What is a Rover Thomas painting?

Catherine Carr

University of Wollongong

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What is a Rover Thomas Painting?

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

From

University of Wollongong

By

Catherine Carr BCA (Hons)
University of Wollongong
Faculty of Creative Arts

2010
This thesis examines the paintings of Kukatja/Wangkajunga artist and stockman Rover Thomas, who was born 1926 at Yalda Soak near Well 33 on the Canning Stock Route in Western Australia and died in Warmun on 12 April 1998.

The basic contention underpinning my study is that the creation of art throughout the East Kimberley region since the 1970s can be seen as a response to the dramatic social changes that occurred since colonisation which caused dislocation and dispossession throughout Aboriginal communities.

After a life as a stockman on various cattle stations in the East Kimberley, away from his own country of Kukatja/Wangkajunga people, Thomas commenced his innovative painting in the early 1980s, whilst living at the community of mainly Gija and Miriwoong people at Warmun or, as it was then called, Turkey Creek. By exploring Thomas’s life, in the upheaval of the late 20th century, the pathways that led to the establishment of the distinct East Kimberley art movement became clearer. Thomas’s boards and canvases with their individual style were fundamental to this art movement. I argue that Thomas’s hybrid style, which featured a reinvention of East Kimberley tradition, was drawn from aspects of regional rock painting and ceremonial practices, and was distinctive compared to the other regions of North Australia especially Arnhem Land, West Kimberley and the Western Desert. My research shows how Thomas moved across the wide terrain of the East Kimberley, drawing together different places aligned to his father’s and mother’s ancestry, presenting places, stories, topographical features in an aerial perspective with broad areas of colour enclosed by dotted outlining. His palette of earth colours was minimal.
The extraordinary originality of his paintings led to his representing Australia in the 1990 Venice Biennale. This thesis attempts to answer the question ‘What is a Rover Thomas painting’ through critical analysis of ten of his paintings drawn from the collections of Art Gallery of New South Wales and National Gallery of Australia. This study is not concerned with the mythology or the iconography Thomas used in his paintings but it is specifically focused on the stylistic analysis of his paintings. This study provides a detailed scrutiny of painting methods and techniques and establishes a fresh approach to all material aspects of his paintings: including pigment, its consistency and texture, brush strokes and dotting, and the trajectory of each work from its source in the Kimberley. This thesis demonstrates that Thomas’s paintings were an amalgamation of different cultural styles, which developed out of great social change, yet remained deeply embedded in the land.
I, Catherine Carr, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the award of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, is entirely my own work unless otherwise referenced and acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

...........................................................................................................

Catherine Carr
I would like to acknowledge the considerable help of a large number of people in carrying out this study into Rover Thomas’s life and his paintings. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to them all.

I am particularly indebted to the significant assistance that Kim Ackerman gave me in unravelling the life of Rover through many emails, chats and a wonderful weekend in Hobart. He opened my eyes to the true richness of the culture of the East Kimberley. I am eternally grateful.

Many thanks to art dealer Mary Macha and her wonderful dog Tom for the great week in Perth I spent with her. She opened her files to me in return for my cooking. We had a fantastic week talking about the early days of the art movement at Warman and looking through photographs about Rover and other East Kimberley artists.

I owe a huge debt to the wonderful Pam Linklater who sadly passed away this year. We carried out many ‘just a chat’ correspondences. Pam introduced me to many artists in Kununurra who knew Rover and who were extremely willing to chat about ‘that old man Ropa’ and the ‘old times’. I thank her for her friendship, her insightful understanding of painting practice and her enthusiasm for my research. I miss her very much.

To Kevin Kelly who had been a friend to Rover and was executor of Rover’s estate I thank him for his personal and intimate insights into Rovers’ life.

I express my gratitude to Cathy Cummins and the committee of Waringarri Aboriginal Arts who gave me full access to the files relating to Rover’s paintings which enabled me to considerably widen my knowledge of his works. I spent several periods in 2006, 2007 and 2009 at Waringarri helping collate files in return for access to these
files. They were some of the best times - just sitting around the painting table with Mignonette Jampin, Phyllis Ningamara, Agnes Armstrong and Judy Mengil as fellow artists talking about painting techniques, sharing lunch and a good laugh about my inability to be a grandmother. This was a highlight of my studies. Thank you for you wonderful hospitality. I thank Cathy for her friendship and I hope her life slows down a bit so she can get back to her roots as an artist.

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I owe a huge debt which I hope to pay by way of this thesis to the many artists I met and talked with in Kununurra and Warmun during 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009. A special thank you goes to Jane Yalunga, the daughter of Rover Thomas and a wonderful
artist in her own right, for the use of her family photographs. Her chats about her father gave me a very personal feel for Rover.

Thank you to artist and guide Ju Ju Wilson for a wonderful day in 40C heat scrambling around rocks and overhangs at the Martin’s Gap and Maxwell Plains rock art sites. Her insights and comments on these sites allowed me to more fully comprehend the interaction of rock art and contemporary East Kimberley aesthetics.

The artists I spent time with talking about ‘Ropa’s’ painting techniques and practice at Our Land Gallery in Kununurra with Jock Mosquito, Phyllis Thomas, Charlene Carrington, June Peters, Lena Nyabdi, Nancy Nodea and her son Mark Nodea, Tommy Carroll and Churchill Cann, I give my thanks for them taking time to explain to an ‘outsider’ who seemed to ask seemingly endless (and at times, no doubt, seemingly silly) questions about their paintings and culture. It is they, not I, who are the true authorities and keepers of their culture. So if this research into Rover Thomas’s life proves significant it is to these people that the credit is due. Any errors of fact or interpretation remain my own.

A big thank you goes to my supervisor Diana Wood-Conroy not just for her patience, invaluable advice and her instruction on research approach and methodology but overall for helping me through the whole process which at times became quite complex. Thanks also go to my other supervisors Amanda Lawson and Garry Jones.

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And lastly to my husband Michael and my four children, Fletcher, Madeleine, Claudia, the queen of formatting and Phillipa who have endured years of my single
minded focus on these studies. I owe them, and especially Michael, a huge and probably un-payable debt of gratitude for their unfailing support and belief in my capabilities.
WARNING

Some people mentioned in this thesis have passed away. No hurt was intended to Aboriginal people in using their names.
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Plate 3.12 Delineated Ungurr or Wungurr the rainbow serpent figure at Layawon cave on Doon Doon station west of Kununurra. Technique: painting; Form White outlined, black; Motif: snake; Size: approximately 1.5 metre; Character: none. A typical example of the style of serpent/snake figure in rock painting in the area (Image: Kim Akerman).


Plate 3.14 Delineated rock art painting at Martin’s Gap Kununurra. Technique: painting; Form: white outlined; Motif: freshwater crocodile; Size approximately 60cm; Character; none. An example of the simple figurative form in rock painting (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

Plate 3.15 Hand stencils at Nganalam Site Keep River National Park (Image: Catherine Carr 26 October 2007).
Plate 3.16 Images of *Wandjina* with plum tree leaves, in lower section of image, at Wanalarri rock gallery on Gibb River Station in the central Kimberley, which indicated firstly the journey of Wojin an important ancestral being and evidence of food sources nearby (Image: Godden and Jutta (1982), *Rock Paintings of Aboriginal Australia*, Reed Books, Kew, Victoria p.61).


Plate 3.18 Kevin Waina *Bradshaw Art* (date unknown), ochre on canvas, 40 x 58 cm, Private Collection (Image: Aboriginal Art Shop: www.aboriginal-art-australia.com).


Plate 3.21 *Wandjina* figures on cave wall in the Prince Regent Watershed area (West Kimberley Region). Man in image is Frank Lacy. (Image: West Australian Newspapers Ltd in Ross Haig (Ed) (1990), *Panorama of the North: Journeys in the Pilbara, Kimberley and Northern Territory’s Top End*, p.20).


Plate 3.25  Delineated kangaroo figure from Ord River Valley. Technique: Painting; Form: white outlined, yellow ochre infill; Motif: Figurative; Kangaroo; Size: unknown; Characteristics: long eared (Image: Kim Akerman).

Plate 3.26  Flying Foxes painted in Layawon Cave Doon Doon, Dunham River East Kimberley. Technique: painting; Form white outlined, black infill; Motif: figurative; flying fox; Size: unknown; Characteristics: heads in profile, 2 left facing, two right facing (Image: Kim Akerman).


Plate 3.28  Nganalam rock art site in the Keep River National Park in Northern Territory. This place is named from the *gooning* or totemic name of the Sulphur Crested Cockatoo which is *Nganalang* (Image: Catherine Carr 26 October 2007).

Plate 3.29  Jinumum rock shelter and art site in the Keep River National Part in Northern Territory. This is a series of rock overhangs along the edge of the lower edge of the Keep River Gorge (Image: Catherine Carr 26 October 2007).

Plate 3.30  A series of large sandstone boulders in an isolated rock outcrop designate the rock shelter at Martin’s Gap near Kununurra. Ju Ju Wilson is in the foreground at the site (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

Plate 3.31  Rock art shelter at Maxwell Plains to the east of Kununurra is composed of a large sandstone overhang with a gallery of delineated and mechanical paintings as well as etching and cupules. Ju Ju Wilson is in the foreground (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

Plate 3.32  Burnt area around the rock shelter and rock art gallery at Martins Plains near Kununurra (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

Plate 3.33  One of the small alcoves in the rock shelter at Martins Gap near Kununurra. Highlights the river eel motif at the entrance to this cave. (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).
Plate 3.34  Roots of a boab and the burnt ground highlighting the surface of the floor around the rock shelter (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

Plate 3.35  Rock on floor of rock shelter showing abrasions made when sharpening implements. There was also evidence of pecking (small round holes) on the top surface of this rock. Martin’s Gap near Kununurra (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

Plate 3.36  Grinding marks on stone on floor of rock shelter at Martin’s Gap near Kununurra (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

Plate 3.37  Cupules on wall in one area of the rock shelter site at Martin’s Gap near Kununurra (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

Plate 3.38  Old delineated painting of sugar glider on rock shelter wall at Martin’s Gap. Technique: painting; Form white outlined, red; Motif: sugar glider; Size: approximately 20cm wide; Characteristics: none (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).


Plate 3.40  Superimposed river eel motif over other motifs on wall of rock shelter at Martin’s Gap near Kununurra (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).


Plate 3.42  Warning figure, approximately 40 cm high, on wall of rock shelter at Martin’s Gap near Kununurra (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

Plate 3.43  Delineated motif of river eel on face of wall at Martins Gap near Kununurra. Technique: painting; Form white outlined, red; Motif: river eel; Size: approximately 2m length; Characteristics: none (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

Plate 3.44  Detail of Plate 3.43. Highlighting the over painted hand stencils. This is seen in the central area of this detail. Also in this detail there is, in the lower section of this plate,
evidence of a previous painting, probably a similar image (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

Plate 3.45 Detail of Plate 3.43. Focussing on the dotting that is apparent around the ‘tail’ of the river eel motif (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

Plate 3.46 Tommy Carroll with *Dunham Country* 2008, ochre on canvas, 50 x 60cm, Private Collection (Image: Our Land Gallery Kununurra).

Plate 3.47 Rover Thomas *Grugrugi* 1989, earth pigments and natural binder, 100 x 90.5cm on canvas, Holmes a Court Collection (Image: Belinda Carrigan (Ed) (2003), *Rover Thomas: I want to paint* exhibition catalogue, Holmes a Court, Perth).

**Part 2: Beginnings to the Contemporary Art Practice in the East Kimberley**

**Chapter 4: Biography - Rover Thomas: Stockman and Artist**

Plate 4.1 Rover Thomas, Warmun (Turkey Creek) 1990s (Image: Martin Van Der Wal, AIATSIS Image No. N6455.09).

Plate 4.2 Rover Thomas signature on document (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Rover Thomas file, 2006).


Plate 4.6 Charlie Brooks – Thomas’s older brother who left him at Well 33 in the late 1930s (Image: Photographer unknown, date unknown: Jane Yalunga Collection).
Plate 4.7  Settlement at Turkey Creek (Warmun) 25. April 1979 (Image: Kim Akerman).


Plate 4.9  Rover Thomas (blue shirt) and other (possibly Roley Gibbs) at Yalda Soak in 1995 (Image: Kevin Kelly, Waringarri Aboriginal Arts files, October 2007).

Plate 4.10  Rover Thomas Turkey Creek (Corroboree Painting) 1985, 24” x 34”, ochres and natural binders on plywood, Private Collection (Image: Mary Macha files February 2008).

Plate 4.11  Great Northern Hwy approaching Warmun (Turkey Creek) (Image: Catherine Carr June 2005).

Plate 4.12  Rover Thomas’s family came up from Jigalong and Well 33 to attend his funeral in 1998 (Image: photographer unknown: Jane Yalunga Collection).

Plate 4.13  Rover Thomas gravesite and headstone at Warmun (Photo: P. Brown).

Chapter 5: Rover Thomas and the Kurrirr Kurrirr Ceremony.

Plate 5.1  Performance of Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremony at Turkey Creek in November 1979. Rover Thomas is standing on the far left with hat and red kerchief (Image: Kim Akerman).


Plate 5.3  Corroboree headdress Derby, Western Australia 1970 (Image: Douglass Baglin and Barbara Mullins (1970), Aboriginal Art of Australia, Australian Colour Heritage Series, Belrose NSW, p.19).
Plate 5.4  Corroboree dancers decorated with bird’s down with large thread cross dance emblems on their shoulders (Image: Douglah Baglin and Barbara Mullins (1970), *Aboriginal Art of Australia*, Australian Colour Heritage Series, Belrose NSW, p. 19).


