. Knowledgeable about the traditions, styles and concerns of Western art, and informed by their Aboriginality, urban artists respond in very inventive ways to the challenges of ‘mainstream’ contemporary art.

Innovation also provides the path along which cross cultural exchanges can be negotiated. A number of innovations described in this chapter reflect responses by Aborigines living in remote areas, to missionisation, collectors’ and commercial interests in their art, government policies and social conditions. The visual and intellectual energy of these responses has, in recent years, considerably raised the Australian public’s consciousness about these issues. As well, the powerful images of urban and rural Aboriginal artists have made other Australians aware of the disillusionment and dispossession these people have suffered. The courage of Kooris, Nungas, Murris and other urban and rural Aborigines to realistically portray their experiences has led to their acceptance as ‘real Aborigines’ and their history as a real part of Australia’s history (see discussion on Aboriginality in Chapter 8).

Innovations are not merely changes in visible appearance, they also represent, and cause, conceptual shifts. In some
instances, as with the *Aboriginal Memorial*, the outward appearance of the objects, *dupan* (hollow log coffins), did not change from their traditional form. But presenting them in a different context, as a national memorial to Aboriginal losses over 200 years, gave (this collection of) *dupan* an entirely new significance and a place in Australian history. The *Aboriginal Memorial* widened Aboriginal peoples' perceptions about what their art could signify to other Australians,¹ and many Australians were awed by the significance of the message.

Although Stanton's thesis about innovation was used to describe Aboriginal art, it is also applicable to other indigenous cultures. The chapter on categorisation (Chapter 3) gave a number of examples of innovations within Maori artistic traditions. Chapter 7, on contemporary Papua New Guinean art also discusses innovations resulting from the country's post-contact history, especially the introduction of Christianity, new technologies, Western education and political systems. The Pacific Festival of Arts (Chapter 9) could be envisaged as an innovation on a very large scale.

Innovation has been mentioned in earlier chapters, but not with the concentration accorded to it here. It is intended that each chapter builds upon the previous ones, and as the various themes arise, such as 'innovation' or 'regimes of value', that they inform the whole work. This chapter has

¹ Other Aboriginal works appreciated for their national political significance are the Yirrkala bark painting petition to Federal Parliament and Michael Nelson Jakamarra's mosaic in the forecourt of National Parliament House.
investigated innovation in Aboriginal art, presenting evidence of where and when some innovations have occurred. It has demonstrated that, in a range of circumstances, places and times, Aboriginal artists can be conceptualised as innovators. The following two chapters, which investigate contemporary art in Papua New Guinea and urban Aboriginal art, describe the development and nature of these art movements. The chapter on urban Aboriginal artists also conceptualises artists as activists, and the chapter on Papua New Guinean contemporary art (in part) discussed the artists' conscious contribution to the creation of a cultural identity for the new nation.

As collections are formed a discourse arises around how to describe such innovative art, including how to categorise it. As has been previously discussed, categories are formed around types of objects and their distinctive characteristics such as regional style, date of origin, media used and commodity status. However, concentrating on the difficulties of categorisation may lead to the role of the artist being overlooked. The roles of artists as innovators, activists, cultural historians and visualisers of identity are crucial in the development of all forms of indigenous art in the South Pacific region.
CHAPTER 7: PAPUA NEW GUINEAN CONTEMPORARY ART: ITS DEVELOPMENT AND NATURE

Art, at the moment of creation, is the specific rhythm and the face of its age.

Hugo Ball

INTRODUCTION

This chapter attempts a partial and tentative account of the emergence of contemporary Papua New Guinean art from the 1960s to the early 1990s and of the nature of this art. Some of the issues explored may be applicable to other developing countries in the South Pacific region; the formation of cultural identity, the influence of expatriates and their patronage, the development of an 'educated elite' and the elite's support for their artist peers. The circumstances stimulating the development of new art forms in one indigenous society may have some similarities to trends and developments in other indigenous societies. But each society has its own distinctive circumstances and develops its own distinctive art. For example, there are some similarities and, on the other hand, great disparities, in the circumstances prompting developments

1 Extract from the Dada Manifesto, Ball quoted in Ades (1986:11).
in Aboriginal art in the period 1970s to 1990s (see Chapters 6 and 8) to those which occurred in Papua New Guinea in the same period.

Until the late 1960s Papua New Guineans\(^{1}\) had made little contribution to the portrayal of the country and its people in visual art forms derived from Western culture, or in what was written about Papua New Guinea in fiction and non-fiction.\(^{2}\) The colonial culture dominated and expatriates spoke for and envisioned 'the Territory' from their cultural orientation.\(^{3}\) Some opportunities for new forms of artistic expression for Papua New Guineans emerged in the late 1950s to 1960s. Evidence is presented to demonstrate that changes towards a new social and cultural order were occurring, even at the

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1 It is convenient to use this term for people who were soon to become Papua New Guineans at the time of Independence, 1975.

2 One channel of communication which used native material was broadcast radio. Fieldworkers recorded songs, performances and oral traditions and these were used in the vernacular or translated into Tok Pisin or Motu for education programs and the 'Native People's Session'. Under the direction of P.N. Cochrane, staff of the broadcasts division (first attached to the Department of Education and then the Department of Information and Extension Services), collected material on field trips and wrote the legends and stories into a form suitable for broadcasting. Alan Natachee, the first Papua New Guinean writer to have his English language poetry published, worked for the broadcast division and produced segments on Mekeo customs and legends. P.N. Cochrane, when editor of the *Journal of the Public Service* (Territory of Papua and New Guinea), published Natachee's poems in several issues and sent several for publication in *Oceania* (Vol 22 No 2, 1951, 148-61). Some of Natachee's handwritten originals are in the Cochrane PNG Archive, Michael Birt Library, University of Wollongong.

3 In the field of writing, Elton Brasch criticised expatriate writers for, 'generally... not revealing any sense of responsibility towards this land or its peoples. Rather they felt themselves answerable to the tastes of the home country. Here is literary colonialism: its motives and methods identical to those of the political and economic varieties' (Brash 1973:167-8, see also Brasch and Grecius 1972).
village level, prior to the late 1960s when the momentum of change increased.

The move towards independence and the rapid expansion of higher education were two factors influencing the emergence of new forms of creative expression by Papua New Guineans. In the late 1960s indigenous people were given some direct opportunities and encouragement to develop their creative potential in media previously dominated by Europeans. Although there had been positive developments throughout the 1960s, 1968 was a significant turning point for creative writing with the first publication of a major work by a Papua New Guinean writer, Albert Maori Kiki's *Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime*. 1969 saw the first exhibition of works by Akis, an artist who had found his own form of self-expression using the Western medium of ink on paper. Throughout this chapter the parallel circumstances of Papua New Guinean writers and visual artists are discussed. This is important for two reasons: firstly, it highlights some perceptable differences in the attitudes of influential expatriates towards the relative significance of literature in comparison to visual art; also, in the formative period of the 1960s to 1970s, writers and visual artists were inspired by similar subject matter, but each realised it in their own manner; thirdly, many of the writers became members of the 'educated elite' and have subsequently

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1 Kirsty Powell cites comments by PNG writers: John Waiko was eager to learn about the white man's culture and saw English as the key to the knowledge he desired; Arthur Jawodimbari remarked that his father was a great linguist, speaking Ewage, Orokaiva, Binandere, Hiri Motu, Pidgin and English and as a small boy he was excited to learn English; according to Russell Soaba, 'English was the ultimate' (Powell 1976:19).
supported the vision and achievements of contemporary visual artists. As well, because the literature on Papua New Guinean contemporary art is so scant, the work of Papua New Guinean writers of the same era is considered to be the best source for information on the social, cultural and political perspectives and everyday realities experienced by Papua New Guineans at the time.

A significant goal of those who faced the task of nation-building in the late 1960s-1990s, has been the creation of a unified, independent country with a characteristic national culture. Political and intellectual leaders realised that to achieve this goal they must give new value to traditions and encourage their incorporation into contemporary culture (U. Beier 1975:302-310; Jawodimbari:1980:3-4; Kiki 1968; Narokobi 1977: 14-15, 1980; Somare 1973:1-4.). John Kolia expressed the problem thus:

Papua New Guinea is the home of several hundred cultural and language groups whose differences or contrasts put the country's national unity to question. The members of these different cultures feel themselves primarily bound to their own group and must first of all develop a feeling of nationalism. For that, however, a national identity is necessary. This identity problem is not seen as a purely emotional reminiscence of the past and traditions, but instead a matter of extreme political significance, since it implies the attempt to blend together hundreds of individual ethnic identities in the one national identity (Kolia 1978:2).

Independence was declared on 15 September, 1975. This chapter finds that the political and social re-definition of the country
from the late 1960s was an intense stimulus for new forms of creativity. Drawing from the past and looking to the future, intellectuals, politicians, writers and visual artists of the contemporary era helped create the character of the new nation, Papua New Guinea. This is exemplified by Papua New Guinea's National Parliament House which was intended to be a symbolic embodiment and aesthetically powerful statement of national unity and a new cultural identity. The architecture and art works designed for Parliament House signify the translation of ideals into tangible forms and represent a newly created national heritage.

But the creation of a new national cultural identity was not the sole reason or motivation for writers' and artists' experiments with new forms of creative expression and media. In the 1960s-70s the process of decolonisation made higher education more accessible to Papua New Guineans. A number of the 'educated elite',¹ which emerged and engaged in the leadership of the new nation, gained early recognition as creative writers, publishing novels, poetry and drama. Both the literature and visual arts of the period cover a wide range of traditional, historical and everyday subjects and fantasy. Non-literate Papua New Guineans were also drawn to the growing urban centres to find work, adventure and experience. A few villagers who came to Port Moresby and Goroka to find work as

¹ Definitions of the term were given in the student newspaper Nalaidat. In an editorial Martin Buluna said it 'comprised indigenous doctors, teachers, clergymen, university graduates and tertiary students' (10 July 1969). Dus Mapun defined the elite as 'the privileged few' receiving education in higher educational institutions' (Dec 1971). Cited in Powell (1976:24).
labourers were attracted by displays of contemporary visual art by their countrymen and attempted it themselves, adding their perspectives of village and urban life to the emerging contemporary culture.

The literature on contemporary Papua New Guinean visual arts is scant. The reader is reminded of the discussion of a discernable category of 'contemporary' art in Chapter 3, which used some types of recent art from Papua New Guinea as examples. The discussion will focus as well on some attempts by expatriates to devise sub-categories for contemporary art. In their writings Ulli and Georgina Beier described contemporary visual artists as 'outsider artists', envisaging that their creative expression explored a personal vision, unrelated to traditional culture and unconcerned with new socio-cultural and political developments (G. Beier 1974; U. Beier 1975a, 1976). Hugh Stevenson distinguishes between 'naive' artists and 'art-school trained' artists on the basis of style and educational background (Stevenson 1990b). Eva Raabe calls Stevenson's latter group 'intellectual' artists (Raabe 1985). The validity and appropriateness of these attempts to develop sub-categories of contemporary art are assessed. The process of innovation in contemporary Papua New Guinean art is also explored.

PRECURSORS OF CHANGE IN THE 1950s TO 1960s

The activities of Christian missionaries, the policies and procedures of Government officials and the economic interests
of traders, planters and other entrepreneurs had placed substantial pressure on the traditional cultures of many societies throughout the colonial period. By the late 1960s, the way of life for societies with long association with Europeans had substantially altered (in particular coastal Papuan societies in contact with British colonisers since the 1880s and those on the New Guinea side which had experienced a similar length of time since German occupation).

Traditional beliefs and ways of life, including religion and mythology, systems of social organisation and local economies had to adapt and amalgamate with sets of values and work practices introduced by missionaries, *kiaps* (government officials, particularly district officers and patrol officers) and other representatives of the colonial regime. These changes profoundly affected the role of creative expression in supporting the beliefs and identity of society. Some societies, like the Elema of the Papuan Gulf, lost faith in many of their beliefs and traditions. The elaborate construct of Elema social and ceremonial life (described by F.E. Williams 1940), had been destabilised by the 1950s and many practices had been abandoned.¹ Missionaries had been in the area since the 1880s (Chalmers 1887) and the evangelical fervour of some missionaries had led to the abandonment of many cultural and

¹ Orokolo cultural traditions could not offer an explanation of the apparent technical and political superiority of Europeans. As well, the influence of missionaries caused major ceremonies to be discontinued and the ceremonial houses *eravos* to be burned down. Initiation rites were exposed to women which desecrated them. Young men were forced to leave the village and find work in order to pay taxes imposed by the Australian government. This meant they could not participate in initiation ceremonies which subsequently died out.
religious practises (Beier and Kiki 1970:160-65). As well, the traditional Hiri trade cycle was destroyed by ‘trade store’ culture: the people of the Gulf were no longer so dependent on Motuan pots, nor were the Motuans dependent on Gulf sago as their dry season staple since rice could be easily purchased. The abandonment of Hiri exhibitions also interrupted the flow of shell wealth along the coast and the trade in guila logs for building lakatois (double-hulled Hiri canoes built for coastal trade). During World War II many men from the Gulf area joined the Army and worked as carriers, being away from their villages for several years.

For the Elema people one era was over, but a complex new one had begun. It is in the nature of human societies to reconstruct themselves following a period of devastation. Although Elema society would never be the same again, the pattern of Western influence on a few of its members began to have some positive results.

In 1968 an Elema man, Albert Maori Kiki, published his autobiography, *Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime*. Kiki was one of the few Papua New Guineans to have received a prolonged education in the 1950s and had attended medical school in Fiji. Kiki’s autobiography was assisted to publication by Ulli Beier, who had recognised Kiki’s potential as a storyteller (Brash

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1 Crawford describes similar events for Gogodala society, also on the Papuan Gulf (Crawford 1981: 40-44).

2 The last Hiri expedition took place in 1954. Preparations for the departure of the Hiri form the Motu village of Porebada was documented by anthropologist Charles Julius and tape recordings made by P.N. Cochrane. These recordings are in the Cochrane PNG Archive, University of Wollongong.
1972:169). In his book Kiki spoke of the ancestral boards of Orokolo, the *hohaos*, which had been kept in the *eravos* (ceremonial houses). Many had been destroyed when the *eravos* were burnt; but some had been kept in peoples' dwellings, others buried or sold to Europeans (Kiki 1968:165).

In the 1960s an old man, Avavo Kava, had built a house in the style of the old *eravos*. A Catholic priest, Father Compte, interested Kava in carving *hohaos* and purchased the resulting boards from him. Initially Kava's pieces bore little resemblance to old *hohaos*, as did the boards of other men who began to carve them because the missionary was willing to pay for them. By the time the practice of several old men carving *hohaos* for Father Compte was becoming established, the old and new styles of *hohaos* were investigated by Ulli Beier (1969) and then more thoroughly by Beier and Kiki (1970). In Beier's estimation, the carvers were no longer restrained by convention and this enabled them to develop more individualistic styles. Metal tools and European paints added to freedom of form and colouration (Beier 1969:481, Beier and Kiki 1970:32). Interest in the carved boards widened. First the District Commissioner used them to decorate his new house, then Father Compte sold his collection to an artifact dealer in Port Moresby. To establish the social and historical context of the *hohaos*, Kiki and Beier conducted field

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1 In traditional Orokolo society carvers did not have special status. Carvers learned through observation. Generally old men, who could not actively participate in hunting and gardening, were carvers and it gave them a useful role in society. Some men were more skilled than others and this was recognised by the designation *Evera-Haeras* 'men with skill of hand' (Beier and Kiki 1970:27). Because of this there was no difficult cultural precedent to overcome for the men who began to carve in the 1960s.
research which resulted in their book *Hohao* (1970). As a result of their fieldwork the Papua New Guinea Museum in Port Moresby acquired some old hohaos.

The Elema villagers, in particular the carvers of ‘new’ hohao, can be seen as responding to new stimuli for the creation of these objects. The use of non-traditional tools and materials and the willingness to make objects for people outside of Elema society (these objects were not traditionally traded), meant that the makers had taken the opportunity for Elema to engage with the outside world with something arising from their own culture. But the makers of the new hohao revered the potency of the older form, even though (it is alleged) they had lost the full knowledge of the designs and symbols previously used. The story of Orokolo hohao may also be seen as representative of the penetration of Christianity into Papua New Guinea societies and how it has been instrumental in both changing culture and then assisting people to adapt to their changed society.

Attachment to the past, and a desire to revive esteem in traditional values and achievements, led Albert Maori Kiki to write his autobiography and then to research and write about a significant art form from his ancestral past. In doing so, Kiki united past and present forms of creativity. This foreshadowed a path that many other Papua New Guinean writers and visual artists were to take in the next two decades in the creation of a culture composed of traditional and modern elements. Kiki became highly esteemed as one of Papua New Guinea’s first writers and what he wrote about was influential in the growing
debate about the re-establishment of traditional values as a firm basis for structuring a new society.

Only a few creative people of Kiki's generation had the opportunity of an extended Western education. Apart from elementary school books and Church literature and decor, few influences from Western visual or literary arts reached their villages. For Papua New Guinea societies like the Elema, art production was concerned with the art forms already known and used in the village context.2 Village life and traditional values were also a profound source of inspiration for the next generation, urban-based visual artists and writers who received a longer exposure to Western-style secondary and tertiary education from the 1960s.

THE EMERGENCE OF CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE AND VISUAL ART

'I grew up', wrote the Bouganville playwright Leo Hannett, 'leading a typical village life' (Hannett cited in Powell 1976:1). The village ethos is a strong element in the work of Papua New Guinean writers and visual artists who left their villages to be

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1 Sir Serei (Vincent) Eri and Sir Paulius Matane were others of the generation educated in the 1950s. Although he did not have an overseas education, the poet Alan Natachee, whose work is now being recognised as significant, was also of this generation (Sharrad 1993). No Papua New Guineans received a visual arts education at this time.

2 Although no thorough study has been made, it is probable that some of the first major innovations in PNG art were inspired by Christianity and made by converts for their village Church. The Vatican Museum of Ethnology and Missiology in Rome possesses a magnificent life-sized 'Buka Madonna', sculpted in ebony in the 1890s. David Anam, a renowned Tami carver, sculpted all the figures of saints and church furniture for the Martin Luther Seminary at Lae (Anam 1986).
educated at school in the 1960s to 1970s. But the experience of secondary and tertiary education expanded their world view and led to them becoming part of Papua New Guinea’s ‘educated elite’, diversifying their life experience from that of their forbearers (Lee 1967:113-17).

Although the childhood experience of a ‘typical village life’ was the common experience of visual artists and writers who came to prominence in the 1970s to the 1980s, each one’s experience of it differed according to the culturally distinct communities they came from. Whether they were highlanders, lowlanders, coastals or islanders the local environment, community activities, forms of social organisation and local mythologies are reflected in their work. Village life united them in a common history with their ancestors, but the world they came to experience and record was very different from that of their grandparents and parents.

Kirsty Powell noted that ‘all the playwrights are coastals’ and that there were no Highlanders in the first generation of students at the University of Papua New Guinea, established in 1965 (Powell 1976:1). In contrast, many of the first visual artists to practise in Western media were

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1 The first use of the term ‘educated elite’ is ascribed to J.A. Lee (1967:113-17).

2 Kirsty Powell unpublished M.A. thesis (UPNG). Powell includes Leo Hannett, John Kaniku, Turuk Wabei, Arthur Jawodimbari, John Waiko, Bonita Jill Tiwekuri, Joe Niduue, John Kasaipwalova, Linda Kasaipwalova, Bernard Narokobi, Russell Soaba, Kamabu Namaleu Lamang, Herman Talingapua and Rabbie Namaliu in this generation of UPNG-educated writers. Albert Maori Kiki (whose autobiography Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime was published in 1968) and Vincent Eri (whose novel The Crocodile was published in 1970) were among the few men to have received a tertiary education in the 1950s. Kiki and Eri are also ‘coastals’.
Highlanders who had remained in their villages until maturity.\(^1\) The implications in the differences in educational background, and the directions stimulated by the different institutions attended by visual artists and writers, will become apparent later in this chapter.

The representatives of the colonial world - *kiaps*, policemen, traders, missionaries and government officials - were familiar at the village level to the artists’ and writers’ own generation and that of their parents. Powell notes that, in the case of the writers’ village communities, contact with Europeans spanned fifty to eighty years (as at late 1960s). In their history since contact, several of these communities had confrontations with the authoritarian rule of the colonial masters (Kasiapwalova 1972; Waiko 1971). In many instances, people from the writers’ grandparents and parents generations had served on labour lines, as porters, and in other menial occupations at the direction of European overseers.

Missionaries were generally considered a more benevolent force than *kiaps* and planters, although resentment against the church’s paternalism, racial discrimination and cultural imperialism were to surface later (Hannett 1969:22). For many of the writers, the church was part of their daily lives. In their case, the Christianity had influenced village society to the extent that, ‘of the thirteen playwrights, eight are sons, or

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\(^1\) Akis, Kauage, Jakupa Ako, Ruki Fame, Benny More, John Man are all Highlanders who had little or no schooling. Joe Nalo, Martin Morububuna, Agion Aiako, Jodam Allingam, Gickmai Kundun and Taba Silau are among the visual artists who attended secondary schools and had art training at tertiary level. See these artists’ biographies in Hugh Stevenson and Susan Cochrane Simons (1990:69-78).
daughters, or nephews, or grandsons of official church workers (pastors, priests, catechists, mission teachers, evangelists, elders and so on). Only three (writers’) fathers followed the traditional role of subsistence gardener or fisherman’ (Powell 1976:13). Those associated with the missions had more knowledge of European ways and were prepared to send their sons or daughters away to school so they could participate in the development of a new kind of society.

Being separated from village life, while being educated at boarding school (whether in Papua New Guinea or Australia), brought a profound realisation of the consequences of their education to a number of Papua New Guinean writers. Herman Talingapua (1969:20) expressed it thus:

My age and ‘learning’ notwithstanding
I am excluded,
Uninitiated,
condemned to sleep with women,
unfit to carry shield and spear.

When John Waiko returned to his Binandere village as a PhD graduate from the Australian National University, wishing to celebrate and gain acceptance for his achievement, his efforts were largely unrecognised by his fellow villagers. Initially, as is portrayed in the film Man Without Pigs (Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, Owen dir. 1988), Waiko found he had little esteem because he had not earnt his place nor gained wealth in ways important to Binandere people. In his autobiography, Sana, Papua New Guinea’s first Prime Minister, Michael Somare, spoke of the importance of returning to his Sepik village and
undergoing the initiation he had missed in his boyhood (Somare 1975). Some of the ‘educated elite’ shared the regret and nostalgia expressed by Paulias Matane at a writer’s conference:

> Education has made me a foreigner to my own tradition, culture and beliefs . . . I wish that my proud forefathers would come back to me now, take me and transform me into one of them so that I would be like them - a colourful, articulate, skillfull, proud, confident and brilliant man (Matane 1972 cited in Brasch and Grecius 1972).

Following their high school education, the majority of writers went to the University of Papua New Guinea. From the time of its foundation (1965) this was the most cosmopolitan institution in the country. Apart from the different regional backgrounds of the students, the (all expatriate) staff were from Australia, USA, Europe, Africa, India, Ceylon and elsewhere. The evolution towards independence had begun and, as Martin Buluna wrote in the University newspaper *Nilaidat*, ‘whether the government likes or not the (University educated) elite will lead the opposition against colonialism, foster nationalism and demand independence’ (Buluna cited in Powell 1976:24).

The University of Papua New Guinea was based on the Australian model of universities. The Department of English was a major division of the Faculty of Arts, but there was no provision for the study of visual arts in the humanities. In the

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1 In Australia in the 1960s visual arts was taught at Technical Colleges. With the establishment of Colleges of Advanced Education from 1972, Visual Arts became available as a Bachelor Degree. Only since the amalgamation of Colleges of Advanced Education with Universities from 1990 have Universities had Visual Arts (as opposed to theory-based Fine Arts) departments.
Australian university system at that time, literacy and writing skills in English (and other languages) was valued above visual literacy and skills development in visual arts forms.¹

The majority of playwrights in Powell’s study were among the first students at the University of Papua New Guinea.² She notes that strong friendships were made across wantok and racial boundaries (Powell 1976:26). Students expressed their independence and radicalism through the channels of student politics, anti-colonial politics and sexual politics.³ A number of writers developed intensely critical attitudes towards the church. ‘We are fed up’, said Arthur Jawodimbari, ‘with their fatherly attitudes, as well as their patronising advice on how we should build this country’, and Bernard Narokobi wrote, ‘the whole atmosphere of Christ’s teaching in Papua New Guinea is divisive, unchristian and sometimes immoral’.⁴

The structures and philosophies of the colonial regime were intensely scrutinised and criticised. Powell noted that the surge of anti-colonial literature was perhaps not surprising.

¹ This is still the case. Students undertaking degrees in Visual Arts must also develop skills in writing about their preferred art practise and the practice and theory of art generally.