Plate 5.6  Ethnographer Helmut Petri noted that participants in certain balga or everyday ceremony dressed and acted out roles of bullocks. Photo from Frobenius Expedition 1937-1938 (Image: Crossman and Barou (1997), *Peitres Aborigenes d’Australie*, exhibition catalogue, Indigenes Editions, Montpellier, France, p. 15).


Plate 5.15 Man dressed as old woman in Kurrirr Kurrirr Ceremony at Warmun November 1979 (Image: Kim Akerman November 1979).

Plate 5.16 Kurrirr Kurrirr Ceremony at Warmun (Turkey Creek) Dancers carrying juari (dead spirits) icon painted boards of Jimpi, on left, Manginta, on right, with women holding long sticks on both sides of these boards and a group of children behind (Image: Kim Akerman November. 1979).


Plate 5.18 Paddy Jaminji Cyclone Tracy c1980 catalogue card: front from Mary Macha files (Mary Macha files February 2008).

Plate 5.19 Paddy Jaminji Cyclone Tracy c1980 Mary Macha catalogue card: back.
Inscription reads;
This is the story about Cyclone Tracy Rover Thomas visited Darwin after the cyclone and he told Paddy Tjupanji [Jaminji] the song about the buildings where they all fell down. This is a Kril Kril [Kurrirr Kurrirr] painting. The black part is the saltwater place and the brown part is the city area.
Told by Paddy to Don MacLeod on 4/10/84 (Catalogue Card: Mary Macha files Perth February 2008).
Plate 5.20  The *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony performed at the opening of the NATSIAA (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Art Award) in the gardens of the Museum and Art Gallery of Northern Territory (Darwin) in 1998 as a tribute to Rover Thomas (Image: Red Rock Art in *Australia Art Monthly*, No. 194, October 2006, p.3) Note: The size and shape of the boards used.


Plate 5.22  Detail of photograph taken at Turkey Creek of *Kurrirr Kurrirr* performance November 1979 - from left ‘Monkey’ (deceased), Jacko Texas (deceased), masked dancer unknown, George Mung Mung (deceased). Information on participants from Jock Mosquito and Churchill Cann (Image: Kim Akerman).

Plate 5.23  Rover Thomas assisting in painting ceremonial board for *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony in 1982 at Turkey Creek (Image: Kim Dooham photographer: Pat Vinicombe Collection: Mary Macha files 2008).

Plate 5.24  Mary Macha with dog Murdoch on left, centre, Rover Thomas and right, Paddy Jaminji at Subiaco, Perth in July 1984 (Image: Vaslav Macha: Mary Macha Files 2008).


Plate 5.27  Rover Thomas and Queenie McKenzie in Darwin airport in 1996 -7 coming from printmaking workshop (Northern Editions) at Charles Darwin University, Darwin (Image: Photo given by Jack Britten to Pam Linklater (Our Land Gallery, Kununurra), date unknown - copied November 2007).
Chapter 6: Influences, Methods, Materials and Techniques used by painters in the
East Kimberley


Plate 6.2  Two Coolamons, 84 x 18 cm (top), 57 x 18 cm Kimberley, Western Australia, Provenance Collected prior to 1940 (Image: Moss Green Fine Art Auction, *Fine Early Aboriginal and Oceanic Art*, 2008, Lot 72).

Plate 6.3  Three Western Australian Pearl Shell pendants, Riji and Jakoli, pearl shell, natural pigments, human hair, various sizes (Image: Sotheby’s auction, *Aboriginal and Oceanic Art* 25 November, 2007, Lot 122).

Plate 6.4  Ceremonial tablets of the Mudburra tribe, Victoria River, Northern Territory, bearing totemic designs of snakes, lizards and circles. Note the dotting used as infill around the designs (Image: Frederick D. McCarthy (1958), *Australian Aboriginal Culture*, Australian Museum, Sydney, p.50).

Plate 6.5  From left to right are seen (1) a ceremonial board from Pine Creek; (2) a spear-thrower from the Forrest River; (3) a seed container from the Victoria River bearing snake and lizard figures, north Kimberley, showing snake patterns; and (4) a spear-thrower from the Admiralty Gulf runs a line of emu tracks. Black, red and white are the colours used. (Image: Frederick D. McCarthy (1958), *Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art*, 5th Edition, Australian Museum, Sydney, p.51).

Plate 6.6  Rover Thomas *Juntarkal* 1985, natural earth pigments and natural binders on composition board, 60 x 122 cm, Private Collection (Image: Mary Macha Files 2008).

Plate 6.7  A selection of carved boab nuts. Carved Boab Nuts: *Top Row: left* from Derby; *centre*: location unknown; *right*: Wyndham, 1962 – the vertical line represents the road from Wyndham to Kununurra and the adjoining loops are significant places on that road. *Bottom Row: left*: from Kunmunya Mission, 1948; *centre*: from Derby but probably done by Sunday Islanders; *right*: from Kunmunya Mission, 1948 (Image: I.M. Crawford (1968), *The Art of the Wandjina: Aboriginal Cave Paintings in Kimberley*,
Plate 6.8 Depiction of Dumbi the Owl on a boab. Unknown artist (Image: Jungara Gallery Cairns)

Plate 6.9 Rover Thomas *Untitled (Owl)* c.1988, natural pigments and natural binders on canvas, 76 x 51cm Private Collection Victoria (Image: Sotheby’s auction catalogue, Melbourne, 9 July 2001).

Plate 6.10 Ochre Dig south of Warmun at Roses Garden. This ochre quarry produced a coarse yellow pigment (Image: Warmun Art Centre).


Plate 6.12 Ochre pits have been mined for countless thousands of years. Ochre was a valued trade commodity and Aboriginal people travelled long distances to obtain the ochre used. Example of typical ochre quarry in northern Australia (Image: John Skarratt in S. Coupe (Ed) 1993, *Frontier Country*, p.23).


Plate 6.14 Blocks of ochre at art dealer Mary Macha’s house in 2008 which were used by Rover Thomas in paintings at Perth in 1992 (Image: Catherine Carr February 2008).

Plate 6.15 Jars of ground ochres and pigments used by Rover Thomas in Perth during the 1980s. Note the open jar on the lower left marked ‘Turkey Creek’ (Image: Mary Macha files).


Plate 6.18 Rover Thomas *The burning site* 1990, National Gallery of Australia Collection. Detail. Upper left corner. Note more
stable dotting even on edge, also painting on canvas (Image: Thomas et al (1994), Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas, p.56).

Plate 6.19  
Rover Thomas *Unduhill* (Kennedy’s Hill) 1991, natural pigments and bush gum on canvas, 100 x 60cm Art Gallery of New South Wales). Highlighting the leaching of pigments around dotting. (Image: Art Gallery of New South Wales).

Plate 6.20  

Plate 6.21  
Red ochre white outlined Barramundi (30cm) and yellow ochre white outlined stingray (25cm) rock paintings Martin’s Gap Kununurra (Image: Catherine Carr October 2007).

Plate 6.22  
Detail of tail area of Barramundi rock painting at Martin’s Gap Kununurra. Highlighting the application of white dotted edge. It is very coarsely applied (Image: Catherine Carr October 2007).

Plate 6.23  
Close up of Rover Thomas and his dotting technique. Note he is supporting his right forearm with his left arm and sitting side ways cross-legged. The painting is *Ord River with Tributaries* 1989 (Image: Mary Macha files 2008).

Plate 6.24  

Plate 6.25  
Rover Thomas painting unknown painting at Warmun 1996/7. Sitting cross-legged on the ground, supporting his board with his knees and holding his paint brush in an upright position. He is using a 1cm round tipped artist paintbrush (Image: Pat Vinnicombe: Mary Macha Files 2008).

Plate 6.26  
Artist Minnie Lumai at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts Kununurra using a ‘cotton bud’ for application of dots in her painting (Image: Catherine Carr October 2006).
Plate 6.27  Rover Thomas *Untitled* 1984 (Art Gallery of New South Wales). Detail. Upper right corner. Note rubbed right side showing reddish pigment coming through. (Image: Art Gallery of New South Wales)


Plate 6.29  Rover Thomas *When the Sun goes down. Another Hill, he (the hill) comes shadow* 1984. Original catalogue sheet (Mary Macha files 2008)

Plate 6.30  Thomas at Mary Macha’s in Perth July 1984 commencing painting *When the Sun goes down. Another hill, he (the hill) comes shadow* 1984 (Image: Mary Macha files 2008).

Plate 6.31  Thomas at Mary Macha’s in Perth July 1984 continuing his painting *When the Sun goes down. Another hill, he (the hill) comes shadow* 1984. Paddy Jaminji is in the foreground of the photo. (Image: Mary Macha files 2008).

Plate 6.32  Thomas at Mary Macha’s in Perth July 1984 completing his painting *When the Sun goes down. Another hill, he (the hill) comes shadow* 1984 (Image: Mary Macha files 2008).

Plate 6.33  Art dealer Mary Macha with artefacts and paintings in the garage in Perth 1984. *When the Sun goes down. Another hill, he (the hill) comes shadow* 1984 and *Untitled* 1984 are in the background (on the right) prior to sale (Image: Vaslav Macha: Mary Macha files 2008).
Part 3. Defining a Rover Thomas Painting

Chapter 7: Ten Rover Thomas Paintings: A close examination

Plate 7.1.1  Detail of Map 7.2.2.3 (Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1983) (Image: Catherine Carr 2007).  pg. 241


Plate 7.2.1.2  Yilirnpirn 1983 - Original Catalogue Sheet from Mary Macha Files, Perth February 2008.  pg. 252

Plate 7.2.1.3  Yilirnpirn 1983. Detail (lower right corner). Close up of quality of white dotting on outer edge and white dotting surrounding centre area of painting: Note the chipped, cracked and rubbed off dotting.  pg. 253

Plate 7.2.1.4  Yilirnpirn 1983. Highlights the chipped and missing white dotting and also the evidence of over-painted dotting inside the outer white line.  pg. 255

Plate 7.2.1.5  Yilirnpirn 1983. This detail highlights the character of the brush stroke marks.  pg. 256

Plate 7.2.1.6  Yillirnpirn 1983. Gridded. Each section is 9. (H) x 20.66 (W) cm.  pg. 258

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Plate 7.2.2.2  Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1983. Original catalogue sheet from Mary Macha files February 2008.

Plate 7.2.2.3  A version of the Emu and Dingo Dreaming story in Douglas Goudie (2004), ‘Section 6: Extreme weather impacts – old’ of Disruptive Weather Warnings and Weather Knowledge in Remote Australian Indigenous Communities: Research Report for Bureau of Meteorology (Melbourne) May 2004, Centre for Disaster Studies, James Cook University, Townsville


Plate 7.2.2.4  Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1983. Detail. Typical example of dotting found throughout the painting; cracked, chipped, and merged dots, showing dissimilar size and shape.

Plate 7.2.2.5  Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1983. Detail indicating a thick over-painting and ‘touch up’ section on areas of the red background.

Plate 7.2.2.6  Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1983. Detail of section of gritty touched-up surface on left side of painting showing the obvious brush strokes in the painting.

Plate 7.2.2.7  Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1983. Gridded Map. Each section is 9.02cm (H) x 20.3 (W) cm.

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Plate 7.2.2.11  Upper Left
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Plate 7.2.2.13  Upper Right
Plate 7.2.2.14  Centre Left
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Plate 7.2.3.1  Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek) 1984 (Image: Thomas et al (1994), Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, p.38). pg. 281

Plate 7.2.3.2  Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek) 1984 – Original catalogue sheet in Mary Macha files February 2008. pg. 283

Plate 7.2.3.3  Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek) 1984. Detail. An example of the condition of dotting throughout the painting; chipped cracked and damaged. Size of dotting .2 to .75cm. pg. 285

Plate 7.2.3.4  Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek) 1984. Detail highlighting the different surface textures; gritty and grainy medium textured in the centre section; red areas rubbed back and smooth light textured. Note the chipped dotting. pg. 286

Plate 7.2.3.5  Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek) 1984. Detail highlighting the rubbed back surface and brush stroke direction marks. Drawn 21 December 2007. pg. 287

Plate 7.2.3.6  The Rainbow Serpent at Ngamarrin 1985. (Image: Arken Museum for Moderne Kunst, Denmark) This painting is an example of the repetition of stories which occurred through Thomas’s career. This is a commissioned work by Hank Ebes and is in the Nangara Collection, Melbourne. Note that this painting is painted as a mirror image to the earlier version. pg. 289

Plate 7.2.3.7  Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek) 1984. Gridded. Each section 18.2 (H) x 60.3 (W) cm. pg. 289

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Plate 7.2.4.2  Untitled 1984. Original catalogue sheet (Image: Mary Macha’s files, February 2008).  pg. 298
Plate 7.2.4.4  Untitled 1984. Detail showing irregular dotting both size and shape, dotting chipped, cracked and missing.  pg. 300
Plate 7.2.4.5  Untitled 1984. Detail surface appearance. Loss of dotting on edges, chipped cracked and missing dotting, rubbed back dark section with under-painting apparent and tonal changes across area. Gritty and irregular surface (on this section thicker than other parts of the painting).  pg. 302
Plate 7.2.4.6  Untitled 1984. Gridded. Each section is 18.2 (H) x 60.3 (W) cms  pg. 303
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Plate 7.2.5.2 Lake Argyle 1986. Original catalogue sheet in Mary Macha’s files, February 2008, however this description has been collated incorrectly and is actually for another painting of the same period: Banana Springs 1986 (Image: Mary Macha files, R.T.31086).

Plate 7.2.5.3 Original documentation Banana Springs 1986, natural pigments on canvas 90 x 180cm, National Gallery of Australia, Acquisition No. 87.1034. This is a companion painting to Lake Argyle 1986 and this sheet gives the description relating to Lake Argyle 1986 (Image: Mary Macha’s files February 2008).

Plate 7.2.5.4 Photograph of Mary Macha’s dog Murdoch with Rover Thomas painting Lake Argyle 1986 in background. Subiaco Perth, 1986 (Image: Mary Macha files February 2008).

Plate 7.2.5.5 Lake Argyle 1986. Detail. Example of white dotting. Note irregularity of size and especially shape of dots with chipped, cracked and missing on outer edge of painting with some merging of dots.

Plate 7.2.5.6 Lake Argyle 1986. Detail. Surface appearance of painting highlighting the shiny, glossy, slightly grainy surface of painting throughout all areas of painting.

Plate 7.2.5.7 Lake Argyle 1986. Detail in the upper centre giving an example of the strong brush-stroking used throughout this painting. Note: very shiny surface. Rubbed under-surface of painting showing through.

Plate 7.2.5.8 Lake Argyle 1987. Detail showing surface appearance of painting. Note the glossy light medium textured area on the right, and the ‘shiny’ surface in the black area.

Plate 7.2.5.9 Lake Argyle 1986. Gridded. Each section is 18 (H) x 60 (W) cm.

Plate 7.2.5.10 Upper Left Corner
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Plate 7.2.6.3 Frog Hollow Country 1987. Detail showing an example of typical dotting throughout the painting which focuses on the irregular size and shape of dotting. pg. 329
Plate 7.2.6.4 Frog Hollow Country 1987. Detail showing close-up of surface highlighting the poor surface quality of the black areas in the painting. pg. 329
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Plate 7.2.6.6 Frog Hollow Country 1987. Gridded. Each section 18 (H) x 60 (W) cm. pg. 332
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description, AP1691 (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Rover Thomas file, AP1691).

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INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS A ROVER THOMAS PAINTING?
(Previous Page: Plate 1). Rover Thomas as a young stockman possibly on Texas Downs Station in the 1960s (Image: photographer unknown, date unknown: Jane Yalunga Collection).
Introduction: What is a Rover Thomas Painting?

‘The natives are extremely fond of painting,’ wrote Thomas Watling, an Australian convict, almost 200 years ago (Taylor 1989).

Aboriginal artists work at the intersection of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures and, in artistic terms, are authentically part of each. If it is valid to emphasise the cultural traditions from which Aboriginal artworks draw meaning (and so enter the domain of Aboriginality), it is equally valid to respond to the visual power of contemporary Aboriginal art (the domain of Western connoisseurship) (Edwards 2007:62).

This thesis will focus on one particular artist-Rover Thomas (Wangkjunga/Kukatja) (1926-1998) and on one region - the East Kimberley in Western Australia (Plate 1). My research argues that Thomas’s paintings were a product of his life’s experiences gained through interaction with the dominant new European culture. This also necessitated a renegotiated relationship with different Aboriginal cultures. Thomas commenced painting in the early 1980’s whilst living in the East Kimberley at the community of mainly Gija and Miriwoong people at Warmun or, as it was then called, Turkey Creek. His paintings struck the art world like a bombshell in the mid 1980’s when they first appeared. Thomas, along with Trevor Nicholls, who were the first Aboriginal painters to do so, represented Australia at the 1990 Venice Biennale. His boards and canvases with their individual expression helped establish the East Kimberley as a distinctive art style. His unique methodology depicted places, stories and topographical features from an aerial perspective. His palette was minimal with broad areas of colour. His paintings presented an innovative approach and differed from what was found both east and west of this region. My thesis explores what specifically identifies a Rover Thomas painting through a searching examination of Thomas’s techniques, motifs and materials in a visual analysis of ten paintings currently held in public collections.

My approach is influenced both by anthropologists writing about art, and it is also tempered by my own art practice. I have a strong background in art history and
theory, in particular in an art practice which is process-based. My interest is therefore
centered on the way in which an artwork is constructed: its material qualities. Of
importance also is the knowledge that artworks or material objects exist across time and
space and continue to engender new meanings and histories.

**Motivation and Purpose**

In the late 1990’s on one of my visits to the Art Gallery of New South Wales I
was astounded by several Aboriginal paintings on display. These were paintings by
Rover Thomas. I needed to know more. I needed to find out how this man; this
stockman from the Kimberley rocketed into the art world to become an established and
sought after artist so quickly. My thesis takes the view that it is particularly relevant to
look at Thomas’s background to be able to contextualise and understand his paintings.
Like many Aboriginal people, his life was enmeshed in dislocation, dispossession and
change and uncovering his background is crucial in understanding his unique paintings.
His ‘hybrid’ or ‘fusion’ style has come from this background which was characterised
by the overwhelming transformation by the social structures of one culture through the
invasion and domination of another. Writing about Thomas, historical anthropologist
Nicholas Thomas comments;

> If we were concerned to chart moments of hybridization, we might need to begin with the artist’s
> migration from his birthplace to the East Kimberley. If we did not, we would be presuming that
> intra-Aboriginal cultural displacement counted for less than a merely technical fact, such as the
> artist’s use of canvas. We would be presuming that the fusion of local pigment with an
> introduced material marked some larger cultural fusion (Thomas 1996:15).

My contention is that while Thomas was born and spent his early life in the
desert regions, his painting techniques show that there is really little influence of desert
heritage in his paintings. Technically his art reflects the East Kimberley aesthetic. His
paintings are of a truly hybrid nature. His style owes more to the manner of *how* he
viewed the landscape, and this is where his desert heritage comes to the forefront, for
instance, the use of the aerial perspective is seen as a desert convention. Thomas’s birth
in the Great Sandy Desert and later migration to the East Kimberley generated his original style. Two distinct systems of iconography exist between the desert and the more tropical area of the East Kimberley. This is clearly seen in rock painting, ceremonial paraphernalia, ground painting and body painting in both regions. Exploration of these two different stylistic heritages will be examined in detail to tease out the importance of these areas on Thomas’s painting.

Sources/Literary Review

The major sources used throughout this thesis are discussed in this section and have been broken down into specific areas of study. This review aids in the identification of the gaps in understanding Thomas’s life and work which this study attempts to redress.

1. Reception of Aboriginal Art

Critical examinations of how to ‘read’ Aboriginal art by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers, curators, critics and other artists has grown exponentially since the time Aboriginal art was first widely purchased by galleries, collectors and investors. Several writers, who have been influential in shaping my perceptions, have stood out in their analysis of ‘how’ Aboriginal art should be reviewed. These include the following.

Nicholas Thomas in his 1999 Possessions: Indigenous Art/Colonial Culture states that Thomas’s paintings ‘do not constitute ‘contemporary art’ as it is usually understood’ and that Aboriginal art should be viewed through ‘space and time’. He argued that Thomas’s paintings were ‘works of art’ but the ‘values and traditions of the art world do not thereby become salient to his work’ (Thomas 1999:218). In other words, Thomas’s works sat outside the ‘traditional’ Western art world discourse.
However, he says that ‘the traditionalist strands of indigenous art reflect certain dimensions of indigenous life, and the avant garde strands others…[that] a contemporary indigenous culture is extraordinarily challenging’ and that ‘this culture belongs to the present, but also lies beyond it…[beyond] the space and time of colonial modernity and post-modernity (Thomas 1999:17). He expresses the view that Thomas’s work spans both the ‘contemporary’ and ‘hybrid’ dialogues and it is this nexus that is the focal point of the argument of my thesis (Thomas 1999:223). It is also my belief that Thomas’s work was centred in tradition and in cultural spaces beyond Western imaginings and it therefore illustrated how Aboriginal art in general can be fully engaged with both modernity and traditional art simultaneously.

Art historian Ian McLean argued in his article written in 2006 entitled ‘How Art Can Change the World: Art, Life and Modernity in Western Arnhem Land’ in Art Monthly Australia that when traditions are overturned, radical shifts occur in cultural practices as communities struggle to adapt. He believed in describing 20th century Aboriginal paintings as stylistically modernist because the shifts made were in response to the extraordinary social stresses caused by modernity.

Only by understanding [painting] as a modernism will we appreciate its full social and political significance as well as aesthetic achievement…postcolonial modernism (McLean 2006:29).

McLean’s view that the production of art in remote Aboriginal communities was a strategy of dealing with the outside and alien world has underpinned much of my thesis. He states that:

There has always been a subtle dialect of openness and secrecy, of dialogue and resistance. If the Aborigines closely guarded their identity, they readily sought out things that could be translated, assimilated and used. One of these was fine art’ (McLean 2006: 31).

These works coupled with anthropologist Howard Morphy’s 2008 Becoming Art: Exploring Cross Cultural Categories which framed my view of Aboriginal art as an integral part of Australian art. He states:
...the entry of Aboriginal art in the contemporary discourse on Australian art has become possible because the conception of art in Australia has changed. It has become a little de-centred, moving away from the Western canon (Morphy 2008: 4).

My view, which has been moulded largely by Morphy, McLean and Thomas, precisely expresses my feelings on Aboriginal art being produced as a response to the invasion of Europeans into the traditional lands of Aboriginal people throughout Australia.

In her 1990 essay ‘Abstraction’ in Abstraction: Marion Borgelt, Stephen Brown, Liz Coats, Debra Dawes, A .D .S. Donaldson, Clinton Garofano, Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Janet Laurence, John Nixon, Rose Nolan, Carole Roberts, Peter Skipper, Rover Thomas, Aida Tomescu, John Young exhibition catalogue, curator Victoria Lynn placed Aboriginal art within the western notion of abstraction. While she positioned it as ‘more narrative than modernist abstraction’ she noted that ‘its meaning involves intransigent immutable symbolism’. In doing so Lynn distanced Aboriginal art from the mid-20th century notion of self-reflexivity. She attributed to Aboriginal art the capacity to offer notions of spirituality and to give a fresh set of meanings to abstraction. Lynn stated that artists, such as Thomas and the other Aboriginal artists, within the context of the exhibition, displayed ‘eccentric’ or unconventional and independent qualities. My study develops these insights and shows how unique Thomas’s work was in comparison to other artists in the East Kimberley.

In the 1994 article ‘The Cult of Cultural Convergence’ in Art Monthly Australia, curator Margo Neale used the example of Thomas to propose that real equality and respect for him (and other Aboriginal artists) will only be achieved when critical and intellectual appraisal takes place in the open market, in the same milieu as contemporary work from other cultures. Unfortunately, throughout this article Neale seemed to vacillate between seeing Thomas as a traditional Aboriginal artist and a contemporary artist. Her overall message was the need for constructive discourse into the whole area
of how to critique, contest and challenge curatorial museum and market practices with regard to Aboriginal art in relationship to the overall art market.

Much of what Neale expressed is reinforcing by designer Tony Fry and design writer Anne Marie Willis’ 1989 essay ‘Aboriginal Art: Symptom or Success’ in *Art in America*, and their essay from 1988 ‘Art as Ethnocide: the Case of Australia’ in *Third Text* which is repeated in art historian Rex Butler’s 1996 *What is Appropriation? An Anthology of Critical Writing on Australian Art in the 80s and 90s*. All these texts stated that Aboriginal art was a way of politicising the condition and plight of Aboriginal people and that the entry of Aboriginal art into the international ‘fine art’ market negated this political aspiration. Fry and Willis used the term ‘ethnocide’ to express the view that ‘new’ Aboriginal art has ‘erased’ Aboriginal culture by speeding the process of cultural assimilation. They stated that ‘Economic pragmatism, and in some cases the adoption of an artistic ego, have frequently taken the place of idealism’ (Fry and Willis 1989:160), making the point that Western culture can be identified by its way of imposing its cultural values onto others. The 1989 article emphasised that Fry and Willis were writing from the view that non-Aboriginal people in the art world had to stop seeing Aboriginal art as ‘problematic”. Both these articles are quite crucial in the contemporary discussions on Aboriginal art.

By contrast art historian Roger Benjamin (1990 ‘Report from Australia – Aboriginal Art: Exploitation or Empowerment?’ in *What is Appropriation? An Anthology of Critical Writings on Australian Art in the 80’s and 90’s*) and writer and linguist Stephen Muecke, (2005 *Textual Spaces*) criticised Fry and Willis’s remarks as positing Aboriginal art as static and incapable of adaptation and reinvention. Muecke noted the diverse forms and interpretations of Aboriginal art and its translation from ‘primitive’ art to ‘high art’. Criticism was also levelled at Fry and Willis for wanting to
keep Aboriginal art separate. Muecke discusses in his article the discourses of landscape in relationship with postcolonial Aboriginal painters (including Thomas) and their reinvention within their own culture through their painting.

Aboriginal artist and curator Hetti Perkins’ 1993 article ‘Seeing and Seaming: Contemporary Aboriginal Art’ in *Art Monthly Australia* provided a good background to the evolution of the ethnographic gaze, and the emergence of Aboriginal art as ‘fine art’ through the exploration and reception of major Aboriginal exhibitions in urban areas. She put forward the suggestion that there was a perception that the use of certain materials linked the art market to perceptions of ‘traditional’ and ‘authenticity’. In her 2003 essay ‘Parallel Universe, Other Worlds’ in *Complex Entanglements: Art, Globalisation and Cultural Difference* she looked at the results of the destruction of Aboriginal culture by colonization and its effects on Aboriginal society and art practice, and which, paradoxically has led to the construction of an innovative and basically political art scene. Her ideas posit the notion of art as an agent of social change. The article plays with the notion of parallel worlds: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal art and culture inhabiting the same area but with no real connection. This is important critical writing which also mirrors the writing of artist Brook Andrews and Aboriginal scholar Marcia Langton.