² Leo Hannett, John Waiko, Kumalau Tawali, Rabbie Namaliu, Arthur Jawodimbari, John Kasaipwalova Linda Kasaipwalova and Russell Soaba.

³ In 1966 only six of the fifty eight students were women. The only published writer of the period 1966-73 was Linda Kasaipwalova who was also a member of the Womens Liberation Group, but most educated women tended to be a-political (Powell 1976:27).

⁴ These, and other writers’ complaints against the Christian church were often expressed in the student newspaper Nilaidat. The debate was continued in several issues in 1969.
Anti-colonial sentiment probably existed long before the 1960s, but Papua New Guineans had not been able to express it in a form of which their colonial masters took much heed. Powell noted that:

Colonialism holds the creative spirit in thrall. In particular, in colonial Papua New Guinea, with no tradition of writing, and with a very rudimentary colonial education system, there was no writing to speak of about Papua New Guinea by Papua New Guineans before the 1960s (Powell 1976:42).¹

In the 1960s-70s the intellectual climate was also stimulated by notions of black power. The struggles of African countries for independence and the oppression of blacks in the USA provided a wider context for Papua New Guineans' own experience of colonialism. The anti-colonial writings of Franz Fanon, Eldridge Cleaver and other black writers were introduced into university courses by Ulli Beier and some other academics. John Kasiapwalova's long poem, The Reluctant Flame, engages with the individual and collective turmoil of students at the time. It is a poem of public protest and personal arousal at the effect of colonial rule:

Black stooges yessarring whitishly to make paper our destiny

Our revolting will be turned against ourselves traitors . . .

¹ Stevenson commented that 'racism, rather than colonialism, was the real issue. Powell and (Ulli) Beier were polemicists, among the American and African academic humanists and socialists who came to the Territory after the U.N. took an interest in it. I heard Kasaipwalova and Hannett address an assembly at the Port Moresby Teachers College in 1970. They were very young but their diatribe was against racism, not anti-colonial. Most local teachers and students I knew were arguing for Independence' (pers. comm. Nov 1992).
Our aspiration will forever lie lost in the mess of paper
status
FUCK OFF WHITE BASTARDY, FUCK OFF!
Your weighty impotence
has its needle
into me
(Kasaipwalova 1972)

As well as taking various courses in anthropology, politics, history, English literature and the literature of the Third World, all the writers attending University of Papua New Guinea took the creative writing course started by Ulli Beier. Beier was supportive of the use of writing as a political weapon and many of the emerging writers were eager to express their views for a widespread public airing. Much Papua New Guinean writing that was guided to publication by Ulli Beier is on anti-colonial themes. Although he introduced other themes to writers, in particular exploring the dramatic possibilities of legends and folk tales, as Powell says, 'what he did not like he did not publish' (Powell 1976:46).¹ The significance of the selectivity practised by the Beiers will be discussed later in the chapter.

There were opportunities for Papua New Guinean writers at that time other than studying at the University of Papua New

¹ Paul Sharrad has investigated Ulli Beier’s response to the Papuan poet Alan Natachee (who was slightly older than the UPNG group, mission and self-educated and sponsored by expatriates other than Beier, in particular Percy Cochrane. Sharrad finds that Natachee was marginalised by Beier (Sharrad 1993).
Guinea. Drama and creative writing were also taught at Goroka Teachers College. The Expressive Arts Department of Goroka Teachers College, set up in 1967, was headed by Tom Craig who taught art, and drama was taught by Greg Katahanas. Students of the time in both art and drama commented on the great sense of freedom in which artistic creativity flourished. Georgina Beier commented that, since Craig had taken over the art department the number of students had rapidly increased, from three to twenty-nine. 'The reason for this marked change' she wrote, 'is that Tom Craig does not limit himself to teaching art. He is an unfailing believer in people's potential' (G. Beier 1974:52). Craig's philosophy was that education should be directed towards the fulfilment of an individual's personality, and it was a mistake of Western education to be overly concerned with the pursuit of knowledge (Craig cited in Beier 1974:52).

The drama, literature and creative writing departments at Goroka were also vital and productive, but in contrast to University of Papua New Guinea, more plays got produced on stage than put into print. Of their subject matter Powell writes (w)hat is striking about the plays that came out of the Goroka scene . . . is the pre-occupation with the theme of culture clash, and the complete absence of interest in anti-colonialism. The reason is to be found in the a-political nature of the Goroka campus; in student's lack

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of awareness of their bonds with the rest of the Third World; and in Greg Katahanas' dislike of protest theatre (Powell 1976:51).

It is apparent that, in this formative period, the instructors and mentors of visual artists and writers exerted some influence on the creative output of their students. Powell suggests that the student writers responded to the particular themes and topics explored in the courses offered on different campuses. As well, the Beiers, Katahanas, Brash and other teachers were influential in what was selected for publication, exhibition and performance (see below).

Educational opportunities in the visual arts were more limited. Apart from rudimentary art lessons in schools, Stevenson traces the first opportunities for Papua New Guineans to learn Western art forms and practices back to art and design courses for commercial purposes and expressive arts courses at teacher training colleges:

At the end of the 1960s, training was taking place at the Department of Information and Extension Services; Idubada Technical College in Port Moresby in printing, design layout and photography; Goroka Technical School in commercial art and design and at Goroka Teachers College in expressive arts (Stevenson 1990a:24).

By the early 1970s Stevenson discerns two different perceptions of the role of contemporary art emerging. First there was the idea of art for self expression and personal development, as taught at Goroka Teachers College, an idea which was also rapidly penetrating the school art curriculum. Second, there was the idea of individual visual artists making a professional career of their art. Stevenson notes that both
these roles for art were new to Papua New Guinea societies. Previously the work of notable visual artists had been committed to the activities of their community (Stevenson 1990a:24-5).

By the late 1960s art educationalists had determined that the school art curriculum should reflect and value Papua New Guinean cultures. The old Art and Craft syllabus, based on the Australian curriculum, was regarded as obsolete and was replaced by Expressive Arts, ‘an integration of visual arts, music, story, dance and drama’ (Stevenson 1990a:25). Not all secondary schools taught Expressive Arts, and it was not until the late 1970s that students benefiting from its effect became the major group enrolling at the National Arts School (Stebbins 1988). At the tertiary level, the philosophy of art education followed the lines set by Goroka Teachers College staff, viz. to avoid the eagerness to copy Western art uncritically and to appreciate the aesthetic and symbolic value of traditional works of art while accepting cultural barriers which prevent students copying ancestral designs. William Beattie, a lecturer in art at the College wrote that the students at Goroka came to be teachers, not visual artists, and because of this

the art department's first aim is to teach respect for the past . . . . Our second aim is to introduce new art materials as a means of expression . . . . Our third aim is to foster a traditional approach where students work not for personal satisfaction but for the satisfaction of the community (Beattie 1973: no page nos.).
Another avenue of opportunity developed from 1969, when the possibility of Papua New Guineans having a professional artistic career began with a meeting between Akis and Georgina Beier. While acting as an interpreter for an anthropologist, Georgeda Bick, Akis had made some sketches which Bick thought had potential. Akis accompanied Bick to Port Moresby and was encouraged by the Beiers to experiment and take instruction in drawing, batik and printmaking. His exhibition of drawings in 1969 was the first solo exhibition of works in a Western medium by a Papua New Guinean artist and attracted great attention. By 1972, a number of men from village backgrounds were drawn to the possibilities of art making and found a group of expatriates who were willing to encourage and assist them.

On arriving in Port Moresby in 1968 Georgina Beier had started her own art studio. From the outset she was highly critical of the expatriate 'Sunday painters' whose 'European mediocrity is presented in a prestigious setting' (Beier 1974:1). The general European attitude towards Papua New Guineans wishing to draw or paint was patronising and she foresaw the danger that only imitative work would be produced if they followed the local European standards. She also criticised the practise of school teachers urging children to use tribal motifs, seeing this as meaningless and detrimental to the social significance and context such designs might have (G. Beier 1974:1-2).
However, Georgina Beier found Tom Craig's efforts in the art department at Goroka Teachers College praiseworthy and described it thus:

(1)he art department of the College under Tom Craig is concerned with building people before artists. Any student who wishes to specialize in art is accepted. Only interest is required . . . . What has made that art department so alive is not merely the teacher's ability to impart skills in a variety of techniques, but above all his absolute faith and sensitivity towards the individual personalities of his students (G. Beier 1974:52).

But she was not inclined to work in a structured educational environment herself. She had a strong personal view that the most inspired work by third world visual artists was created by people who had not been exposed to Western art education. She preferred to teach her proteges in her own studio and devoted considerable time to their artistic development (G. Beier 1974).

In the early 1970s, under pressure from the Beiers, Elton Brash and others, the University made some studio facilities available for art and drama activities. This small Centre for New Guinea Culture soon became inadequate and in January 1972 the Centre for Creative Arts was set up and Tom Craig was appointed as its Director (Stevenson 1990a:28). As Craig wrote of the Centre for Creative Arts:

(1)he Centre aims to provide facilities for the continuation of Papua New Guinea art in all fields and to provide artists with living and working space, and materials and tools. It recognises that Papua New Guinea is involved in a clash of cultures; that Papua New Guineans
are striving to maintain certain cultural values, to change without becoming uprooted and to link their future aspirations to their past heritage. The Centre is trying to give artists the opportunity to develop their talents, to turn the potential disadvantage of a cultural transition into advantage and to stimulate extensions (sic) of Papua New Guinea expression so that they can rediscover their roots, their uniqueness, their Papua New Guineaness (Craig 1973, no page number).

Following the establishment of the Centre for Creative Arts, Georgina Beier’s adherents tended to stay with her. The number of visual artists working at the Centre, then run by Tom Craig, grew and included other visual artists without formal training, Jakupa, John Man and Cecil King Wungi. It also attracted some younger men who had completed secondary school, including Joe Nalo, Martin Morububuna, John Dangar and Jimmy John. Graphic arts, directed to industrial and commercial purposes continued to be taught at older schools, while the Centre developed a philosophy ‘aimed at assisting individual artists to develop and integrate traditional practises and aesthetics with contemporary materials’ (Stevenson 1990a:29). Craig explained the role of the Centre for Creative Arts:

While it is not an educational establishment, the Centre is not intended as a school in the normal sense of the word. It does not have formal entrance requirements but caters for that special group with outstanding abilities. It does not operate on the basis of formal courses of specified duration. No certificate will be given at the end of a student’s residence at the Centre (Craig 1973, no page number).
The Centre offered Associateships to promising young visual artists, musicians and writers, comprising of accommodation, the provision of studio space and materials and an allowance. Associates stayed at the Centre for as long as they and the staff felt they were benefiting. Any work produced was sold by the Centre, which retained 50% towards the costs of the artist's materials. Secondly, the Centre could also invite Papua New Guineans or members of the international community to become Fellows for a short term. The playwright, Arthur Jawodimbari, had two periods as a Fellow at the Centre. Thirdly, the Centre had Members; Members were established visual artists like Kauage who could use the Centre for exhibitions, obtaining materials and getting commissions. But they were also permitted to have studio space elsewhere and other outlets for their work (Craig 1973, no page number).

Following the Cultural Development Act of 1974, which also saw the establishment of the Papua New Guinea National Museum and the Institute of Papua New Guinea Cultures, the Centre became a national institution. Its name was changed to the National Arts School and it offered formal courses in music, fine arts, graphic design and textiles. The National Arts School Gallery became the venue for most major solo and joint exhibitions by contemporary artists. Although a number of visual artists (Akis, Kauage, Fame, Onglo, India and others) continued to attend Georgina Beier’s studio workshops until the Beiers left Papua New Guinea, the National Arts School facilities and exhibition space were also open to them. Several of the well established visual artists who had no formal
education, in particular Jakupa and Benny More, enjoyed long periods as artists-in-residence at the National Arts School and used it as a base for continuing their artistic career.¹ They were respected by the student body for their artistic vision and contribution to contemporary culture.

In 1990 the National Arts School was amalgamated with the University of Papua New Guinea and became the Faculty of Creative Arts. Amalgamation with the University caused some consternation, particularly as it reduced access for potential students with visual skills but no formal education, to an environment where they could develop their skills and exhibit work. While some of the earlier graduates who had been employed as teachers at the National Arts School retained their positions on the Faculty staff following the amalgamation (for example in 1993 Gickmai Kundun was the lecturer in sculpture and Jodam Allingam head of visual arts), they have their positions because they obtained higher degrees. Other established visual artists, who hold the National Arts School's Diploma in Fine Arts and had been employed as instructors, including Joe Nalo, Martin Morububuna and Stalin Jawa, were dismissed as their academic qualifications were not high enough for University requirements. Since 1989 Nalo, Morububuna, Jakupa and other visual artists associated with the National Arts School, have had to rely on sales and commissions

¹ Information from 'Introduction' to Tenpela Krismas (Tenth Anniversary of NAS exhibition catalogue, Port Moresby, 1985). Also pers. comm. Stalin Jawa, then Director of NAS (Port Moresby Sept. 1988) and Prof. K. McKinnon (May 1989).
of their art to make their living, while Jawa obtained a position in the public service.

In the late 1980s the Director of the Papua New Guinea National Museum, Soroi Eoe, extensively lobbied parliamentarians and other influential members of Papua New Guinea's elite for the re-establishment of a Museum Act. At this time it was desired to separate 'culture' from the tourism portfolio, and to allow the Museum and Provincial Cultural Centres autonomy in setting their own budgets and policy directions. When the Museum Act was finally passed in 1992 one of Eoe's first moves was to re-establish the Art Gallery function of the Papua New Guinea National Museum. Stalin Jawa was appointed to oversee the development of an artist-in-residence program (with Martin Morububuna the first recipient), and develop an exhibition program oriented to contemporary art. The Museum also decided to support the performing arts and employed the group Tambaran Culture to give music workshops and demonstrate the making and use of various types of traditional instruments for school groups and other visitors (Eoe 1993 lecture and pers. comm.).

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1 Refer to Chapter 11 for details of the PNG Museum and Museum Act.

2 Eoe referred to these new initiatives of the PNG National Museum in the paper he delivered at the Pacific Arts Association 5th International Symposium, South Australian Museum, April 1993.
TOWARDS A NATIONAL CULTURAL IDENTITY

In the mid 1970s, with independence pending, indigenous leaders and expatriate administrators perceived the emergence of, 'a pan-New Guinea culture with a cultural aspect in tune with modern life and attuned to it', and decided to help its evolution, by giving it a focus' (pers. comm. Ken McKinnon).¹ That focus was to be Papua New Guinea's National Parliament House. The building was made possible by an Act of Parliament and a Parliamentary Committee, assisted by special advisers, set the criteria for the architectural competition for the design and oversaw the commissioning of the building. Expatriates were appointed to the senior positions,² as no Papua New Guineans had the requisite qualifications. But they were fully committed to the nationalist ideology developed by Papua New Guinean politicians and intellectuals, an ideology which this building was to express both symbolically and in its physical form.

Papua New Guinea's National Parliament House took ten years to realise from the initial concept to its completion. Officially opened in 1986, it is a visual manifestation of the national cultural policy formed at the time of independence in

¹ Professor Ken McKinnon was then Director of the Department of Education of Papua New Guinea.

² Cec Hogan, architect, Mike Briggs, engineer and Archie Brennan, designer.
1975. Its architecture and commissioned art works exemplify the philosophy of merging heritage with modernisation. It was a collective effort in developing an iconography suitable for a new national culture and identity. In the intervening years, between the mid 1970s and the mid 1980s, the number of contemporary artists had increased, they had become more confident and found local support for their visual expressions of Papua New Guinean life and culture.

Papua New Guinea’s National Parliament House has been described as an amalgam of modern architectural and construction techniques with traditional Papua New Guinean building styles and art (pers. comm. Mike Briggs Dec. 1990). The design brief stated that, ‘Parliament House should be inspired by Papua New Guinea’s ‘worthy traditions of art and architecture’ and, as far as possible, be developed ‘using solid local materials’ so that ‘the substance of the Parliament will also be that of the country’ (extracts of the architectural brief cited in Rosi 1991:291).

Within its framework it features cultural references to each of the nineteen provinces, 1000 tribal groups and 750 languages which exist within Papua New Guinea and, through its design, brings them together in a statement of national unity. Journalists emphasised this theme at the time of its opening:

1 Mike Briggs, design engineer on the construction of Parliament House. Briggs is retained as a consultant to oversee the maintenance of the building. He escorted the writer, with artist Joe Nalo, on a tour of the building, and I am most grateful for their explanations of the concept of the building and the artworks it contains.
Standing at the foot of Port Moresby's Independence Hill, where the Australian Government officially relinquished its administration of Papua New Guinea on September 16, 1975, the new Parliament building has come to be looked upon by the people of Papua New Guinea as a symbol of their new nationhood (Newman 1986:9).

The architectural structure of Papua New Guinea Parliament House derives from Papua New Guinean ceremonial and meeting houses. The *Haus Man* (mens’ house) or *Haus Tambaran* (spirit house) is traditionally the centre of decision making at village level. Two of the three wings of Parliament House, which are linked by inter-connecting walkways and a single roof,¹ are based on traditional architecture. The spectacular soaring shape of the grand entrance hall is dominated by a facade which takes the form of a *haus tambaran* in the Maprik style.² With this arresting shape the architect, Cec Hogan, ‘chose a form that is aesthetically powerful, but also one that the outside world associates with Papua New Guinea’ (cited in Rosi 1991:296).³ The circular form of Block C is a configuration of men's meeting houses in the Highlands, with its pinnacle characteristic of the Chimbu style. As Rosi says (1991:297), ‘Because Highlanders are noted for their

¹ Pamela Rosi notes that, in his first address from the new Parliament House, the Prime Minister Michael Somare, said the roof is shaped like a travelling spearhead to symbolise the nation’s strength and commitment to progress and development (Somare cited in Rossi 1991:295).

² The style of Haus Tambaran from the Maprik area is one of several spectacular styles in the Sepik region. These spirit houses are associated with ancestral cults.

³ The interior of the great entrance hall is much less culturally specific than its Maprik-influenced exterior. From the inside, the shape also resembles the great ceremonial houses of Papuan Gulf societies.
elaborate feasts and extensive exchanges, it is appropriate that the members' dining room and other entertainment facilities are located in this Highland unit'.

A production team of visual artists from all over the country was brought together at the National Art School to integrate artwork into the fabric of the building. This work was undertaken under the ethos of *Bung Wantaim* (coming together, striving together).¹ Briggs commented that the team of visual artists and craftsmen collaborating on major pieces (carving and painting were traditionally male roles in Papua New Guinea societies) were mostly village people who, 'with just the guidance of a project co-ordinator, a workshop manager and a sculptor, managed to complete the work in three years' (Briggs pers. comm. 1990).

Instead of the traditional painted bark spathes which form the facade of a Maprik *Haus Tambaran*, the facade of Parliament House was adapted from drawings by Jakupa, Kauage and John Man (who are, incidentally, Highlanders) and executed by the National Arts School Production Workshop in mosaic; the work was co-ordinated by Archie Brennan (Cochrane Simons and Stevenson 1990:35). There are multiple references within the facade's overall design: the resources of the land from the sea, the land and the sky are depicted in an ascending display, but the snake and crocodile represents lurking danger; traditional wealth is signified by pigs, gardens, the bird of paradise; a

¹ A term used by politicians during national election campaigns, in this context it refers to the necessity for artists to put aside their regional differences and work towards a common goal (See also Rosi 1990:310).
woman carrying a heavy *bilum* (net bag) represents traditional transportation; Kauage's helicopter signifies modern communication (Briggs pers. comm. 1990, Rosi 1991:300). Another symbol of the base of the new nation are the two figures in the centre of the facade, a man and a woman in ceremonial *bilas* (dress). Equal rights for women was written into the constitution, whereas gender segregation was a feature of many traditional Papua New Guinean societies, (Narokobi 1983). But as far as women being on an equal footing with men is concerned, these figures represent 'a "model for", rather than a "model of" society' (Geertz cited in Rosi 1991:301). The row of carved lintel masks at the base of the facade echo the Maprik style of *Haus Tambaran*, but here represent the nation's provinces.

Another mural, at the rear of Block B, signifies the styles and processes of weaving, essentially a womens' art in Papua New Guinea. Because the fibres used in weaving (pandanus, sago and coconut palm leaf, split cane, hibiscus fibre, etc.) would not last the lifetime of Parliament House, the mural was made in concrete with design elements painted in recessed areas. It operates metaphorically in more than one way: it represents women because weaving is a womens' art, and it represents the different strands of the nation which, when drawn together, make a new unity.

The main collaborative works in the interior, which reflect the philosophy of integrating all Papua New Guinean art styles, include the magnificent assemblage of carved poles inside the main entrance, the Speaker's chair, and the ceiling
mural of the Grand Hall. The fifteen metre high assemblage of carved poles which stands in the entrance is the work of a dozen carvers from diverse regions who combined their talents and worked aspects of their regional styles into the complex design. The Speaker's chair reflects the style of a Sepik orator's stool, but is flanked by panels intricately carved with designs from the Milne Bay area; its front panel features a stylised *garamut* (slit gong) from Manus Island, an instrument long used to call the people together. The ceiling of the Grand Hall was inspired by the painted bark ceiling of the Council House at Ambunti on the Sepik River, and has as its theme spirits and ancestors looking down and protecting the proceedings below (pers. comm. Briggs 1990).

Apart from the collaborative works (and not all are described here), the National Parliament houses what is arguably the best collection of major works by individual Papua New Guinean contemporary artists. Many of these works were specially commissioned for the building and are among the most outstanding works by the artists involved. Often modern materials have been used to depict a legend from the artist's area. In some instances the ancestor's story is a parable for modern times, or the legend serves to remind people of the creative and regenerative links between human beings and the natural world. For example, at the top of the staircase leading to the Visitor's Gallery is a mural designed by Cecil King Wungi from Bundi Village, Madang Province. The theme of this work is a debate between the nation's leaders and the native animals and birds arguing whose images should be chosen for the
country's coinage. At the entrance to the Parliamentary Library is a beaten copper and steel rod sculpture by Benny More (from Kainantu, Eastern Highlands). It narrates a legend from his area where humans' behaviour leads to their transformation into fruitful plants for the benefit of future generations.

The intellectual climate of the 1970s was intensely creative. Artists were working, both individually and in collaboration, within the framework of an ideology they supported. The vision of creating a national identity for contemporary Papua New Guinea was embraced by political and intellectual leaders and visual artists of all persuasions. From this limited selection and description of the National Parliament House and the artworks it contains, it should be apparent that the essential intention of the building's designers was to create a symbol of national identity, respecting both the values of past generations and the accomplishments of the present generation. Visual artists, whatever their background or training, responded to the need to give expression to the goals of independence and to symbolise contemporary Papua New Guinean culture in the country's Parliament House. The Tok Pisin phrase *bung wantaim* (striving together) reflected the mutual commitment of Papua New Guinean politicians and intellectuals, including visual artists, to the achievement of a national goal.

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1 Further details of the structure and contents of the building can be found in Mike Briggs (1989); Susan Cochrane Simons and Hugh Stevenson (1990) and Pamela Rosi (1991).
THE INFLUENCE OF EXPATRIATES AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY ART

This section pursues two issues: firstly, it attempts to assess the positive and negative influences of powerful patrons and promoters of Papua New Guinean literature and contemporary visual arts, in particular Georgina and Ulli Beier; secondly, it reviews the categories several expatriate writers developed in their descriptions of trends in Papua New Guinean contemporary art.

The Beiers came to Papua New Guinea from Nigeria. Ulli Beier was a London-trained Africanist and Georgina Beier an artist. Both had been patrons and promoters of contemporary artists in Nigeria, where they worked for sixteen years (U. Beier 1968; Mount 1989) and were to fill the same role for contemporary artists in Papua New Guinea. The Beiers were very influential, both in assisting the emergence of contemporary art and in promoting it. In the visual arts, the Beiers tended to seek out mature men and women who, without Western artistic training and working from a non-traditional

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1 Georgina Beier worked at the Oshogbo School in Nigeria in 1964.

2 Following their departure from PNG Ulli Beier worked with, and published on, a number of Aboriginal artists, notably Trevor Nickolls and Jimmy Pike. He also edited several issues of the journal of Aboriginal writing and art, Long Water 1988 to 1989. At their house in the Sydney suburb of Annandale the Beiers had exhibitions of works by Kauage, Akis, Nickolls and at least one (white) self-taught Australian artist whose work they described as 'Art Brut'. The Beiers are presently (1994) attached to the University of Beyreuth, Germany.
base, are able to express themselves freely and naturally when given the materials and encouragement to do so.¹

Ulli Beier's efforts extended to Papua New Guinean writing as well. He was 'the chief architect of literature courses at the University of Papua New Guinea', where he initiated and taught the creative writing course. He also taught courses in African literature which 'proved to be both symbolically and intrinsically stimulating' and 'opened up new possibilities for Papua New Guinea writers' (Powell 1976:39-40). Beier is acknowledged as 'an important figure in the education of (a number of) the playwrights and in the emergence of Papua New Guinea literature' (Powell 1976:39, see also Brash 1972:169, Sharrad 1994). Powell surmised that what Ulli Beier seemed to do was to release the inhibitions students had in expressing long-suppressed anti-colonial emotions, and to help them recover pride in their own forgotten or suppressed traditions, and in the emerging Papua New Guinea culture (Powell 1976:42-3).