A parallel world was especially true of Aboriginal academic Marcia Langton’s 2003 essay ‘Dreaming Art’ in *Complex Entanglements: Art Globalisation and Cultural Differences* which looked at the status of Aboriginal art in the Australian art world where paradoxes predominated. She described the overwhelming embracing of Aboriginal art by governments, and tourist organizations as seen in the appropriation of designs, stories for trademarks, and opening ceremonies at sporting events. Such appropriations defined a sense of nationalism to the world. This was in contrast to the
reluctance of these same people to listen to or understand the struggles and complex histories of Aboriginal culture. The ‘embracing of Aboriginal culture’ has become almost emblematic of the notion of ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘tolerance.’ This article again brings up issues of authenticity and Langton’s insightful writing showed ‘how art is to be viewed’ by the general populace.

Indigenous curator, Djon Mundine’s 1988 ‘Aboriginal Art’ in *Australia Today* linked the art of northern Australia directly with the production of ceremony as the most important source for art production. He used the term ‘static polaroids’ to refer to art produced for the outside market. This article gave vital background information and an overview of perceptions and reception of Aboriginal art. He made mention of Thomas specifically as being an artist who was producing art in an area where ‘no art’ was believed to exist.

An interesting point of view is put forward in Aboriginal artist Richard Bell’s 2003 article ‘Bell’s Theorem: It’s a White Thing!’ on the internet site *Kooriweb: Voices from Black Australia* (accessed 3.8.2006). He made the comment that the key players in the field were not Aboriginal and that much of the marketing of Aboriginal art was exploitative. He strongly believed that ‘white experts’ are belittling the people that own the culture. Bell stated that Aboriginal art should not be ‘pigeon holed’ within the Western art system but should stand alone and separate. This sentiment was mirrored in Butler’s 2002 article “Bright Shadows’: Art Aboriginality and Aura’ in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*. These were very strong, personal views, which taken together with the series of Blakatak in 2005, emphasised a strong Aboriginal voice.

The 2005 *Blakatak: Program of Thought* was a series of ‘discussions’ and was hosted by the Museum of Contemporary Art. Participants included artist Brook Andrew, Marcia Langton, art expert Christine Nicholls, curator Judith Ryan, Aboriginal health
expert Ian Anderson, artist Bronwyn Bancroft, Howard Morphy, Djon Mundine, sociologist Nikos Papastergiadis, artist Gordon Hookey, journalist Julie Nimmo, sociologist Vivien Johnson, artist Fiona Foley, artist Judy Watson, artist Lindy Lee, artist Ricky Maynard, lawyer Terri Janke, Hetti Perkins, and anthropologist John von Sturmer - in other words a great cross section of people both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal involved in the Aboriginal art scene. This was an open forum. Interesting discussions ensued concerning the positioning of Aboriginal art in the art arena.

Allied to these discussions was lecturer and poet Peter Minter’s 2006 interview with Brook Andrew in Meanjin: Blak Times: Indigenous Australia and centres on the above Blakatak: Program of Thought discussions. Brook Andrew stated that it was an opportunity to approach art criticism from a ‘thoughtfully’ non-dominant cultural approach. He commented that Blakatak was also ‘to tease out colonial and Western categorizations of Aboriginal art’. According to Andrew, international perspectives became imperative through discussions with other cultures’ experiences similar to those of Aboriginal artists. This interview brought out a very personal view. Andrew pointed out that ‘Aboriginal art’ is an easy pan-national label attached to Aboriginal Australia by non-Aboriginals, which tended to ‘homogenise’ the Aboriginal experience and did not allow diverse experiences in language, ceremony, design and expression of artists from different areas of Australia. The transcripts of the Blakatak: Program of Thought, and Brook Andrew’s viewpoints encapsulated much of the debate concerning ‘how to position’ Aboriginal art within the mainstream Australian art scene.

Professor Jon Altman’s 2000 essay ‘Reception and Recognition of Aboriginal Art’ in Silvia Kleinert and Margo Neale’s (eds) The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture gave background to the history of the marketing of Aboriginal art, detailing from the 19th century onwards. The market for Aboriginal paintings by artists
such as Rover Thomas has skyrocketed since the early 1980’s with works by Thomas now being ‘traded’ in auction sales for six figure amounts.

Fred Myers, an American anthropologist, has published many books and articles relating to the interface between Aboriginal art, and more specifically of paintings produced by Western Desert artists. He tracks the pathways from artefact to acceptance of Aboriginal art in the international art scene. These include the 2002 *Painting Culture: The Making of Aboriginal High Art*, 1995 ‘Re/Writing the Primitive: Art Criticism and the Circulation of Aboriginal Painting’.

The above essays and articles informed and formed the underpinning of the argument that Thomas through inter-cultural connections, both Aboriginal and European, produced artworks of a hybrid nature. It is significant that Aboriginal people, and specifically Thomas, can neither be relegated to the past, to a prehistory that supplies something unthreatening and culturally distinctive to a colonial populace, nor can the distinctiveness of their cultures be denied. This is a culture of peoples who clearly lived lives beyond, as well as before, the colonial contact.

2. **Biographical**

When I initially examined the quantity of information about Thomas and his life what struck me was the accumulation of inconsistencies in that information. Contradictory facts were put forward in various texts. For example: it was said that Thomas was born in the Kintore Ranges in *Pintupi* Country (Caruana 1989, Cochrane 1998), that he was born in c1935 (Brody 1990:102), but also that he was born in the ‘outback’ during the late 1920’s (O’Ferrall 1990) (This begs the question of what is meant by the term ‘outback’), and, that he was born and died at Gunawaggi (Hossack 1998). These inaccuracies have led to a great deal of confusion in the art world about
who Rover Thomas was. Initially the actual artist was not of importance – the object –
the painting was primary. Little interest was taken in documenting specific details about
him as an individual. Only in the mid to late 1980’s was accurate information collected,
usually by anthropologists, art centre co-ordinators and art dealers. However, by this
stage, disinformation, such as his date of birth, was already circulating in the art world.
This inaccurate information continues to permeate the Australian art scene; for example,
in curator Wally Caruana’s 2009 article, ‘Rover Thomas, Painter’ in *Australian
Aboriginal Art* he states that Thomas’s birth date was 1930 (Caruana 2009:100). The
comprehensive biographical chapter in this study addresses the gaps in Thomas’s life.

Biographical information on Rover Thomas was elicited from many sources:
article ‘Rover Thomas – Who’s That Bugger who Paints Like Me?’ in *World of Antique
and Art* and his 2009 ‘Rover Thomas, Painter’ in *Australian Aboriginal Art Issue 2*
which restated previously written material about Thomas. In the 2009 article, he also
re-published a 2003 interview, which had been originally published in curator Belinda
Carrigan’s *Rover Thomas - I want to Paint* exhibition catalogue, with art dealer Mary
Macha and Don McLeod talking about Thomas.

Art of the Kimberley* is a pivotal document, which although sparse on Thomas’s
biographical details, is expansive concerning his painting and the wider painting
practices in the Kimberley.

Art dealer Graham Cornall’s 1998 article ‘Rover Thomas (Joolama) –
Australian Artist: born 1926 – died 11 April 1998 – An Appreciation’ in *The World of
Antiques;* Carrigan’s 2003 exhibition catalogue *Rover Thomas – I Want to Paint;*
curator Karen Leary’s 1997 exhibition catalogue *Eye of the Storm;* publisher Nevill
Drury and author Anna Voigt’s 1999 book *Fire and Shadow: Spirituality in Contemporary Australian Art* and curator Anne Marie Brody’s 1999 exhibition catalogue *Stories: Eleven Aboriginal Artists* all give reasonably detailed, but in some cases, flawed information concerning Thomas’s life. Much of the last two books biographical information has been drawn from Ryan’s 1992 exhibition catalogue.

Thomas was referred to in Brody’s *Stories: Eleven Aboriginal Artists* as having a Wangkajunka or Kukatja heritage, in painting traditions. She posits the thought that if he had not gone to Gija country his art would have been different and would have drawn more on Kukatja elements which were closely aligned to Pintupi iconography. Most other sources just refer to him as having a ‘desert’ heritage. There is only a passing reference to Thomas being brother to Nyuju Stumpy Brown, a well-known Wangkajunka painter. Other family members rarely appear in biographical details in exhibition catalogues, books, or on internet sites. In the above main texts, documentation of Thomas’s early life is very sketchy and brief and his life during early 1980’s until his death in 1998 is glossed over or not even mentioned.

In anthropologist Will Christensen’s 1992 essay ‘Paddy Jaminji and the Gurrr Gurrr’ in *Images of Power: Art of the Kimberley*; and curator Michael O’Ferrall’s *1990 Venice Biennale Australia* and 1989 *On the Edge: Five Contemporary Aboriginal Artists* there was no mention that Thomas did not come from Gija country. O’Ferrall only says “Rover Thomas was born in the ‘outback’ during the late 1920s” in the 1990 and 1989 exhibition catalogues O’Ferrall gives absolutely no biographical details.

Thomas’s own book, *Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas* which was produced with anthropologist Kim Akerman, Macha, Christensen and Caruana, which was an exhibition catalogue published by the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) in 1994, also included very little biographical information. An essay by Akerman in this
catalogue contextualised Thomas’s work with regard to the changing environment of the region, while the biographical details by the NGA’s Caruana were underdeveloped. The catalogue is set out by grouping his paintings by subject matter including descriptions, in Thomas’s own words. The strength of this book lay in the artwork contextualised by Thomas’s own words; of the description of the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony, which was reproduced in Appendix III, and the stories of the ‘killing times’, with the acknowledgement of particular stories relating to certain paintings.

It is true to state that much of the information in auction catalogues and newspaper articles have been gleaned from what are seen by many as definitive articles on Thomas and the East Kimberley artists: namely Ryan’s 1992 exhibition catalogue, art writer Susan McCulloch 1999 and Caruana’s 1993 (2003) books which, however, include inaccuracies. It is interesting that the most comprehensive descriptions of paintings, especially information on provenance, are to be located in the auction catalogues produced by Sotheby’s, Deutscher-Menzies, Moss Green, Deutscher-Hackett, Lawson-Menzies and Christies. As an example; from the 1998 Sotheby’s *Important Aboriginal Art* auction catalogue Lot No. 112, *Barrumundi Dreaming c1985* gives a detailed provenance:

Painted at Warmun (Turkey Creek), East Kimberley, Western Australia.

Lord McAlpine of Wrest Green.

Sold Sotheby’s July 29 1990, Melbourne, Lot 177.

Private Collection, Melbourne.

This example is typical of all auction catalogues. Most biographical details in these catalogues, however, have been sourced from, once again, either Ryan’s 1992 exhibition catalogue, McCulloch’s 1999 or Caruana’s 1993 book.

Many newspaper articles, such as obituaries, especially during the latter period of Thomas’s life from 1994 till his death in 1998 give good biographical details often
with personal accounts and quotes by people known to Thomas throughout his life. An example is journalist Sue Neale’s ‘Vibrant Images from an Arid Zone’ article in *The Age* on 16 November 1995 which gives details of who his father and mother were and his journey back to his birthplace at Yalda Soak in 1995.


3. **Historical**

The main sources which inform discussion on the exploration, occupation by Europeans in the Kimberley and the setting up of the pastoral industry, historically and during the period of Rover Thomas’s life in the East Kimberley, can be found in: historian Cathy Clements’ two 1990 articles ‘European Explorers’ and ‘Early European Settlement’ in *The Australian Geographic Book of the Kimberley*, and anthropologist Bruce Shaw’s 1992 ‘Historical Background Chapter’ in *When the Dust Come in Between: Aboriginal Viewpoints from the East Kimberley prior to 1982*. Both give extremely well researched background historical information on early exploration, invasion and occupation of the Kimberley. Educator Ralph Folds’s 2001 *Crossed Purposes: The Pintupi and Australian Indigenous Policy* highlight the plight of Pinupi people in the Northern Territory. This book focuses on the impact and interaction between Aboriginal people and white people and the misconceptions which arose
between these interactions. It is also instructive of how similar policies were carried out throughout the Kimberley region.

The background to the historical, legislative and legal effects of pastoralists on the people in the East Kimberley was found in the 1992 book *When the Dust Come in Between: Aboriginal Viewpoints from the East Kimberley prior to 1982*, by Shaw and in his 1980 essay ‘On Historical Emergence of Race Relations in the Eastern Kimberley: Change’ in anthropologists Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt’s *Aborigines of the West: Their Past and their Present*. These essays gave personal accounts of a number of Aboriginal men who were born and worked on the cattle stations throughout the Kimberley region.

Other significant sources in the pastoral industry included historian Mary Anne Jebb’s 2002 *Blood, Sweat and Welfare: A History of White Bosses and Aboriginal Pastoral Workers*; historian Pamela Smith’s 2000 article ‘Station Camps: Legislation, Labour Relations and Rations in Pastoral Leases in the Kimberley Region, Western Australia’ in *The Drawing Board: The Australian Review of Public Affairs*; historian and lawyer Thalia Anthony’s 2000 article ‘Labour Relations on Northern Cattle Stations: Feudal Exploitation’ in *The Drawing Board: The Australian Review of Public Affairs* and economist Tony Smith’s 2003 ‘Aboriginal Labour and Pastoral Industry in the Kimberley Division of Western Australia: 1960-1975’ in *Journal of Agrarian Change*. These texts gave insights from Aboriginal workers, as well as detailed and historical information pertinent to the whole region. This was in contrast to the more personal reminiscences of cattle stations in the early 20th century found in G. W. Broughton’s 1965 book *Turn Again Home*, historian Mary Durack’s books; *Kings in Grass Castles* 1959 and *Sons in the Saddle* 1983 and reminiscences by Eric Durack’s in
his 1979 ‘Some Early Reminiscences of the East Kimberleys’ in Helen Weller’s, *North of the 26th*.

Although these references gave a general overview of the pastoral industry throughout the period prior and during Thomas’s stockman days, they also highlighted the lack of direct information available concerning Thomas himself during the period he worked as a stockman in the pastoral industry on different cattle stations in the East Kimberley. Records are held in the State Records Office in Western Australia concerning specific cattle stations which Thomas worked at, but I had difficulty accessing them because non-Aboriginal researchers need permission from the relevant communities and family members.

Information about the Canning Stock Route was sourced from historian Eleanor Smith’s 1966 book *The Beckoning West: The Story of H. S. Trotman and the Canning Stock Route* and authors Ronele and Eric Gard’s 1995 *Canning Stock Route, A Travellers Guide* and the Australian Broadcasting Commission’s 7.30 Report 2008 transcript *Artists Explore Forgotten Side of Stock Route History*. All these brought together information concerning the exploration of the Canning Stock and gave a comprehensive background to Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal contacts and interactions in the early part of the 20th century in the Great Sandy Desert.

Aboriginal Men as Told to Bruce Shaw. All these focused on the early days of the Warmun community. There were specific internet sites concerning the Warmun community which gave precise information www.ngalawarmun.wa.edu.au (accessed 2.2.2006) and www.aboriginalartonline.com (accessed 31.3.2005). It would appear that enough accounts of European exploration were available to give a reasonable assessment of the impact of European colonisation in the Kimberley region, however, very little has been written from an Aboriginal perspective of this invasion and domination in the Kimberley.

4 Rock art

Information concerning the pivotal relationship of rock art to art practice in the East Kimberley is rather scant despite that fact that rock art influenced Thomas’s painting practice. This represents quite a substantial gap in knowledge. General background information on rock art is found in scholarly articles by archaeologist I. M. Crawford’s 1968 book *The Art of the Wandjina: Aboriginal Cave Paintings in Kimberley, Western Australia*; his 1972 article ‘Function and Change in Aboriginal Rock Art, Western Australia’ in *World Archaeology*; archaeologist D. J. Mulvaney’s 1969 *The Prehistory of Australia*; archaeologist Ken Mulvaney’s 1996 ‘What to Do on a Rainy Day: Reminiscences of Miriruwung and Gadjerong artists in *Rock Art Research* and archaeologist Andree Rosenfeld’s 2000 essay ‘Rock Art: a Multifaceted Heritage’ in Silvia Kleinert and Margo Neale’s *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*. Popular books by rock art researcher Grahame L. Walsh in his 1988 *Australia’s Greatest Rock Art* and Elaine Godden and photographer Jutta Malnic’s 1997 *Rock Paintings of Aboriginal Australia* were used chiefly for images and descriptions of images.
Curator John E, Stanton’s 1989 book *Painting the Country: Contemporary Aboriginal Art from the Kimberley Region, Western Australia* emerged from the exhibition ‘Innovative Aboriginal Art of Western Australia’ 1988 and this book gave detailed cultural and social insights and highlighted the link between rock art and contemporary art practice. Berndt and Berndt with Stanton’s 1999 *Aboriginal Australian Art* also gave very detailed cultural and social discussion highlighting these links.

5. Ceremonial Practices in Kimberley: Kurrirr Kurrirr Ceremony

This area of research into the history of ceremonial practices throughout the East Kimberley elicited meagre information. For me, anthropologist Akerman was central to any study of ceremonial practices in the East Kimberley. His research was pivotal in understanding the transition and relationship of iconography on ceremonial paraphernalia to the contemporary art movement in the East Kimberley. His 1999 essay ‘The Art of the Kurirr-Kurirr Ceremony’ in curator and anthropologist Luke Taylor’s *Painting the Land Story* comprehensively described ceremonial practices in the Kimberley region with direct relationship to Thomas’s Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremony. Akerman did reference the relationship of rock art to the production of the painting ‘style’ of the East Kimberley but it was merely a statement with no background evidence. Akerman’s 1992 article ‘From Boab Nuts to Ilma: Kimberley Art and Material Culture’ in Ryan (Ed), *Images of Power: Aboriginal Art of the Kimberley*, his many photographs taken in 1979 of a performance of the Kurrirr Kurrirr, and resources from his own files were also vital to my research.

Catherine H. Berndt’s 1963 Conference Paper *Religious and Artistic Life: Art and Aesthetic Expression* was an early discussion on the relationships of art to
ceremony; also in Stanton’s later 2007 essay ‘Contemporary Art of the East Kimberley’ in Perkins and curator Margie West (curatorial editors), One Sun One Moon: Aboriginal Art in Australia gave insightful information on the development of newly introduced ceremonial practices in the East Kimberley as a response to recent events, such as the emergence of the pastoral industry. Unpublished and draft articles by Will Christensen and archaeologist Ian Kirkby were extremely helpful in understanding the Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremony. Articles such as Kimberley Land Council director Wayne Bergman’s 1996 Yirra: Land Law and Language; an unpublished 1997 article Living Landscape by anthropologist Pat Vinnicombe, given to me by Macha; images by photographer Douglass Baglin and Barbara Mullins in 1972 Aboriginal Art of Australia all helped to visualise this ceremony.
6. Methods and Materials Employed by Painters in the East Kimberley

Valuable sources used in understanding the pre-contact art practices of the Kimberley region were: ethnographer and anthropologist Frederick D. McCarthy’s 1938 article “‘Trade’ in Aboriginal Australia’ in Oceania and his 1958 Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art 5th Edition; Catherine H. Berndt’s 1961 article ‘Art and the Aesthetic Expressive’ in W. E. H. Stanner and Helen Sheils (Eds), Australian Aboriginal Studies: A Symposium of Papers presented at 1961 Research Conference; and D. J. Mulvaney’s article from 1976, ‘Creativity in the Aboriginal Past’ in Art and Australia.

R. M. Berndt’s 1979 essay ‘Aboriginal Art of Western Australia’ in Art and Australia made the claim that ‘primitivism’ was finally laid to rest with the movement of painters using western materials such as acrylic paints, canvas and innovative ways to depict traditional patterns and themes. He gave a brief overview of rock art and other material practices in this article. Akerman’s 1980 article highlighted the changes that occurred during the post-contact period in Aboriginal society. Articles by Akerman, Christensen and Ryan in the 1992 exhibition catalogue Images of Power: Aboriginal Art of the Kimberley described the material culture of the East Kimberley and its move away from utilitarian objects to objects for commercial sale.

Extensive writing on the relationships of painting to cultural practices was discussed in Peter Sutton’s 1988 exhibition catalogue Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia; Berndt and Berndt with Stanton’s 1999 Aboriginal Australian Art.

were very detailed anthropological documents with much background cultural information concerning the East Kimberley. Kjellgren cites Akerman, McCarthy, Berndt, Sutton, Stanton, Myers and many others for sources of this background information on material and social culture. However, overall the emphasis of Kjellgren’s thesis was on the Gija painters and he focussed on artists who had been born in the East Kimberley while avoiding the issues of hybridity which surrounded Thomas. Most information in Kjellgren’s thesis on art practice in the East Kimberley was covered in a few pages. What this dissertation lacked was any close visual descriptions or stylistic analysis of artists’ paintings.

A closer viewing of art was found in the 2004 thesis of cultural anthropologist Mayke Kranenbarg Painting Authenticity: Aboriginal Art and Knowledge in an Intercultural Space which was based on painting practices at Warmun. Kranenbarg’s emphasis was limited to the stories contained in the paintings in the exhibition True Stories: Art of the East Kimberley held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2003. Drawing together Akerman, Christensen, Ryan’s essays, and Kjellgren’s and Kranernbarg’s theses I was able to access a reasonably detailed view of East Kimberley Aboriginal culture and art. However information on individual artists including Thomas was rather superficial.

Discussion and information on painting practices in the desert regions to the south and east of the Kimberley were covered by anthropologist Nancy Munn’s 1986 Walbiri Iconography: Graphic Representation and Symbolism in a Central Australian Society; anthropologist Christine Watson’s 1999 article ‘Touching the Land’ in Morphy and Margot Smith (Eds), Art From the Land: Dialogues with the Kluge – Ruhe Collection of Australian Aboriginal Art; and Berndt and Berndt with Stanton’s 1999 book. These texts enabled me to understand more fully the painting practices of Aboriginal artists in areas of significance to Thomas.
7. **Painting Techniques**

For technical details of painting techniques used in the East Kimberley I found Tom Mixie Mosby’s article ‘Materials and Techniques of Contemporary Kimberley Artists’ in Ryan’s 1992 *Images of Power: Aboriginal Art of the Kimberley* very useful as a basis for understanding painting practices. Information gained from informal talks directly with East Kimberley artists in 2006, 2007 and 2009 at Kununurra provided a more comprehensive understanding. The artists I talked with included: Jane Yalunga, Charlene Carrington, June Peters, Churchill Cann, Tommy Carroll, Phyllis Thomas, Nancy Nodea, her son Mark, and Peggy and Alan Griffiths.

8. **Language, Skin Names, Country Affiliations and the Right to Paint**

The main sources used in discussing Thomas’s fractured language were linguists Joyce Hudson, Therese Carr and Margaret Reid’s 1996 *Languages of the Kimberley Region*, linguist Frances Koford’s 1992 ‘Kimberley Languages’ in Judith Ryan’s 1992 *Images of Power: Art of the Kimberley*, archaeologist M. Morwood’s 2002 *Visions from the Past: The Archaeology of Australian Aboriginal Art*; linguist Nicholas Theiberger’s 1993 *Handbook of Western Australian Aboriginal Languages South of the Kimberley Region*. I also accessed information from Kimberley Language Resource Centre at Halls Creek and Mirima Dawang Woorlab-Gerring Language and Culture Centre at Kununurra.

Information concerning the complex social and classificatory systems was elicited from the following: anthropologist A. P. Elkin’s 1932 article ‘Social Organization in the Kimberley Division, North-West Australia’ in *Oceania*; anthropologist Phyllis Kaberry’s 1938 *Oceania* essay ‘Totemism in East and South Kimberley, North-West Australia’; rick D. McCarthy’s 1938 article “‘Trade” in Aboriginal Australia’ in *Oceania*; Berndt and Berndt’s 1967 *The First Australians*; and
Berndt and Berndt with Stanton’s 1999 book. They all gave detailed background information from which to compile a picture of cultural and social practices of Aboriginal people in the region as viewed by non-Aboriginals in the first half of the 20th century.

A keener insight into the complexities of affiliations to country which were, and still are, important to people in the region were given by Akerman’s 1980 essay and from his personal conversations in November 2006; Christensen’s 2003 ‘Essay’ in Carrigan (Ed), Rover Thomas: I want to Paint; R. M. Berndt’s 1966 ‘The Concept of the ‘Tribe’ in the Western Desert of Australia’ in Ian Hogbin and L. R. Hiatt (Eds), Readings in Australian and Pacific Anthropology and Watson’s 1999 article ‘Touching the Land’. In understanding the complexity of Thomas’s ‘right to paint’ stories which did not relate to either ownership of the stories or affiliations to the country I have principally used Kjellgren’s 1999 thesis. He explained how Thomas was allowed and able to use and paint stories and country outside the usual constraints placed on who could paint and who could not by Gija social and cultural structures. His thesis also gave an anthropological overview of traditions in the East Kimberley with emphasis of ownership of stories and country being paramount in the production of paintings. Nonetheless, Kjellgren appears unable to address the very individual role which Thomas plays played within this community. Other sources used were Kranenbarg’s 2004 thesis; Berndt and Berndt with Stanton’s 1999 book and informal conversations with Macha and art dealer and executor of Thomas’s estate Kevin Kelly who knew Thomas personally.
9. **Rover Thomas: Contemporary Painting Style**

In understanding the centrality of the key element of mapping which appears in Thomas’s paintings key texts were: two 1997 essays by Sutton, ‘Chapter 9: Icons of Country: Topographic Representations in Classical Aboriginal Traditions’ and ‘Chapter 10: Aboriginal Maps and Plans’ from *The History of Cartography: Cartography in the Traditional African, American, Arctic Australian and Pacific Societies*, Vol. 2, Book 3; and Aboriginal educator Dale Kerwin’s 2006 thesis *Aboriginal Dreaming Tracks or Trading Paths: The Common Ways*. Discussion into different methods and iconography of representation in different areas of Australia gave much in-depth material for background information to ‘reading’ Thomas paintings.

A detailed account of Thomas’s artistic practice, by way of personal reminiscences by Macha, and McLeod was given in Carrigan’s 2003 exhibition catalogue.

A very personal look at several Warmun artists, including Thomas, was included in the 1996 *Printabout: Lithographs, Etchings and Lino Cuts from the Northern Territory Art Collection: Touring Collection* with essays by printers Leon Stainer and Chips Mackinolty. This gave insights into the dynamics and structures within this group, with excellent documentation of photographs showing production of work. Although 1996 was quite late in Thomas’s life the book showed he still had a willingness to accept change and embrace new technologies.

In Ryan’s article ‘Australian Aboriginal Art: Otherness or Affinity?’ in curator Bernard Luthi, 1993 *Aratjara: Art of the First Australians: Traditional and Contemporary Works by Aboriginal and Torres Islander Artists* there was good detailed, descriptions of the stories of some of the paintings by Thomas; *Dreamtime Story of the Willy Willy* 1989, *Yari Country* 1989 from the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) collection. This article is quite pivotal as Ryan, a curator of Aboriginal art at the
NGV, used a non-anthropological perspective. This 1993 article was repeated in the 1995 text ‘The Raw and the Cooked: The Aesthetic Principle in Aboriginal Art’ in *Art Bulletin of Victoria* and in her 1997 ‘Abstraction, Meaning and Essence in Aboriginal Art’ in *Art and Australia* which even used the same paintings to illustrate her argument.