Brash (1972:169) distinguishes three important elements in U. Beier's contribution: the discovery of potential writers, opening channels for publication and establishing creative writing courses as 'academically respectable'.

But Powell and Brash, while recognising the positive aspects of Ulli Beier's contribution, are critical of other aspects of his role. They both write from the position of

¹ Georgina Beier commented that part of the success of the artists Akis and Kauage was due to the fact that, as they had not been taught art, they had nothing to unlearn. This meant that could express themselves freely and develop their own conventions of style. (G. Beier, pers. comm. May 1988).
contemporaries and colleagues of the Beiers in Papua New Guinea. On the 'debit side' Brash (1972:170) considers that, 'the commendable efforts made by writers, educators and publishers so far have tended to cater for foreign readers and the indigenous elite, and have not been counterbalanced by sufficient efforts to cater for the majority'. Although he does not specifically refer to Ulli Beier in this assessment of the 'debit side', this comment occurs directly under his appraisal of Beier's positive role and the implication is that Ulli Beier (and others) could have made more efforts towards establishing a genre of popular literature rather than that which would be appreciated most by the educated elite and the Western literary market.

Powell sought out several writers to assess Beier's particular preferences in the selection of books for literature courses and in the subjects for creative writing courses. Russell Soaba stated that 'the only influence, (if you can call it that) I had from Ulli Beier was the spirit in African art and literature that he tried to convey'. He added that 'I found it hard to conform to Ulli Beier's methods of having to have Niuginian writers express their discontent of being under colonial rule (although I don't regard them as wrong for creating such themes, nor am I advocating a denial that I am one of the colonised)' (Soaba cited in Powell 1976:44). Powell found of other writers that, 'Jawodimbari based his play, The Old Man's Reward, on Oyono's novel, The Old Man and the Medal and John Kasiapwalova's Reluctant Flame perhaps owes something to Cesaire' (Powell 1976:38-44).
As Ulli Beier did with literature, Georgina Beier used African art works as models to encourage Papua New Guinean visual artists. As with the writers, some visual artists responded to the spirit in African art, while others copied more directly. For example, an applique collage by William Onglo (untitled 1978, coll. Papua New Guinea Museum) strongly resembles *Elephant Man* by Twins Seven Seven, Oshogbo, Plate II in Ulli Beier *Contemporary African Art* (1968).

The Beiers' assessment and categorisation of contemporary Papua New Guinean art should be closely scrutinised for what was left out of their interpretation, as well as what was encompassed within it. Further examples of the Beier's preferences are described in the section on categorisation below. Briefly, in the visual arts: (i) they promoted a particular type of art, which they considered to be 'outsider' art, and had as their proteges a few visual artists who produced this type of art; (ii) they generally abjured village-based art produced for external markets, and (iii) were not interested in the works of art-school trained artists.

Georgina Beier was critical of the inept and uncritical attempts of European art teachers working within the school education system in the late 1960s (G. Beier 1974:1) and what they taught their students. Stevenson agrees that there was much to criticise, but, in contrast to Georgina Beier, admits that there were students who emerged in the 1970s with artistic merit despite the system (Stevenson 1990a:29, see later discussion).
The Beiers tended to be dismissive of village-based art produced for external market, and were extremely selective in the few examples they found interesting, such as some new Orokolo *hahao* boards, (U. Beier 1969, discussed above). Commenting on the Orokolo situation Georgina Beier said that ‘this brief spell of imaginative freedom was soon followed by complete disorder. The carvers were exposed to absolute freedom, but they had not developed a sense of self-criticism and there was no-one to help develop a new discipline . . . I have seen some shields decorated in chalk with drawings of pin-ups, possibly copied from *Playboy*’ (G. Beier 1974:3). She was convinced that, ‘the traditional arts in Niugini are disappearing and, as in all countries of the third world, traditional skill and imagination are fast deteriorating into tourist art’. Although she points to two other ‘isolated’ instances where ‘Niugini art, produced outside of its proper traditional context, is still of very high quality’, Georgina Beier is adamant that the incursion of foreign cultures and tourist demand was detrimental to traditional art production.1 To her, ‘the tourist has become the container for the debris of dying cultures. He is a storeroom of rotten garbage. He picks up the remnants after his forefathers have massacred a virile culture’ (G. Beier 1974:2). While it is admitted that much so-called ‘tourist’ art is highly derivative and poorly made, a strong opinion such as that held by the Beiers may adversely

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1 Interestingly, one of her examples of the survival of artistic qualities is recent work by Asmat carvers whose culture had been ‘suddenly and brutally destroyed by Indonesians’, rather than Europeans (G. Beier 1974:3).
stereotype village-based art production and overlook instances of innovation and creativity occurring at the village level.

There is an apparent contradiction in the Beiers' assessment of artistic license for Papua New Guineans. While they were appalled by some forms of experimentation, they lionised other forms of creative expression which utilised the cast-offs of Western consumerism. It would seem that they thought that art derived from traditional forms produced in villages for sale to Westerners was mostly banal and worthless, but if the villager migrated to Port Moresby and created something new in the urban environment, it was exceptional. In his article, and later audio/visual production on the Goilala 'Squatter Art', made by urban fringe-dwellers, Ulli Beier (1978:8; 1988 audio/visual) found that 'the mixture of traditional design and exuberant delight in the alien objects gave the entire camp an atmosphere of exhilarating beauty. In a certain sense this festival was much more exciting than a purely traditional and 'authentic' ceremony'.

In the visual arts the Beiers concentrated on a limited number of Papua New Guinean artists whose work they promoted extensively, both through publications and exhibitions. The visual artists whom they favoured were Akis, Kauage, Ruki Fame and, to a lesser extent, Kambau Namaleu Lamang, William Onglo, Barnabas India, Tiabe, Mari Ahi and Hara Hara Prints, Wanamera, and Suzanne Kareke (G. Beier 1974, 1977; U. Beier 1969, 1976, plus exhibition catalogue notes). The basis of their selection is sometimes difficult to determine - several other visual artists with similar backgrounds, who are
now well known, had begun their artistic careers in Port Moresby and Goroka at the time the Beiers were in Papua New Guinea. Jakupa is a notable example, while Cecil King Wungi, John Man and Wkeng Aseng should also have fitted into their characterisation, but these artists were not promoted by the Beiers.

It is true that most of the visual artists described by G. Beier as ‘outsider’ artists (see section on categorisation below) are Highlanders, with very little, if any, Western-style education, who left their village to find work in the city. None of them had planned an artistic career as such.1 However, other artists who the Beiers did not write about had similar backgrounds to their proteges, including Jakupa, John Man, Wkeng Aseng and Cecil King Wungi. There is some evidence that some artists found it easy to work with Georgina Beier while other artists did not. Joe Nalo explained that most artists were attracted to Georgina Beier’s workshops at one time or another, but he, Jakupa and others did not like her directive approach, preferring Tom Craig’s philosophy of artistic freedom of expression, choice of materials and subject matter (Nalo pers. comm. Nov. 1990).

This evidence indicates that the Beiers had a particular mind set about whom and what should be accorded recognition in the contemporary arts scene in Papua New Guinea in the late

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1 Artists from the Highlands districts of PNG written about by the Beiers were Akis, Kauage, Tiabe, Ruki Fame and Wanamera. In the same volume Suzanne Kareke and Marie Aihì were from coastal Papua as was Kambau Namaleu Lamang, who had been to school but had not been taught art (G. Beier 1974). William Onglo and Barnabas India were also in G. Beier’s group.
1960s to the 1970s. Innovations in village art were largely ignored. Their concentration was on artists with little education who had moved into the urban centre, Port Moresby (including the Goilala Squatters), and found new ways to express themselves. Their promotion of Akis and Kauage in particular has brought international recognition to these visual artists. But, although the extent of the Beiers' influence, and the extensive promotion of the visual artists who were their proteges both in Papua New Guinea and overseas, was clearly an advantage to those artists, this concentration may have unfairly neglected other talented visual artists and artificially restricted knowledge of the overall developments in contemporary art taking place from the late 1960s-1970s.¹

The Centre for Creative Arts (later the National Arts School) was not adverse to admitting and encouraging artists who had high school education and had learnt to create Westernised forms of art since their school days. Such students included Joe Nalo, Martin Morububuna, David Lasissi, Taba Silau, Gickmai Kundun, Jodam Allingam and Wendy Choulai. Georgina Beier (1974) and Stevenson (1990a, 1991) are in agreement that much of the visual art teaching that had gone on in schools up to the 1970s was inept. But Georgina Beier considered that exposure to Western art influences (realistic representation,

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¹ The Beiers were successful in obtaining major commissions for their stable of artists from government departments and institutions in Papua New Guinea and in selling collections of paintings, drawings and prints, metal sculptures and beaten copper panels to museums overseas including the Australian Museum and the Museum fur Voelkerkunde, Basel, Switzerland. These collections and commissions are unashamedly biased in favour of Akis, Kauage and the sculptor Ruki Fame.
perspective and other spatial relationships, tonality, etc) was detrimental to the natural expression of untrained artists; freeform drawing, rich patterning and the application of flat areas of pure colour are aspects of art making she particularly encouraged.

The influence of the Beiers resounded for many years, even after they left Papua New Guinea. Both forceful and resourceful, the Beiers undeniably established wide interest in the selection of Papua New Guinean literature and art which they assisted to fruition and promoted. But the force of their personalities and opinions perhaps precluded or thwarted other developments. Unless another champion appeared, like Anthony Crawford for the Gogodala,1 village-based commercial art production remained tainted with the stigma of low quality 'tourist' art. The selection of contemporary Papua New Guinean art from the 1970s represented in overseas museums including the Australian Museum in Sydney and the Museum für Volkerkunde in Basel, Switzerland, is comprised of the work of Beier proteges. Following their retirement from Papua New Guinea, exhibitions held at their Annandale house in Sydney continued to support the same artists.

Other contemporary visual artists not in the Beiers' 'stable', like Jakupa and Joe Nalo, found other patrons such as Tom Craig, Hugh Stevenson, Ingrid Heerman and Pamela Rosi in the 1970s, all of whom assisted to exhibit and promote their

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1 Crawford did some exceptional fieldwork among the Gogodala people of the Gulf of Papua, encouraging a cultural renaissance, extensively publicised it and promoted their 'new' art to overseas museums (Crawford 1981).

Georgina Beier's view, that visual artists from village backgrounds, who chose to live and develop artistic careers in Port Moresby in the years of rapid socio-cultural and political change, were 'outsiders in their new surroundings' and that 'there (were) no unified values in the cities by which to orient themselves', is questioned in the section below. On the contrary, it would seem that there were frequent opportunities for interaction between 'outsider' and 'intellectual' artists and other members of the educated elite.

Making some retrospective observations on the development of Papua New Guinean contemporary art, Len de Vries noted that

(t)he emergence of the fine art wave was strongly affected by expatriates. People like Georgina and Ulli Beier, Thomas Craig, Catherine Baker, Susan Cochrane Simons, Hugh Stevenson and Marsha Berman did not only stimulate, sometimes initiate, and sponsor the people who experimented in modern art. They also played a crucial role in the introduction and further dissemination of Papuan (sic) contemporary art to Western art cycles across the border. They and
other foreigners acted as co-creators in the history of modern art in Papua New Guinea (de Vries 1992:2).

This is probably an over-estimation of the role played by some expatriates mentioned in the emergence of Papua New Guinean contemporary art from 1969 to the present. It reflects the fact that the work and interests of some expatriates concerned with the movement assisted the recognition of Papua New Guinean contemporary art in the outside world. Expatriates also assisted the visual artists to become established in Papua New Guinea. But, in my view, more recognition should be accorded to the support Papua New Guinea’s ‘educated elite’ have given, and continue to give, to contemporary artists and their visions of Papua New Guinea. This will be explored in a later section.

GEORGINA BEIER’S ‘OUTSIDER’ ARTISTS AND OTHER ATTEMPTS TO SUB-CATEGORISE PAPUA NEW GUINEAN CONTEMPORARY ART

Georgina Beier expressed the view that contemporary Papua New Guinean visual artists work outside any cultural context, as their art is detached from both traditional and modern culture. She devised a category of ‘outsider artists in the third world’ (in which she includes a number of contemporary Papua New Guinea artists). In her view these are visual artists (who have) developed a wholly personal perspective and style, but who have the same social position and share a common experience: they are products of colonial upheaval and the destruction of traditional cultures. They now fill this cultural
vacuum with their own creative impulses. The difficulties in inventing without help a new art world of its own can only be overcome by artists who have not been marked by traditional conventions or the Western education system. . . . They are outsiders in the sense that they stand outside of their own cultural group and work outside of their cultural context (G. Beier 1977:11f).

There is some ambiguity in this statement. It may be read that 'outsider' artists work in a new, urban context, unfamiliar to most Papua New Guinean villagers, and that the type of art made by 'outsider' artists would have little interest for villagers. On the other hand, she states in the quote above that 'outsider' artists have not been 'marked by traditional conventions or the Western education system', and elsewhere comments that they were 'outsiders in their new surroundings' and that 'there were no unified values in the cities by which to orient themselves' (G. Beier 1977:12). The first point may have been true in the very early days of the contemporary art movement, but not after the work of contemporary artists began to be well publicised in the local media, books and journals. The latter point emphasises Georgina Beier's opinion (and that of Ulli Beier as well, U. Beier 1975) that 'outsider' artists worked in isolation from contemporary urban cultures. It is this latter point, which forms the basis of their definition of 'outsider' artist(s), that is considered unsustainable. My reasons are given below, but first a summary by Eva Raabe of all the Beiers' concepts by which they distinguish 'outsider' artists will be quoted:
Nothing binds them any longer to their artistic traditions, just as nothing binds them to the people of their cultural group, who see nothing in the artists’ modern works. But they are outsiders in their new surroundings as well. Since there are no unified values in the cities by which to orient themselves, they are left on their own with their work. The artists paint because they can express this newly discovered freedom . . . .

It becomes clear that outsider artists did not want to fulfil any social function. They chose their style and the themes of their work completely by instinct. Their art has no message consciously aimed at exerting an influence, and they do not themselves realise their contribution to Papua New Guinea’s cultural development (Raabe 1985:109ff citing G. Beier 1977:8ff; U. Beier 1975:310, 1976B:8).

In Georgina Beier’s view, ‘outsider’ artists had to live and work in an urban environment, as their own communities would not comprehend their art and they could not make a living from it. She explains that

(for a number of reasons the contemporary Niugini artist needs to live in a town. He must live in the town because that is where he can purchase his materials, that is where his potential clients live, and that is where he has a better chance of surviving as an individual. At home he would conform to local pressure and spend much of his time in communal activities of the village. He would be lacking the appreciation of clients and the motivation to work, for he would be totally isolated in his activity. If he did manage to sell his works, he would have to share his earnings with his extended family and could probably not retain enough money to buy new materials. He needs an urban existence and
the company of other contemporary artists if he is to continue his career (G. Beier 1974:4).

During the early period of the development of contemporary art in Papua New Guinea (1970s) this argument is reasonable and contemporary artists found the support of expatriates and wantoks in towns rather than in their villages. But there is a film about Akis in which he is shown returning to his village with wealth to distribute (suitable items such as cloth and feathers purchased with the proceeds from his art) which enhanced his reputation in the village (Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1974). In the 1980s John Mann and Taba Silau returned to their villages near Madang and used the Madang Cultural Centre as an outlet for their art work. Watu Lopo and others who commenced the 'sand painting' movement are based in Enga. Contemporary art now makes regular appearances at local 'shows' around Papua New Guinea. But the spread of contemporary art activities to this extent had not occurred by the time the Beiers left Papua New Guinea in 1980.

In my view, the Beiers' impression that 'outsider' artists produced instinctive art (i.e. imaginative and purely decorative) demeans the perceptiveness of a number of their works. An assessment of some of the major works of so-called 'outsider' artists should support an alternative view, viz. that they realise the significance of their art and their role as visual artists.

Childhood experiences, nostalgia for village life, the worlds of spirits and ancestors, and the spiritual and heritage values these subjects hold for Papua New Guineans are
frequently expressed by contemporary artists. Some examples are Jakupa's *Pik Man* (1978), Watu Lopo's Legends of Enga series exhibited in his solo show 'Wood and Paint' (1978), Martin Morububuna's *Death of Mitikata* (1983). Contemporary Papua New Guinean artists have learnt technical skills and styles that make their work more effective. Kauage's career shows distinctive developments in his style; as his confidence grew, he moved from his first tentative drawings and prints, to beaten copper panels, to large scale acrylic on canvas paintings and murals. But it is not only his facility with materials and the consistent development of his individual style that is important. Kauage also conceptualised significant themes for sequences of major works, such as the series depicting the life and the death of his clansman, the onetime Deputy Prime Minister, lambakey Okuk (Kauage 1987) and his paintings of the Impact of technology featuring planes, helicopters, cars and trucks, for example *Air Hostesses* (1981). Kauage encouraged his sons Chris Kauage and Kauage Mattias to take up painting careers, demonstrating to his family, peers and purchasers that the role of artist in Papua New Guinea is one worth pursuing.

The cluster of writers to emerge at the University of Papua New Guinea in the late 1960s, including Hannett, Jawodimbari, Waiko, Narokobi, and Kasiapwalova passionately

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1 This important series of acrylic paintings, drawings and prints was exhibited at the Beiers' house in Annandale (Sydney) in 1987 and they sold one of the major works *Okuk's Son at Port Moresby Airport* (1987) to the Australian Museum. But (to my knowledge) there was no catalogue essay or article written to explain this development in Kauage's work.

2 Chris Kauage attended the National Art School, Kauage Mattias has been taught by Kauage and emulates his father's style.
retaliated against the colonial regime, church paternalism and other forms of cultural domination. These sentiments are sometimes harder to detect in the work of visual artists. This is because the first visual artists only began their artistic careers in the 1970s, whereas the writers had already had several years training in their craft at high school and University. As well, the first writers came from coastal areas where the effects of colonialism had been felt for several generations. The first visual artists, being Highlanders, came from areas where contact with the colonial regime had come in their parents’ generation. Anti-Church and anti-colonial sentiments surfaced later in the work of visual artists from coastal societies, for example Joe Nalo’s *Crucifixion* (1978) and David Lasissi’s set of screenprints and accompanying poems, *Searching* (1976).

Towards independence (declared on 16 September 1975), as the number of visual artists and support for their work increased, they became increasingly confident and the scope of the issues and interests they portrayed widened considerably. Pro-national euphoria is observable in Kauage’s *Independence Painting* (1976) and Martin Morububuna’s Independence poster (1975). The ideology of *bung wantaim* (striving together) lasted into the 1980s, transported into tangible form in National Parliament House, an ideal of national culture and identity to which all the visual artists mentioned made some contribution.

But the new society was not ideal and not all changes were seen to be beneficial. The effects of liberating women from their traditional roles features in Kauage’s (1978) ‘urban
cowboys and prostitutes' series of prints and drawings. Taba Silau portrayed the indifference of wealthy Papua New Guineans to the poverty around them (*The Beggar of Port Moresby* 1977) and Gickmai Kundun's sculpture protests the throw-away mentality of consumer society (*Garbage* 1978). These works all appeared within three years of independence. Since then, through the social comment in their art, visual artists have been trying to remind their contemporaries of the constant need for re-evaluation of social mores (Jakupa's 1989 exhibition at the National Art School), and to continue to aspire to fundamental beliefs even when disillusioned with the present (Joe Nalo, *Universal Man*, 1991).

The Papua New Guinean writer, John Kasaipwalova observed that the writer's task was to reflect the consciousness of the people at the time of writing (Kasaipwalova, cited in Brash 1972:171). The same could be said of visual artists. The evidence provided above demonstrates that a number of contemporary visual artists were already producing artworks commenting on social issues and cultural change at the time the Beiers were in Papua New Guinea. It should be sufficient to refute their claim that these were 'outsider' artists.

Stevenson investigated the output of the group of visual artists who were the Beiers' proteges and other visual artists working in similar genres and styles (Stevenson 1990a). He claimed that some contemporary Papua New Guinean art is 'naive' art and identifies a number of visual artists as
belonging to the 'Naive Group'. He distinguishes this group, in part, by 'the lack of initial contact with institutional art teaching' (Stevenson 1990a:25). While Stevenson presents substantial evidence to support his claims, in my opinion the term 'naive' misdescribes this art (reasons are presented below).

Stevenson contrasts the art of the so-called 'Naive Group' with that of 'art school trained' artists (Stevenson 1990a &b). Stevenson believes that changes to the expressive arts curriculum from 1972 onwards assisted the development of visual artists from that time. But even some artists who had received a school education before 1972 developed talent and competence despite poor teaching.1 Eva Raabe goes further and describes Stevenson's 'art school trained' artists as 'intellectual' artists (Raabe 1985:112). I acknowledge that access to art education allowed artists to experiment with different styles, media and skills, but do not accepted that this education made one group of visual artists more intellectual than another.

The distinction between 'naive' and 'art school trained' or 'intellectual' artists rests on several factors: the village upbringing and lack of Western style education of 'naive' artists; the fact that they took up their careers as visual artists in their maturity, and some distinctive stylistic tendencies. In contrast 'art school trained' or 'intellectual'

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1 The Hugh Stevenson Collection at University of Papua New Guinea reflects his support of artists from all kinds of backgrounds and is representative of the currents and interests of a considerable number of contemporary artists of the period.
artists have received a school education and training in Western aesthetics and art styles (and in the English language).

Stevenson tested Georgina Beier's claim that some visual artists are outsiders because the nature and style of their work does not relate to their traditional cultural context. His evidence is based on stylistic, as well as socio-cultural, grounds. He estimates that it was more than pure chance which enabled the emergence of what he calls the 'Naive Group' of Papua New Guinean artists in the late 1960s-70s, and identifies a number of socio-cultural reasons for their emergence. Before looking into the stylistic tendencies by which this group is defined, certain commonalities in their background and the localities they came from are investigated (Stevenson 1990b: 47-57). Stevenson noticed both regional and chronological similarities in the background of the visual artists in the 'Naive Group'. As he explains:

Akis, John Man, Wekeng Aseng and Barnabas India are from Simbai in the south-west uplands of the Ramu Valley, Cecil King Wungi came from Bundi, further east in the same hill country. This area is separated by a mountain ridge in the south from Kauage, William Onglo and Jakupa who came from the north of the Simbu Province. Watu Lopo is an outsider from Laiogam further west in Enga Province ... although they are not a part of this analysis the major sculptors, Ruki Fame, Benny More, Gickmai Kundun and Agion Aiako also come from the north-eastern Highlands (Stevenson 1990b:47).
Further, Stevenson surmised that, as the origin of visual artists in the 'Naive Group' was from a relatively small and contiguous area of the north-central Highlands, it was most likely the information passing through the Highland/Simbai network both in Port Moresby and the home villages was that members of the community were making a supplementary income from making pictures and sculptures for expatriates, and were consequently gaining social advantages (Stevenson 1990b:55).

The social advantages Stevenson refers to included gaining recognition and status in both the village community and in Port Moresby. He does not perceive these artists as 'outsiders': on the contrary, he indicates they were fully aware of what they undertook. In Stevenson's view, Kauage, John Man, Watu Lopo, C.K. Wungi, Barnabas India and William Onglo were all working as labourers in the vicinity of Port Moresby. This social station did not have the connotation that it might have in Australia. For the itinerant unemployed population of villagers from all over Papua New Guinea who were in Port Moresby at the time, to have work at all was usually an indicator of extra initiative. The men who became artists found unusual and imaginative ways to assert themselves . . . their efforts coincided with the artistic interests and cultural attitudes of some expatriates in Port Moresby at the time (Stevenson 1990b:47).

Stevenson also describes the stylistic tendencies of the 'Naive Group' and brings forward the problem of explaining and defining art from another culture in Western aesthetic and art historical terms. He states at the beginning of his essay that the term 'Naive Art' only indicates the features of an art style,
rather than the artists' perception of themselves and their art (Stevenson 1990b:47).¹ ²

Stevenson also recognises some common characteristics among the first group of contemporary artists to become prominent, his so-called 'Naive Group'. In his assessment, the artists of this group

lacked contact with institutional art teaching . . . (they) used centrally conceived motifs, usually highly schematised and not related to the field. They also depended on line to define mass and strong infill patterns . . . . Later adherents to this group, Jakupa, John Man, Benny More and Cecil King Wungi made the Naive Group distinctive and identifiable in the Port Moresby community (Stevenson 1990b:25).