The Australian playwright, Louis Nowra’s 1997 essay, ‘Blackness in the Art of [Rover Thomas]’ in *Art and Australia*, provided a personal view of Thomas’s paintings by contrasting Thomas’s paintings with American artist Mark Rothko, the American Abstract expressionist, together with the Australian landscape artist Fred Williams. Nowra saw Williams as having a similar approach to viewing the landscape. Works by Rothko were seen by Thomas at the National Gallery of Australia and Thomas commented “That bugger paint like me”. This article attempted to place Thomas’s work within mainstream Australian art by highlighting the similarities through Nowra’s understanding of Western aesthetics.

Kjellgren and Kranenbarg’s theses were the only comprehensive studies carried out on Aboriginal art in the East Kimberley region in the last ten years. Both Kjellgren and Kranenbarg viewed the artworks produced as trans-cultural objects made by one culture for use in another. Kjellgren in his 1999 thesis attempted to explain the changes that occurred when the paintings were moved into the non-Aboriginal art world. He discussed in depth how Aboriginal art was positioned within the non-Aboriginal art world and how it was seen as ‘spiritual art’ produced by the reinvented ‘noble savage’ to set it apart from non-Aboriginal art. He discussed issues of authenticity/collaboration at length in a comprehensive exploration of the passage, reception, perception and commodification of East Kimberley art into the art world.

My thesis *What is a Rover Thomas Painting?* used the source material described above as a catalyst to provide nuanced visual analysis of Thomas’s life and painting practices which highlighted the hybridity of his paintings. This study particularly
addresses the gaps in knowledge concerning the varied influences on the production of art in the East Kimberley.

**Research Scope and Approach**

Aboriginal paintings are now, in most instances, seen as trans-cultural objects that is, produced by members of one culture for use by another. Thomas’s paintings fit neatly into a trans-cultural category. This study examines Thomas’s paintings through a material culture lens. The anthropological approach to material culture study is the study through artifacts, and other pertinent historical evidence of belief systems; the values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions, of a particular community or society (Appadurai 1986, Koptoff 1986). Objects, or in this case, Thomas’s paintings, did not arise in a vacuum; they were physical manifestations of concepts. This method of looking at paintings is a ‘classical’ anthropological approach and contextualises the object (painting) within the culture that produces it. The approach I have used in analyzing Thomas’s paintings is through contextualising the paintings and incorporating the many elements of an art history analytical method. Works of art can be understood in several overlapping ways:

1. Formally, as expressive objects that seek development of usual aesthetic forms capable of representing specific engagements with the external world.

2. Historically, as artifacts whose representational form and depicted content can be interpreted as evidence for understanding the social and historical context of their production.

3. Structurally, as constitutive components of larger, culturally embedded systems of experience, knowledge and meaning making (Weems 2008: 43).

My choice of this material culture approach highlights my belief that paintings made by Thomas reflect his belief patterns and, by extension, the belief patterns of the
larger society of which he was a member. In Thomas’s case this takes the form of a fusion of different beliefs and concepts throughout his life as he moved from the desert areas in the Great Sandy Desert to the more tropical areas of the East Kimberley. His life was impacted in a very different way, and this was reflected in his paintings. The hybrid desert elements, and rock art aesthetics of the East Kimberley deeply embedded in the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony which Thomas ‘dreamed’ and the significance this ceremony had on the emergence of the East Kimberley art movement highlighted this impact. Drawing on comparative material, where appropriate, my study is focused on the history and significance of Thomas’s work within the contemporary artist’s realm in the East Kimberley. From the collision with European settlers, Thomas transformed the art practice conventions within the East Kimberley through the re-invention of concepts and conventions from societies no longer bounded by ritual and social custom.

**Visual Analysis**

A stylistic analysis carried out on ten paintings by Thomas from the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) and the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) will draw out Thomas’s underlying sense of form and give a greater understanding of the linear sensibility and topographical analysis of the country which is inherent in Thomas’s work. The art style, techniques and practices of artists in the East Kimberley area were typified by the use of broad areas of monochromatic ochre encapsulated by dotted edging on board or canvas. This practice had its genesis in the rock art traditions and ceremonial practices and paraphernalia carried out in this area for generations (Akerman 1999: 28). East Kimberley artists painted maps of their country and looked beneath the surface to the structure of the land. Within this distinctive vision of their country, artists often included ancestor figures and stories, and significant modern or historical events.
**Geographical Boundaries**

For the purposes of this research I have defined the East Kimberley and the adjacent Victoria River regions as given by both Kjellgren in 1999 and Ryan in 1992. Ryan stated that the East Kimberley aesthetic was seminal to the delineation and definition of East Kimberley painting as a distinct style. Although she had not set any specific geographical borders, she confined her discussion of the East Kimberley specifically to *Gija*, *Miriwoong* and *Gadjerong* painters from the communities of Warmun (Turkey Creek) and Kununurra (Ryan 1992). Kjellgren used more geographical references when defining the East Kimberley. He argued that while the East Kimberley’s outer cultural boundaries merged with surrounding areas, at its the core were the *Gija*, *Miriwoong*, and *Gadjerong* peoples. They occupied the Ord and western Victoria River basins and produced the distinctive monochromatic style of painting using natural pigments. There was no sharp boundary separating the cultures of the west Kimberley, where the *Wadjina* images are dominant in traditional art, or desert cultures to the south and south west, where there are strong connections to the *Jaru*, *Kukatja* and *Walmajarri* people (Kjellgren 1999). However, while the *Gija*, *Miriwoong* and *Gadjerong* people make up the core of the geographical and artistic heart of the East Kimberley, there are artists from different areas who had residential ties to this region and have been ‘adopted’ by these various groups into their cultural and kinship societies. One such person was Rover Thomas who was born in the Great Sandy Desert, hundreds of miles to the south of Warmun.

**Country**

There is a perception that Aboriginal art from remote areas is more ‘traditional’ than from urban regions and relates more to the ‘collective’ (Edwards 2007: 58). This perception was grounded in the attachment of land via ancestral stories that people have passed down from generation to generation. In the East Kimberley artists depicted the
landscape symbolically: it was the story contained within the country that is important.

Patrick Mung Mung, a senior Warmun artist, discussing his art practice with Kranenbarg, said he used his paintings to illustrate where his country was and what tracks he used in his younger days. He said of the landscape:

I can see right through it. We used to walk through our country, you know. I know exactly where I am through my country. It’s exactly where I am through my country. It’s like a mental map. But you have to watch the country well. Some parts look like each other so you have to think carefully about which sites you have passed to know where you are. You have to look to the marks (Patrick Mung Mung in Kranenbarg 2004: 42).

The East Kimberley cultural perception would be that although Thomas lived most of his life in the East Kimberley, he was not born in Gija/Miriwoong country in the East Kimberley so he was therefore considered an outsider by the Gija/Miriwoong people. However because of his long association with Gija/Miriwoong whilst working as a stockman and his being married to a Gija woman he was able to paint stories associated with Gija/Miriwoong country. The paintings of Rover Thomas can be read in several ways. Firstly the content is drawn from the spiritual links Thomas attached to the changing features of the landscape and also from his eventful life history. Thomas, like many artists, acknowledged the strength of his traditions through individual interpretation and by working in this way he created a new tradition in the East Kimberley. Fellow contemporary Aboriginal artist Banduk Marika (1954 -) encapsulated much of what I imagine Thomas would have experienced during his life, particularly over the two decades of his painting career. She stated

Like many traditional Aboriginals, I was brought up in that nomadic life. I was brought up around a lot of ceremonies, initiation ceremonies and funeral ceremonies, and brought up with a lot of traditional values about life in respect to the land and the people. If you have a traditional background with traditional values of living life and you are taught how to respect art and what you are trying to represent and who you are trying to represent, then its easier to see the difference between the contemporary and the traditional and to make it work (Marika 1994: 25).

Narrative

For Aboriginal artists, narratives concerning stories or Dreaming (see Appendix I) memorialised in the landscape, recorded historical events that have occurred in recent
and past times (Rumsey 1994:116). In this context, the Dreaming can be seen as, in today’s terms:

…not a set of beliefs which is lost because it is no longer valid, it is rather a way of talking, of seeing, of knowing, and a set of practices, which is as obtuse, as mysterious and as beautiful as any poetry (Benterrak, Muecke and Roe 1984:14 in Rumsey 1994:119).

In recounting dreaming narratives associated with particular paintings artists would say that these stories came from old times when animals and plants were people. In this context Giya Hector Jandany described these narratives:

They [dreaming animals] bin makin’ story about dreamtime, you know. Them animal makin him Dreamtime. What this and that all law and thing. All this bird bin make him. Story. Story for bird. All the animal make that story for us. We got that story all along now (Hector Jandany in Kjellgren 1999:73)

For East Kimberley artists the content or stories contained in paintings were central. They would have told you that ‘this is about my father’s ‘country’ or my mother’s ‘country’ when asked about the content or the story of the painting. These were stories handed down over time. But often the stories were a mixture of their cultural and personal life stories. This is very much the case in Thomas’s paintings. Individual paintings in his oeuvre appear autobiographical.

Methodology and significance of research

My research was based on reviewing the literature concerning the life and paintings of Thomas as well as fieldwork investigations concerning art practices past and present in the East Kimberley. The aim was to clarify biographical aspects of Thomas’s life as well as reviewing painting method practices of artists in the area. I undertook a close examination of ten of his paintings to better understand Thomas’s individual painting style. In analysing these ten paintings I approached them as I would any great Western art with an equal methodological examination. This is in response to these paintings being produced primarily for the Western art market and being held in
public institutions alongside Western art works. One could say I have used the Morellian\(^1\) method of analysis of Thomas’s paintings which is based on clues offered by minute details, rather than identities of composition or other broad treatments.

**The research methods used**

1. Search, collect and collate pertinent texts: including historical information for the Kimberley region, information on relevant cattle stations, background information on cultural and ceremonial practices, personal biographical information and any research data of other researchers carried out in this area. Extensive use was made of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Library in Canberra.

2. Fieldwork research: Collect research data by means of informal interviews, accessing catalogue records of Thomas and his paintings in state and national gallery collections, art centres where Thomas painted, and art dealers who bought and sold his paintings. Photograph rock art sites in the East Kimberley.

**Investigations carried out**

(See Appendix VII: Fieldwork/Research Log)

a. Field trips to the East Kimberley: October 2006, October 2007 and April 2009: I volunteered at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts at Kunnunurra on each occasion in return for access to documents held concerning Thomas.

\(^1\) Giovanni Morelli (1819 -1891): An Italian diplomat and theorist, Morelli originally wrote under the pseudonym Ivan Lermolieff. Primarily concerned with problems of authorship, he was one of the first to devise a systematic approach to the attribution of works of art. Morelli’s method was based on the belief that the way important details were rendered — such as the hand, ear, or drapery — was so idiosyncratic that an analysis of them would lead to correct attribution (Dictionary of Art Historians - http://www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/morellig.htm).
Informal conversations took place with art dealer Kevin Kelly, art dealer Pam Linklater and talks with Thomas’s daughter and artist Jane Yalunga (October 2007) and artists Tommy Carroll (October 2006 and 2007), Churchill Cann (October 2006 and 2007), Nancy Nodea (October 2007), Peggy and Alan Griffiths (April 2009), Mark Nodea (October 2006), Phyllis Thomas (October 2007), Lena Nyadbi (2007) concerning Thomas and his art practice.

b. Examined and photographed several rock art sites at Keep River National Park, Martin’s Gap and Maxwell Plains near Kununurra in 2007 with Mirriwoong/Gadgerong artist Ju Ju Wilson. Carried out a case study on one painting at Martin’s Gap.

c. Informal conversations and collection of information from files held relating to the East Kimberley and Thomas with Akerman in Hobart in November 2006.

d. Partial access to files and informal interviews with Macha at Perth in February 2008.

e. Examination of paintings: collecting and collating original documentation and information from records held by art centres, art galleries and art dealers. Viewed and carried out detailed analysis of ten Thomas paintings: two at Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) on 18 January 2007, eight at National Gallery of Australia (NGA) on 26 September 2007, 21 December 2007, and 8 May 2008.

Research Aims

1. Contextualise and accurately record Thomas’s life within the East Kimberley,
2. Elucidate and document the development processes of Thomas’s painting within the East Kimberley during the period 1980 to 1998.

3. Systematically analyse and document ten Thomas paintings held in the NGA and AGNSW.

4. Establish and highlight the hybridity of his painting by establishing his painting characteristics and style.

This thesis addresses the gaps in knowledge in Thomas’s life history and the wide influences and stylistic characteristics in his paintings and East Kimberley art.

Research Limitations

The problems encountered during the study include:

1. Access to the paintings held at the NGA took approximately eighteen months of negotiation with curatorial, conservation and study room staff.

2. National and state art galleries throughout Australia hold collections of Thomas paintings but access to information is very restricted. Only basic documentation is available and this is often only to be obtained from the galleries’ website. Requests for further information were ignored. Documentation methods and information from other art dealers and art centres was fragmented, poorly presented and often inaccurate.

3. Information on paintings in auction catalogues was more comprehensive however it often gave inaccurate details of some paintings.

4. Photographing individual paintings was allowed but in very poor light with no flash allowed.

Structure of thesis

The structure of this thesis is in three parts and has ten chapters:

Part One: Cultural, Historical and Biographical.
Chapter 1: ‘Historical Overview of the East Kimberley’ gives an overview of the exploration and exploitation by European settlers that occurred in the East Kimberley from the mid nineteenth century. Since Thomas moved in and out of the cattle stations in this region for a large portion of his life and many of his paintings reference these stations, attention will be focussed on the role Aboriginal people played in the development, implementation and operation of the pastoral industry in the Kimberley region.