Stevenson's application of the term 'Naive' to describe something which has emerged as characteristic of recent Papua New Guinean art has been criticised by Terry Smith (1991). This criticism relates to the application of a term from Western art to different social conditions and circumstances of art production. But Stevenson believes that alternatives are

1 Naive art is described in Western art historical terminology as an extension of folk art. The practitioners of Naive art are generally peasants, untutored in any professional way, who develop their own artistic insight and form of representation (see quotation from John Berger in Chapter 1). Stylistically, Naive artists tend to show no knowledge of perspective or other compositional tenets of western art; they present human figures in full frontal or profile positions; use simplified forms and enclose flat fields of colour in outlines to define their subject. At their best, Naive artists are considered to achieve a natural and spontaneous evocation of their subject (rather than the effect of spontaneity contrived by a professional artist). Some features of Naive art - simplified figures, unshaded colour, spontaneity - are also found in children's art and Art Brut.

2 Art Brut, art of the insane, was collected and theorised by the French painter Pierre Dubuffet. He formulated a theory that this art was an unfettered expression of the inner mind. Again, the artists had never received formal art lessons.
difficult to find, and an appropriate new term difficult to devise (Stevenson pers. comm. 1990). However, Stevenson's reasons for drawing together this group of visual artists was to examine more closely common style elements in their art and, eventually, to find if their regional affiliation was one source of the style elements which make them distinguishable as a group (Stevenson 1990b:47 and pers. comm. re further research). In his investigations to date Stevenson has found that

(a)s this group of artists developed to more complex compositions, similar motifs began to appear in their work even though they were not copying each other's styles. As they had to extend their imaginations they fell back on traditional Highland motifs, the most obvious ones being chevrons, diagonal shading, checkerboard patterns, striation and denticals - all can be found throughout the Highlands and even into the Ramu and Markham Valleys on engraved bamboo implements and ritual bark cloth decorations. Most distinctive is the similar treatment of faces. The majority of these forms appear in the pre-contact bark paintings of the Northern Hewa people and design elements designated as Old Papuan syle element observed by Abramson and Holst.

There seems to be some evidence then to conjecture that the Naive Group may have been influenced by their recognition of elements of a widespread precontact design tradition remembered from the artifacts of their village childhood (Stevenson 1990b:56).

He is aware of the art historical connotations of the term 'naive' but considers it the best available term in the circumstances. In my opinion 'self-taught' is a preferable term
to describe Papua New Guinean visual artists who commenced making contemporary art without art school training. 'Self-taught' does not carry connotations from Western art history which may be misinterpreted when applied to the circumstances facing contemporary artists in Papua New Guinea. As well, the term 'self-taught' forms an immediate, and easier, comparison with the term 'art school trained'.

Those visual artists Stevenson has described as 'art school trained' and whom Raabe calls the 'intellectual' artists, include Gickmai Kundun, David Lassisi, Taba Silau, Joe Nalo, Martin Morububuna, Jodam Allingam, Larry Santana, Agion Aiako and Wendy Choulai, all of whom trained at the National Arts School or Goroka Technical College in the 1970s. They are joined by an increasing number of National Arts School graduates who are presently making their names as artists, Naup Waup, Apa Tengere, Venatius Gadd and others.

Raabe describes the group of 'intellectual' artists working in the 1970s-80s as

a small group of intellectual artists who are a part of the country's educated elite and whose style represents a more recent development in Papua New Guinea art. The artists of this group are conscious of their country's discordant cultural situation; the problems and tensions are reflected in their works, which are a contribution to the politico-cultural debate. Their education is an important factor in their ability to reflect such problems and tensions . . . . They consciously use traditional values to support national cultural policies (Raabe 1985:110).
The 'more recent development in Papua New Guinea art' she alludes to is the artists' training in Western art styles and aesthetics. In their courses at National Arts School or other art training institutions, students are taught different genres of Western art, including life drawing, still-life and landscape painting; they also learn to apply colour theory, composition, and techniques with different media to their ideas for images, and are introduced to the canon of Western art through art books and reproductions.

But although their values have been marked by a Western-oriented education, their art is a synthesis of Western and traditional forms of expression (Heerman 1979:146,149ff). It is possible to identify the region each of the visual artists comes from because of their inclusion of characteristic local motifs in a significant amount of their work. For example Morububuna employs Trobriand Islands motifs in his prints (*The Creation of Mankind*, 1977) and low relief carving (front panel of main table in Members Dining Room, National Parliament House); Lasissi's prints (*My Name*, 1978) and facades (Papua New Guinea Banking Corporation) incorporate distinctive designs from New Ireland; Nalo's spirit faces are based on the Manus art style (*The Sea Gods take revenge*, 1990) and so on. Even when such artists paint in the most naturalistic manner, the subject matter is often related to everyday, ceremonial or past events, and the deeds of real or legendary persons from their own culture.

Raabe considers that, 'because of their education . . . intellectual artists are more self-reliant' (Raabe 1985:110).
She also considers that their education gave them more insight into the public political debate over independence and that they are marked by the cultural politics of the time . . . they understand art itself as a political message. They live in urban surroundings, regard themselves as citizens of the nation Papua New Guinea and thus want to reach with their art the entire society inside the whole nation (Raabe 1985:110).

She says that only the intellectual elite of Papua New Guinea are receptive to modern art ‘as a mirror of their country’s modern development’ (Raabe 1985:112) and because it serves to present Papua New Guinea outward to other countries (Raabe 1985:112). In her consideration the vast majority of the population of Papua New Guinea has little to do with contemporary art and is not aware of its political significance. This may have been so initially, but with the substantially revised expressive arts curriculum since 1972 more and more people are learning from their school days about their countrymen’s contribution to contemporary art and literature. The works of Papua New Guinea’s most outstanding visual artists and writers are included in the school curriculum (Stebbins 1988), and the general public are becoming increasingly aware of their contribution through the print and broadcast media.

Attempting to find appropriate sub-categories to describe contemporary Papua new Guinean art is more of a preoccupation of expatriate writers than of indigenous artists and writers. Although there is little commentary on contemporary art by indigenous writers, Sir Serei Eri (1990:7) and Sir Paulius
Matane (1990:11) can be seen to support Narokobi's alternative view that contemporary art is one kind of visible evidence of the transformations occurring in Papua New Guinea culture and society (Narokobi 1975, 1983, 1990). Indigenous writers do not make a distinction based on the background and training of individual visual artists, nor are they overly concerned with the artists' styles. The educated elite considers the role of contemporary artists as critics and visualisers of society important, as well as the subject matter of their art which reflects the key issues facing the emerging nation of Papua New Guinea and embodies the marrying of traditional and contemporary values.

While being sympathetic to other's attempts to devise appropriate sub-categories that adequately describe distinctive styles in contemporary Papua New Guinean art, I do not find any satisfactory sub-categories among those which have been devised so far. Even if I prefer 'self-taught' as a term for what Beier calls 'outsider' artists and Stevenson the 'Naive Group', this does not make a major contribution to the reformulation of a complete set of sub-categories to describe contemporary Papua New Guinean art. For the time being, until there is a greater body of work in existence, the best option is to remain with the term, contemporary Papua New Guinean art and not to use sub-categories at all, because the artists themselves prefer it.
THE SUPPORT OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA'S 'EDUCATED ELITE' FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

Evidence is presented here that contemporary artists received, and still receive, intellectual and political support from the Papua New Guinea educated elite. It is probable that this support continues because contemporary art offers a visual interpretation of the transformations taking place in Papua New Guinean culture and society in a manner which is both striking and expressive of current philosophies. It is also most likely that the Papua New Guinean educated elite have not been interested in the distinctions made by expatriates and other scholars, as to whether Papua New Guinean artists are 'outsiders' or 'art-school trained' and so on. I have yet to find one published comment, and have never heard a verbal response by Papua New Guineans, to the types of distinctions about artists made by the Beiers and others. Comments by the educated elite about contemporary art often refer to it as envisioning the transformations taking place in society (see below).

The support of the educated elite for contemporary art is evidenced in several ways, ranging from the general to the specific. In general terms it may be demonstrated that the educated elite\(^1\) support(ed) contemporary artists in their local and international endeavours: this support includes

\(^{1}\) Rather than the small group of university and college graduates referred to by Buluna and Mapun in 1971, by the 1990s this group included politicians, administrators, diplomats, educationalists and other PNGs engaged in government and the intellectual life of the country.
commissioning Papua New Guinean visual artists for major works within Papua New Guinea; sponsoring and otherwise assisting exhibitions overseas through diplomatic channels; writing influential articles in support of artists, which reflect their role in cultural development; including the works of Papua New Guinean contemporary artists in school and higher education curricula; and providing employment and exhibition opportunities within Papua New Guinean cultural and educational institutions. The most specific instance of the support of Papua New Guinea’s educated elite for the country’s contemporary artists was in encouraging and facilitating their role in the creation of Papua New Guinea’s National Parliament House, a symbol of national identity.

Those drawn into shaping a national culture for Papua New Guinea’s rapidly transforming society were faced with the challenge articulated by Bernard Narokobi in 1980

(to) create a new society, based on the new and the old . . . . An artist, whether he or she be a painter, a sculptor, a poet, a playwright, a musician or a novelist works to create vision, new hope, new life (Narokobi 1980:20).

In Narokobi’s view, all contemporary artists have a role as social commentators who envision the life and concerns of their generation of Papua New Guineans. Ten years later Narokobi wrote that

(the works of Jakupa, Kauage and others . . . reflect the deep socio-psychological transformation that is taking place in Papua New Guinea. Changes are taking place in all aspects of life,
including religion, politics and the style of life (Narokobi 1990:17).

He continues with examples of transformations taking place in Papua New Guinea society from the performing and literary arts, the field of law, religion, and in the development of a participatory system of government at village, provincial and national levels. Further on in the same essay he returns to the role played by contemporary art, commenting that

(the artists) express what lies deep in our hearts, a longing to be new, yet rooted in our rich and ancient past (Narokobi 1990 20-21).

Another influential leader, Sir Serei (Vincent) Eri¹, supported visual artists by arranging their participation in international cultural events through diplomatic channels. When Governor General of Papua New Guinea, Eri purchased a number of major works by contemporary artists for Government House (pers. comm. Nalo 1990). Introducing an exhibition of contemporary Papua New Guinean art in Canberra in his gubernatorial role, Eri acknowledged the artists' vision:

These works of art (in the Luk Luk Gen! exhibition) show the skills of our artists in applying modern mediums to traditional concepts. Culture and art-forms are living things and therefore undergo changes and adaptations. . . . These works are fine examples of the adaptability and innovativeness of our creative artists (Eri 1990:7).

The value of art in communicating the beliefs and aspirations of modern Papua New Guinea society to the local

¹ After a long career in public life, Sir Serei Eri became Governor General of PNG. He was the first PNG writer to publish a novel, The Crocodile.
population and the outside world is well understood. Artists travelling abroad are given diplomatic status\textsuperscript{1}, and consulates are involved with overseas exhibition openings.\textsuperscript{2} The opportunities are more limited for non-English speaking visual artists to communicate to the outside world (except through an interpreter), although this has not prevented a number of them travelling overseas. In one of the first instances, Jakupa attended an exhibition of his paintings at the Solander Gallery in Canberra. Several Papua New Guinean politicians and diplomats attended this opening (by the then Consul General, Oala Oala Rarua) and links between the performing and visual arts were made by dancers from the National Dance and Drama Company performing interpretations of Jakupa's paintings.

Matane wrote about the attraction of Westernised urban life for Papua New Guinea's younger generation and their tendency to flaunt traditions and ignore cultural values. He understands that the younger (urbanised) generation relates more easily to contemporary art. He urges youth not to forget 'that our art is our pride, our roots, our life. When we have no roots, then we have no pride in our own cultures and in turn, our country' (Matane 1990:11).

\textsuperscript{1} When on official engagements, such as travelling with an exhibition, undertaking an artist-in-residence position, or working on a commission, such as the exterior and interior murals for the PNG pavilion at the Spanish Expo 1992, artists are issued with diplomatic passports and their requirements attended to by PNG consulate staff.

\textsuperscript{2} The PNG High Commissioner to Australia, Mr Oala Oala Rarua, opened Jakupa's first overseas exhibition in Australia at the Solander Gallery in Canberra in 1976 (Post Courier 14 July 1976). Sir Serei, then Governor General of PNG, opened \textit{Luk Luk Gen!} at the Canberra School of Arts, 12 March, 1991.
These comments, from members of the older generation of the educated elite (Matane and Eri were educated in the 1950s, Narokobi belongs to the 1960s generation educated at University of Papua New Guinea and overseas), are indicative of the respect Papua New Guinea's leading politicians, diplomats, bureaucrats and other intellectuals have for contemporary visual artists and their art.