Chapter 2: ‘Language, Kinship and Social Organisation in the East Kimberley’ looks closely at the role language plays in the cultural and societal interfaces in the region and is central to my argument that Thomas’s language use was evidence of his fractured identity and therefore of his hybridity. The introduction of the English language into the Kimberley region caused changes and breakdowns to occur to the languages of the Gija, Miriwoong, Jaru, and Gadgerong throughout this region and the desert areas. This chapter also looks at Thomas’s relationship to kinship groups in the East Kimberley, the structure and affiliations to country both in the Kimberley and the desert areas to the south and explores Thomas’s ability to paint any subject and his sense of the “right to paint” in relationship to community customs. I investigate the complexities of his position of painting country without customary ownership of local country or story ownership.

Chapter 3: ‘Overview of Rock Art in the Kimberley Region’ focuses on understanding pre-settlement rock art and allows one a glimpse of the background to the painting styles of Thomas and other East Kimberley artists: Paddy Jaminji, George Mung Mung, Jacko Dolmo, Beerbee Mungnari, Jack Britten and Patrick Mung Mung. A discussion of rock art styles in the East Kimberley and also in the Great Sandy Desert where Thomas was born highlights the distinct rock art styles of these areas. Bradshaw figures, Wandjina figures, simple figures found in the rock art galleries of the Ord River
Basin and adjacent Victoria River area, are contrasted with styles and the rock art practices of the desert region to the south. The aim is to identify areas of influence that permeate Thomas painting style.

**Part Two: Beginnings to the Contemporary Art Practice in the East Kimberley**

**Chapter 4:** ‘Biography – Rover Thomas: Stockman and Artist’ investigates, as far as possible, the chronological breakdown of Thomas’s life and its milestones. An important part of this chapter is a critical examination of much of the written information concerning Thomas’s life, in order to determine how much is accurate.

**Chapter 5:** ‘Rover Thomas and the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* Ceremony’ focuses on the importance of Thomas’s *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony and the emergence of the painting movement in the East Kimberley in the early 1980s. The discussion investigates what elements are considered ‘art’, and the trajectory of the painting movement from ceremony to commodity. The genesis of the art movement came through the performance of the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* and I will discuss the relevance of this ceremony to the community at Warmun in the East Kimberley. I highlight the emergence and metamorphosis of the East Kimberley art movement from ceremonial boards to paintings. The chapter includes a brief discussion of important exhibitions. (A detailed exhibition list is in an appendix at the end of the thesis).

**Chapter 6:** ‘Methods, Materials and Techniques used by Painters in the East Kimberley’ focuses on the painting style and techniques of East Kimberley art centring on Thomas and other artists from Warmun and Kununurra highlighting the painting techniques and materials used; ochres and pigments and methods of preparation, types of paint brushes and supports used. In addition, the chapter investigates the wider material culture practices of the East Kimberley centring on designs and styles of painting on everyday objects, and looking at whether any of these contributed to the emerging new ideas in painting.
Part Three: Defining a Rover Thomas Painting

Chapter 7: The analysis of ‘Ten Rover Thomas Paintings: A Close Examination’ concerns the description and detailed analysis of ten of Thomas’s paintings drawn from the NGA and the AGNSW. This was carried out to enable an evaluation to be made of the specific characteristics of Thomas’s personal style. Detailed data sheets have been compiled on each painting highlighting for example; dotting practice, brushstroke methods, exhibition history and original documentation.

Chapter 8: ‘Rover Thomas: Painting Style’ builds on the evidence assembled from the scrutiny of Thomas’s techniques to formulate his individual style. Amplifying the influences on his art established in previous chapters, this chapter compares and contrasts different paintings to ascertain similarities or changes to his art practice throughout his career.

The last chapter, Chapter 9 ‘Comparisons and Conclusions’, makes comparison with several other East Kimberley painters, namely Paddy Jaminji, George Mung Mung, Beerbi Mungnari and Hector Jandany and highlights the individuality of Thomas’ style. This chapter draws together all the strands of my investigation and attempts to answer the questions What is a Rover Thomas Painting? and concomitantly what is Rover Thomas’s position in the Australian art arena.
PART ONE: CULTURAL, HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL
CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF EAST KIMBERLEY
Previous Page: (Plate 1.1) Stockmen, women and children preparing to brand calves at Moola Boola 1910 (Image: photographer unknown: Battye Library 274171PD[1]).
1.1 Introduction

In the 1880s, the accepted lifestyle of seasonal exploitation of different parts of the landscape punctuated with gatherings to resolve conflicts, perform ceremonies and exchange goods, was altered forever. The body of clan lands that together made up the tribal or language groups were invaded by a new people (Thomas et al 1994:6).

This chapter will contextualise and background the Kimberley, the region where Thomas predominantly lived and worked throughout his life. I will initially describe the historical context of the events including an overview of the attitudes and policies of the expansionist and dominant British and European peoples of the 18th and 19th centuries towards the Aboriginal people of the Kimberley region. This will be followed by looking at the importance of the setting up and dominance of the pastoral industry in the Kimberley in the 19th and 20th centuries. Thomas’s role as a stockman is pivotal in understanding the subject matter of many of his paintings. Finally in this chapter I will document the changes that occurred in the 1970’s within the Kimberley region which led to dramatic changes for the Aboriginal people. These changes involved the movement of people off the cattle stations and the subsequent effects of this action.

The impact of white settlers into the Kimberley region of Western Australia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the subsequent introduction and entrenchment of the cattle industry in this region had a disastrous effect on the Aboriginal peoples of the region. This impact was experienced through the introduction of diseases such as leprosy, measles, mumps, influenza, TB, the fouling and over use of water holes and the destruction of local flora and fauna. Aboriginal people consequently suffered restrictions of movement, dislocation, dispossession, imprisonment, even deaths. This culminated in a rapid change to their ways of life and social structures (Shaw 1992:19). Rover Thomas was born into this chaotic and changing world in the mid 1920’s at Yalda Soak, north-west of Kunawarritji on the Canning Stock Route (CSR) in the Great Sandy Desert of Western Australia (Map 1.1) (Well 33).
Thomas was a member of a generation of Aboriginal people who fully understood and participated in cultural and ritual practices although in his later life Thomas’ connection to culture became fragmented. As a boy he grew up at a time when life revolved around acquiring hunting and gathering skills, skills contextualized by the sacred knowledge (dreaming) and oral history of his country and people (Akerman 2005a). His first contact with white people was in the late 1930’s in the Great Sandy Desert when he was a teenager (Kevin Kelly (2007), pers. comm. October). Here he met Canning Stock Route drover Wally Dowling and subsequently moved away from the desert region and into the northern and more fertile regions of the Kimberley.

1.2 Historical Background and Exploration

For both Aboriginal people and their invaders, discovery was an ongoing experience – the process of confrontation, learning and finding a way to live together...Aboriginal culture was forced to change and adapt far more than the culture of the invaders. This was not simply because Europeans were bent on conquest. It was because of the way Europeans saw the land and its Aboriginal people when they arrived. They came from a distant and foreign world equipped with a limited range of strategies for dealing with cultural and environmental difference (McKenna 2002:26).

The history of interaction of Europeans with Aboriginal people in the Kimberley was particularly brutal and invasive. After the arrival of the Europeans many Kimberley Aboriginals were arrested at various times for stealing and spearing cattle which they felt were destroying their waterholes and grasslands. Evidence from historical records recounts how people were rounded up like cattle and either shot, chained to trees or made to walk in chains to Wyndham. As a young boy, Gadjerong man Grant Ngabidji (1904-1977) witnessed the brutality first hand:

At first out in the bush the blackfellers used to kill and eat kangaroo. After they hunted the bullocks, and in those days the white men did not like to see the bullocks killed. They would come along, find the tracks and say ‘Oh, blackfeller bin kill a bullock’, and they would chase after them and shoot them. I will tell you now how the shooting happened with my people, when the white men put the chains around their necks...’oh gadia gadia. Yowadabang yowadabang. A white man is coming on horseback. The gadia galloped to them shouting. They had already rounded up all the blackfellers on the front who had killed that bullock in the bush…I saw a large mob of blackfellers there tied up. I stood alongside my mother...They had cut out all the boys, the blackfellers, and put them to one side. They fetched bullets from the pack horses. We all walked down to a leaning boab tree...We went ahead up the creek a long way, about a mile or so...the others stopped back at that tree...we heard shots behind: bang, bang, bang, bang; ptoo, ptoo, ptoo. We reckoned, ‘Ah, they shootin all the blackfeller’. They were using rifles and they shot what you call twenty, and another twenty; all the young fellers and two women and two men. They were all Gadjerong who we shot, not different blackfellers (Grant Ngabidji in Shaw 1981:38).

During the period 1907 to 1909 one hundred and sixty four Aborigines were convicted of cattle spearing (Wyndham Courthouse records). Some of these Aboriginals were sent in chains to Rottnest Is near Perth and never returned to the Kimberley. This chaining and detention continued into the late 1920’s and early 1930’s (Shaw 1983, Shaw 1992:16). Few written records still exist of incidents or massacres of Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley although there are rare published accounts of incidents of cattle stealing that led to ‘reprisals’ or officially sanctioned expeditions to seek and capture these cattle stealers (Shaw 1992: 17). The rich oral history of the Aboriginal
people in this area recorded at least twelve major ‘killing’ sites in the East Kimberley region. So it was through the story telling of past memories which kept these stories alive (Thomas et al 1994: 40). An example of this is seen in the translation by Christensen of Song 15 of Rover Thomas’s *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony:

*Numpi – rrina kunyaa nyarima lurpungu.* The shade from the hill comes over and talks in language: *munga lurpunga.* (The Devil Devil and woman look around and see the shadow (spirits) of people killed long ago by kartiya (whitefellas). They see where the bodies had been burned. They make a song about those people) (Thomas 1994:26).

As in many parts of Australia initial outside contact to the Kimberley region was made by European explorers, off-course traders and Indonesian fishermen. Contact by European seafarers, such as Abel Tasman, who landed in 1644 on what is now Dampierland Peninsula in northwest Western Australia, made very little impact as they did not settle. Tasman clashed with Aboriginals at Carnot Bay, which is approximately eighty kilometres north of Broome. However, overall contact was kept to a minimum (Thomas 1994: 6). In his two visits (1688 and 1697) to the Kimberley coast English buccaneer and explorer William Dampier gave a colourful description of these early explorations. In his diaries he described the land as: “A dry sandy soil, destitute of water except you make wells”. And he describes the people as “the miserablest people in the world” (Clement 1990:52).

Indonesian fishermen (Plate 1.2) regularly sailed to the Kimberley coastline to collect trepang (also known as sea slugs or sea cucumber). They gave the Kimberley region the name *Kayu Jawa* (meaning literally “wood of Java”). These fishermen established shore camps near fresh water and therefore were in contact with Aboriginal people (Clement 1990:51).

The first European explorers into the Kimberley region included English explorer, Phillip Parker King (1791 – 1856) (Plate 1.3). King named the Cambridge Gulf and King Sound. He spent several dry seasons exploring the northern coastline during 1818 and 1819. King had been sent to the northern area of New Holland, as Australia was
called at this time, to examine all bays and river openings which might lead to the interior of the continent. He reported on natural resources, topography, climate and native inhabitants (Cannon 1999:107). His contact with the Aboriginal people was sporadic and not always friendly (Clement 1990: 54). King wrote that on 30th March [1818] a group of Aboriginals (Plate 1.4) appeared above the cliffs where seamen were filling water casks. They hurled several large stones, injuring three of King’s party (Cannon 1999: 108).

In 1837, funded by the British Government, Captain John Clements Wickham was sent in the ship HMS Beagle (of Charles Darwin fame) to explore and survey any parts of the coastline in this area which had not already been charted. George Grey (1812 – 1898) (Plate 1.5) was a member of this party although he was funded by the Royal Geographical Society specifically to investigate the countryside (Shaw 1980: 262, Clement 1990: 55). He was ordered to try and find the existence of a large inland sea, a notion which had been postulated by scientists of the time (Crawford 1968:62). Grey was the first European explorer to enter the territory of the Wunambal and Wororra people in the western Kimberley. Grey did encountered opposition from Aboriginals in this area and after being wounded in a skirmish, he curtailed his explorations. Grey was extremely impressed by the land and natural harbours he saw and intended to encourage settlers into this area (Clement 1990: 56, Shaw 1992: 13). Subsequent efforts by Europeans to establish colonies in this northern region of Australia focused more on the Northern Territory and this was probably due to the reports of clashes with Aboriginals along the coastline of the Kimberley.

In the Kimberley in 1838, Grey discovered two rock paintings sites. He sketched the paintings (Plate 1.6) which are now referred to as Wandjina paintings. Much speculation surrounded the publication of these sketches in his Volume I Expeditions of Discovery (1841). Of particular interest was that the figures in the rock paintings
appeared to be clothed contrary to Aboriginal customs at the time. The paintings were very different from other rock art observed in Australia (Crawford 1968: 66). This led to an erroneous belief that the paintings were the work of ‘aliens’ or even Egyptian, a speculation which was dispelled by early anthropological investigations in the Kimberley by J. R. D. Love (1930), A. P. Elkin (1930, 1948) and members of the 1938 Frobenius expedition.

It was not until the mid-1850’s that further investigations were carried out in the Kimberley. Augustus Charles Gregory (1819-1905) (Plate 1.7) was leader of the North Australian Exploring Expedition. They were allocated a five thousand pound budget from the West Australian Government\(^2\) to locate suitable areas for new settlements and to follow the flow of the interior rivers.

Gregory observed that the tributaries of the Victoria River in Northern Territory all travelled westward. He took a small party (Plate 1.8) along the northward edge of the desert and followed the Sturt Creek southward to Lake Gregory, which he discovered was dry at that time (Clement 1990: 56). Much of the land that he traversed would later become cattle stations, however, he referred to it as ‘the Great Australian Desert’ (Cannon 1999:214). If he had travelled northward it is likely he would have come across the Ord River which cuts through the East Kimberley to Cambridge Gulf.