There are also many connections between creative writers and visual artists and mutual support of each other's works. In 1969, when Akis had only been in Port Moresby for a few weeks, Ulli Beier commissioned him to draw 'vignettes' as illustrations for the literary journal *Kovave.* Collaboration between visual artists and writers became popular and it is demonstrable that, in this endeavour, they were aware of each other's works. Stevenson records that, in later years,

(p)ublications of the flourishing new literature called for illustrators to explore the use of traditional forms and symbols in a new way, and artists such as Kambau Lamang, John Dangar and Jimmy John rose to the challenge. Publications of creative writing by the University provided an outlet for more imaginative and abstract book covers and illustrations (Stevenson 1990a:24).

Even if they could not read, visual artists could, and did, attend the performances of Papua New Guinean writers' plays. They were also aware of what was being written through new works being broadcast and also through wantoks who could

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1 Ulli Beier's introductory note to Akis first exhibition, Feb. 1969.

2 Radio broadcasting was the main channel of communicating complex information within a country where only 60% of the population were literate. Local material, including plays, poetry and other readings had
read. It would probably be fair to say that visual artists living and working in the urban environment of Port Moresby were as aware as writers and other members of the 'educated elite' of the intellectual currents and social pressures flowing through the community.

Powell notes that university students freely mixed with labourers on the University of Papua New Guinea campus and occasionally invited linemen (foremen) to debate social and political issues, pointing out the egalitarian nature of the University of Papua New Guinea campus. As has been noted, the parents of the writers and educated visual artists were villagers, as was the majority of the population. In many instances the immediate relatives of writers and visual artists held positions of high esteem (such as pastor or village headman) in their home communities (Powell 1976:13-14; biographies of artists in Cochrane Simons and Stevenson 1990:69-78).\(^1\) It therefore seems doubtful that Papua New Guineans would consider their countrymen from a village background, who had reached the status of Kauage or Jakupa in art, as less perceptive, intellectual or capable than members of the 'educated elite'.

Artists of all backgrounds mix in Port Moresby's society and, because of their common interests, are linked in a loose regular 'spots' in radio broadcasts in addition to educational sessions run by Ulli Beier and other English lecturers.

\(^1\) In his essay on the 'Naive Group' Stevenson noted that Akis and Jakupa had status in their village councils; Watu Lopo, John Man and Wkeng Aseng returned home to their responsibilities and only visited Port Moresby from time to time.
cofraternity, or wantok group. They often work on the same premises and exhibit together, communicating through their art their ideas about Papua New Guinea.

INNOVATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEAN CONTEMPORARY ART

Papua New Guinean contemporary art represents innovation on a large scale. In Papua New Guinea, contemporary art is understood to be non-traditional art in new materials. Its subject matter reflects the rapid transformations taking place in the country, including the effects of technological change, social disruptions and connections between the worlds of the past and the present. It also pioneers the formulation of new cultural ideals. Because there is an identifiable body of recent Papua New Guinean art which is understood to be contemporary Papua New Guinean art within the country and beyond, and a number of well-known Papua New Guinean artists who describe themselves as contemporary artists, this term has a more definite meaning in that country than it may have elsewhere.

Papua New Guinean contemporary art is complementary to the country's rich reservoirs of traditional art and the innovative art being produced in villages today, some of which may be for community use and some for sale to outsiders. Earlier in this chapter, the example of the Elema hahao boards demonstrated the process of innovation where some Elema village-based artists reconstrued the style and purpose of hahao boards. Chapter 5 contained examples of innovations
within traditions in body decoration and the *kula* ceremonial exchange cycle.

In 1993 another type of innovation involving traditional art was demonstrated with the arrival and 'dancing in' of a Sulka *hemlaut* mask and two Tabar Island *malanggan* masks at the South Australian Museum. This event was a collaboration between the South Australian Museum, the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery and the respective custodians of the *hemlaut* and *malanggan* traditions who sought to break away from the past object-centred museum practices of collecting in the field and the subsequently display of significant objects with interpretations by museum staff. The structure and organisation of this event allowed the makers/custodians of the masks to fully participate in the processes of negotiation, exchange (the commission included the return of photographs and documents relating to the South Australian Museum's collections of objects from both areas), performance and placement of the masks in the museum gallery and their interpretation by way of floor talks, seminar presentations and the making of a videotape (Cochrane 1993b).

Women innovate in their traditional art styles as well. At the market places in Port Moresby, Goroka and Madang, women display arrays of striking *bilums* (net bags), now made from commercial yarns in every hue and texture available, as well as traditional ones made in regional styles from bush string and natural dyes, cassowary feathers or the fur of *kapul* (cuscus, a type of possum). In 1994 I observed and photographed at the pavement markets at Goroka *bilums* showing innovations in
patterning, shape and the choice of yarns (plastic as well as mercerised cotton and synthetic yarns); these included several featuring the Papua New Guinea flag and slogans in Tok Pisin ¹.

While traditional culture remains strong in some parts of the country, many areas have experienced the passing of traditional ways of life, particularly around towns, industrial areas and mines. The most conspicuous art in the capital city of Port Moresby is contemporary art, because it has been supported by the National government and National Capital District Council, large corporations and local businesses and educational institutions (Cochrane Simons 1990). National Parliament House and the University of Papua New Guinea, most schools, colleges, banks and business houses have some *bilas* (decoration) on their buildings. Public places are also enlivened by contemporary artists, like the Ela Beach waterfront with its *Hiri Fleet Monument* by Gickmai Kundun and set of stylised Motu-Koitapu clan posts, the Gordons market with its large mural by Martin Morububuna and the extensive new (1994) mural commission being undertaken by John Siune for the Elcom housing compound. Traditional architecture usually featured extensive and significant artworks both on exteriors and interiors, and this feature of traditional Papua New Guinean culture has been innovatively translated into modern architecture and urban settings.

The contemporary art movement can be traced back to its beginnings with Akis in 1969 and has consistently developed

¹ MacKenzie (1991) documents innovative designs and the use of introduced yarns in *bilums* made by women in the Central Highlands.
since then. The role of 'contemporary artist' itself is another innovation in Papua New Guinea society, viz, a person who can make an independent living and who has developed an individual style which may be inspired by their cultural heritage, but is not dependent on it. But being a contemporary artist in Papua New Guinea is a new and insecure profession. Larry Santana, a young graphic artist, portrays poverty, hunger, and loss of traditional pride and dignity in city life. Accompanying his drawing *Self Portrait: Struggle and Pain at the Six Mile Dump* (1991), is a statement which reads, in part,

(t)his is an image of myself, and the little settlement house which I built under me. There are my hands and my brush. Tears and blood are in my eyes. The silhouette of the people in the back are . . . in-laws coming from the dump where they have collected scraps of food and material waste from the city. The background carving represents the traditional life we have lost . . . . Life is not worth living but I have my family to care for. As an artist I work with my brush to make money . . . . How can I live with only a few kina? How can I save money to make my work and still feed my family? . . . . As you can see the sketch is not too neatly done. But it is a painting with feeling - from my heart to let the world know what is happening to artists like myself as we struggle to survive on the garbage dump (Santana quoted in Waiko 1994:109).

So far, very few women have taken up the role of contemporary artist, in Papua New Guinea, most probably because the type of self-assertion it requires is not customary for women in their culture. But this is changing too. Wendy Choulai, one of the
early graduates from the National Arts School, made her name in textile design at first locally and since then internationally. She presently lives in Australia, but continues to design textiles which draw on, but do not infringe, the artistic traditions of Motu-Koitapu women (Choulai and Lewis-Harris, 1993). The Waigani Arts Centre in Port Moresby, a centre with workshop facilities and display space for local artists (mostly expatriate amateur artists), has attracted several Papua New Guineans who use its facilities. Working from there, Mary Gole has established a growing reputation as a potter and ceramic artist and Agatha Waramin is rapidly making her name as an exceptionally talented weaver, experimenting with designs and styles drawn from the tradition of weaving bilums (net bags).

Altogether, innovations in Papua New Guinean art have been more motivated by internal causes than external ones. The external causes have been, in general, the socio-cultural and technological transformations introduced by first the colonial regime and, since independence, the policies of the national government. On a more personal basis, artists have been influenced by their schooling and/or direct experiences of political, cultural and social change and their contacts and relationships with expatriates, such as the Beiers, who were influential in developing opportunities for contemporary art. But an international art market for contemporary Papua New Guinean art, although it may be desired by some, barely exists, so that outside market forces have had little effect so far on developments in this art.
Of the internal factors, individual artist's personal commitment to their art and, perhaps, the financial gain and prestige they may gain from their artistic careers, may be important. But for those contemporary visual artists who have gained most renown, both in recognition of their skill and because of the acuity of their vision of contemporary realities, the main incentive could well be that described by Sir Albert Maori Kiki in these words:

however successful the people's adaptation to the modern world, there is a severe sense of loss. This sense of loss, of one's heritage, is particularly acute among the politically conscious, and arising from this is the desire and need to make Papua New Guinea a unique nation, not a mere blueprint of Australia or the Western World (Maori Kiki quoted in Waiko 1990:113).

DISCUSSION

In summary the above evidence suggests that individual contemporary visual artists, whatever their background and training, are aware that transformations are taking place in Papua New Guinean culture and society. While each artist's work affirms his regional identity and heritage, it also addresses wider concerns including the implications of social, cultural and political change for different sectors of Papua New Guinea society. In this, contemporary visual art is no less effective than Papua New Guinean writing.

From the late 1960s, Papua New Guineans had opportunities and encouragement to develop their creative
potential in media previously dominated by Europeans. In the late colonial period (from the mid-1960s until the declaration of independence in 1975), and following independence, the goal of developing a contemporary national culture stimulated writers and visual artists. Self-exploratory works highlighted the search for a new cultural identity; works referring to traditional values, culture heroes and ancestors perpetuated their existence in contemporary Papua New Guinea culture. Writers made penetrating criticisms of the institutions of church and state which had been implanted during the colonial regime, and visual artists supported structures like National Parliament House which embodied nationalistic ideals.

Prior to the 1960s, Papua New Guinea had received little from its colonisers in the way of institutions of learning and culture; most of the primary schools were run by missions, opportunities for Papua New Guineans to go to secondary school were very limited, and tertiary education in any discipline extremely rare.\(^1\) The establishment of the major institutions, including the University of Papua New Guinea, the National Arts School and the National Museum occurred in the late 1960s, came as the country was moving towards independence. The National Cultural Council and cultural institutions such as the Museum and Arts School and were the result of intensive lobbying for a cultural grant from the Australian government.\(^2\)

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1 Eri, Matane, Maori Kiki and Narokobi were among the few who had tertiary education prior to 1960.

2 A $A two million grant specifically for cultural development was given to Papua New Guinea by the Whitlam Government in 1972.
The 1970s was a particularly stimulating decade. Philosophically, Papua New Guinea's new institutions were not inclined to uphold Western learning and cultural traditions as the only model. In facilitating the development of contemporary culture the institutions responded to pre-existing Papua New Guinea values and cultural traditions which would assist Papua New Guineans to formulate their country's role as a nation in the modern world.

Prior to European contact and the effects of colonisation and missionisation, art in Papua New Guinea was an expression of each cultural group's heritage and was created, performed and used within the local sphere of influence. Since contact, opportunities have emerged for visual artists to develop in any creative sphere to which they may feel attracted. The local community is no longer the sole consumer of art production. Art objects made by village-based producers for outside markets are intentionally and/or visibly different from the forms sanctioned for use in traditional practices. Art objects continue to be made in identifiable regional styles, whether these have been continuously practised, or represent a revival after a period of cultural loss (as with the Elema example). The stimulus of new markets and new opportunities for art has encouraged village-based producers to innovate, but they continue to do so within known forms. Papua New Guinean villagers have few opportunities in comparison to Aboriginal artists in remote areas of Australia, who have the advantage of government-sponsored arts centres to assist with promoting
and distributing their art, and a well-developed, segmented art market that absorbs most of their art production.

The urban environment in Papua New Guinea has provided visual artists with a different set of stimuli, opportunities and access to new materials and techniques. In the period of rapid social and political change from the late 1960s, visual artists and writers found a receptive atmosphere at the University, Teachers Colleges, Centre for Creative Arts and National Arts School, where they were encouraged to develop their talents. Even if their teachers and mentors encouraged personal self-expression as the primary goal, visual artists and writers found themselves drawn to portraying social issues and reflecting cultural concerns.