In 1866 English explorer Alexander McRae investigated the Fitzroy River area (Cockburn-Campbell 2006). However, it was not until 1879 that Alexander Forrest, the Western Australian Surveyor with his small party (Plate 1.9) funded by the State

\(^2\) The first formal British claim for Western Australia was enacted at Possession Point near Albany in the south of the state on 29\(^{\text{th}}\) September 1791 by George Vancouver RN. In response to fears of the setting up of a French penal colony, New South Wales Governor Darling established a settlement at Albany in 1826. In 1829 a more permanent settlement was established on the Swan River which had been explored by Captain James Stirling in ‘HMS Success’ in 1826. Western Australia was proclaimed a self-governing colony of the British Empire in 1890.
Legislature, located the Ord River in the East Kimberley. He named it after Sir Harry Ord, Governor of Western Australia at that time (Clement 1990:59).

In a telegram from the Overland Telegraph Line in the Northern Territory to Governor Ord, Forrest wrote:

The chief results of the expedition have been the discovering of the course and source of the Fitzroy and other large streams, together with an area of twenty million acres of good, well watered country suitable for pastoral purposes, beside a large area suitable for the culture of sugar, rice or coffee...Although I much regret that I was unable to accomplish the Far North Expedition, I trust the large extent of good country discovered will recompense the colony for the cost of the undertaking (Alexander Forrest sighted in Edwards 199:41).

This account of Forrest’s discoveries does not give a full picture of the physical hardships he and his team endured throughout this journey. Forrest lost horses and the health of his men suffered in his efforts to find a way over the Leopold Ranges that dominate the central Kimberley (Clement 1990:59). The hardships were so severe that he curtailed his journey and make his way to the Overland Telegraph near Katherine in the Northern Territory. During the period of his exploration it is reported that Forrest had very little contact with Kimberley regional Aboriginals. His exploration took place just after the wet season, when the grasslands and rivers were at their best. He would have had a very different impression had he traveled during the dry season which typically has dry pastures and rivers. It was Forrest who named the Kimberley after the British Secretary of State for the Colonies; the First Earl of Kimberley, John Wodehouse (www.westaustalianvista.com).

In the aftermath of Forrest’s reports mentioned above, there was a rush to lease vast areas of country for grazing cattle. As a result many eastern squatters sent cattle across the country to take up leases. The Western Australian Government was keen for settlers to take up land in the Kimberley (Plate 1.10) and this area was touted in the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880 as a new place to settle (Clement 1990: 59). European settlement in the Kimberley commenced about 1879 however, many areas were not settled until the 1920’s. In the East Kimberley region the earliest colonists to
take up land included Patrick Ahern and Will Fargoo (1881), Philip Saunder (1882), Michael Durack (1882) and Willam O’Donnell (1883) (Shaw 1992: 14). From its beginnings settlement in this area was the province of large companies with large holdings. The minimum size for leases with a river frontage was fifty thousand acres or twenty thousand without a water frontage (Shaw 1992: 14). By the late 1880’s there were many permanent European settlers. Nat Buchanan (1826 – 1901) was the first person to overland cattle (for the leaseholders) from Queensland into the Kimberley arriving at what became Ord River Station in June 1884 (Plate 1.11) (Clement 1990: 67). This was the first East Kimberley homestead to be founded and stocked.

Probably the best known of the East Kimberley families, the Duracks (Plate 1.12), overlanded cattle from their properties in Queensland in 1883 arriving on the Ord River in 1885. The first Durack cattle station established was Argyle Downs (Plate 1.10). The Duracks established Argyle, Lissadell, Ivanhoe, Rosewood, Newry, Auvergne and Dunham River cattle stations in the East Kimberley region (Shaw 1980: 163). Thomas was to work at several of these cattle stations during his days as a stockman.

In 1872 the Colony of Western Australia posted a reward of five thousand pounds for anyone who discovered a workable deposit of gold in close proximity to a port, although it wasn’t until August 1885 that gold was officially discovered by Charles Hall and John Slattery at Halls Creek. They had found ten ounces (283 grams) a quantity the Government did not consider sufficient to pay them the ‘finder’s fee’, (Clement 1990: 68). By the end of 1886, however, there were over two hundred European prospectors working the area. No Chinese were allowed in this goldfield by the West Australian Government. Wyndham was established as an administrative centre and trading port in 1886 to service the gold-rush. By 1896 the goldfield was worked out. It had not lived up to expectation, producing only approximately six hundred and fifty
kilograms of gold. Most of the miners moved on to Coolgardie, in the south of Western Australia when gold was discovered there in 1892. The cattlemen benefited from the aftermath of the gold-rush with the implementation of infrastructure which had been built to service the influx of six to ten thousand prospectors. This included postal services, police stations, and a telegraphic link to Perth. They would otherwise have waited many decades for these services (Shaw 1992:14, Clement 1990:70).

The large numbers of Europeans entering this area during the gold-rush significantly impacted on the territories of several of the Aboriginal language groups: the Ngarinyin near Wyndham; the Gadjerung, Miriwoong and Guluwaring further east near the future Kununurra; and the Gija and Jaru from near Turkey Creek (Warmun) to Hall’s Creek. The Aboriginals in the area surrounding Halls Creek were forcibly driven out after a prospector was speared in June 1886. It was estimated that approximately eight thousand Aboriginals lived in the East Kimberley at this time (Shaw 1992:15).

Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley felt the European presence just as quickly as in other parts of Australia. Between 1894 and 1898 settlement expanded along the lower Ord and Dunham rivers until a continuous belt of property ownership extended from Derby to Wyndham, limited only by unsuitable country to the south and to the north. Thus the great cattle station arc across northern Australia was completed (Shaw 1992: 14). In the western Kimberley pasturelands were devoted to sheep contrasting with cattle on the east Kimberley pasturelands (Thomas et al 1994: 6).

1.3 The ‘Killing Times’

The stories in settler and Aboriginal cultures concerning frontier violence have ‘taken root’ because they tell stories that have been frequently denied in the formal historical record of Australia’s public culture (McKenna 2002: 45).

These white people didn’t like black people, that’s why they were killing them to the west, the south, and the north and the east (Rusty Peters in Oliver 2002: 56).
European explorers had very little direct impact on Aboriginal people (Hunter 1993: 37). However settlement brought a different level of interaction as Aboriginal people resisted their lands being taken over by rapacious pastoralists. The arrival of pastoralists (Map 1.2) which was quickly followed by government agents, police, and gold miners made a huge impact on the Aboriginal people of the region as they were displaced from their traditional lands. It appears that while conflict occurred between Aboriginals and Europeans prior to 1890, the conflict accelerated between 1890 and the 1920’s. This period has become known as the ‘killing times’ in the Kimberley and was marked by bloody reprisals and punitive expeditions (Jebb 2002: 36, Shaw 1992: 15, Thomas et al 1994: 7). The pastoralists and the Aboriginals were brought into conflict because they both shared the need for reliable water sources and large tracts of land. Native game was being replaced by increasing numbers of cattle herds leading to a reduction in reliable food sources for Aboriginal people (Hunter 1993: 37).

In some instances Aboriginal people were massacred in reprisals by pastoralists for spearing cattle or were killed in unprovoked raids to clear them from waterholes which the pastoralists wanted to use (Clements 1990: 63) A well-documented instance of such a reprisal occurred in the Forrest River (now the Aboriginal community Oombulgurri) area in May 1926. A white station manager and pastoralist named Fred Hay, was speared to death as reprisal for the molestation of an Aboriginal wife called Lumbulumbia or Lumbia. A police patrol left Wyndham on June 1 to hunt for the killer and in the first week of July Lumbia was brought into Wyndham. It was rumoured that a group of police and private citizens indiscriminately shot any Aboriginals they saw during their pursuit of Lumbia. Due to a public outcry, led by Reverend Gribble of Forrest River Mission, a Royal Commission was set up to investigate the killings. It was stated in the Royal Commission that eleven Aboriginal people were massacred and their
bodies burned. In May 1927 Constables James St Jack and Denis Regan were charged with the murder of Boondung, one of the eleven. At a preliminary hearing Magistrate Kidson found there was insufficient evidence to proceed to trial (Shaw 1986: 7). Contrary to beliefs held today by non-Aboriginal people, Aboriginal people in this area and many parts of northern Australia were quite militant and numerous and resisted European incursions into their land (Plate 1.13) (Shaw 1980: 264). The Aboriginals speared lone travelers as revenge for these massacres. Some Aboriginals actively rebelled against the invasion of European settlers and were subsequently branded as ‘outlaws’ and hunted as such (Broome1992: 41).

Aboriginal man Jack Sullivan³ who was born on Argyle Station in 1901, gave an account of an incident in 1876 when Johnnie Durack was speared between Rosewood and Argyle cattle stations in the East Kimberley:

One day, he (Johnnie Durack) was in the lead while another feller drove his pack, and he put down to where he was going to cross a creek. That’s where he ran into the blackfellers. Instead of frightening them away he straightaway pulled out a gun – bang bang bang – and chased one feller down to the creek. The blackfeller ducked around and as Johnnie passed him, looking out for him, of course he let drive from his side and got him. When his mate found out he was speared he just galloped away leaving the pack horse there. If they had let the blackfeller go it would not have happened, but they all had the bloody wind up (Shaw 1983: 67-8).

However, in the language of the times the land was ‘cleared’ for the incoming European pastoralists:

In the days I speak of the overlander always carried firearms for his own protection: and of course we were armed. It should be added that the blackfellow on the whole was never given a chance and the coming of the whites meant the going of the blacks” (Durack 1933:19 cited in Smith 2000b).

³ Jack Sullivan was born on Argyle Station in 1901 to a European father and an Aboriginal woman. He grew up on the station and in his twenties ‘came over to the white side’, a choice which was explicitly presented by European station managers to many ‘half caste’ Aboriginals when they came of age to work as stockman. He went on to work at several cattle stations throughout the East Kimberley. He retired in 1971 and initially lived in Kununurra. He died at Warmun.
European settler attitudes to Aboriginal people varied over time indicating the shifting nature of Eurocentric perceptions of the Aboriginal people. Noel Pearson, Director of Cape York Land Council states:

The changes that occurred throughout the Nineteenth century in Australian racial ideology reflected the increasing atrocities of frontier expansion. As the frontier became bloodier and uglier, an appropriately vicious racial ideology became necessary. Racial ideology justified the rapacious dispossession of Aboriginal people. It is obviously more difficult to shoot noble savages than people who were no better than animals, who roved over the landscape like so much nuisance fauna (Perkins & Croft 1994: 7).

Aboriginal people’s responses to settlement varied in the same way as the European perceptions did. Some fought back, some retreated both physically and psychologically, and still others gave in to the onslaught and accepted the changes that were taking place (Shaw 1992:16). Woman and children tended to be drawn into cattle station life first and the men followed. Jack Sullivan said of these times:

When they did get a bit of ground to stand on they had to fight the blackfellers to get that land...They got a bit of land, quietened the blackfellers, tamed them down and worked them. When the blackfellers had been made to understand the white man’s way they were helping the white man then and fighting these wild ones. They would go up and talk to the wild one in their lingo: “You wanna come up an me feller workin’ now. You can’t fillim bout bullock anything well they shoot you”. But a lot of blackfellers would not come in: they wanted to fight em. Well, then they put a bullet in them...I know that in my time there were a few at Lissadell and one or two at Argyle. I saw them tied up at the post and then taken away the nest morning and done in, the bush blacks (Shaw & Sullivan 1979: 100).

1.4 Early Cattle Station Days: Impact and Legislation

We hold [the land] neither by inheritance, by purchase, nor by conquest, but by a sort of gradual eviction. As our flocks and herds and population increase…the natural owners of the soil are thrust back without treaty, bargain or apology…de-pasturing licenses are procured from governments, stations are built, the natives and the game on which they feed are driven back…the graves of their fathers…trodden underfoot (Godfrey Charles Mundy 1852 in McKenna 2002: 28).

The East Kimberley Aboriginals were the first Aboriginal groups in the region to be affected by pastoralists moving cattle overland from Queensland (Smith 2000b:75). As convict labour had ceased in 1867 the establishment of cattle stations in the mid-1880s (Plate 1.14) in West Australia necessitated cheap labour. It was thought that Aboriginals from the region would contribute to the pool of cheap labour in order to service the needs of the new pastoralists (Smith 2000b:76). Indentured Asians were
used as a source of cheap labour in the pearling industry in Western Australia but the indenture system was not used on land-based enterprises. Pastoralists believed that cheap labour was essential to their success. The labour was paid by food and clothing (Broome 1992: 124, Smith 2000b: 77).

From the Aboriginal people’s perspective, the European invasion and occupation heralded, a less mobile way of life. The period between the 1880’s and 1920’s was a time of great dislocation, chaos and fear as traditional lands were overwhelmed and subsumed by the pastoralists.

G. W. Broughton’s reminisces about the East Kimberley:

Native life was held cheap, and a freemasonry of silence among the white men, including often the bush police, helped keep it that way. In far off Perth, clergies and various “protection” societies tried to get at the truth of native killings...but up in the north men kept their mouths shut. The basic philosophy...was that the cattlemen had battled their way into this empty land with great hardship and high cost in lives and money; that they were there to stay, and if the wild blacks got in the way, or in other words speared men and killed and harassed cattle, they would be relentlessly shot down. It was as simple and brutal as that (Broughton 1965:53).

The West Australian Government enacted new laws in response to Aboriginal people in this area during this period. The new laws gave the pastoralists and the police extensive powers to control and restrict the lives of the Aboriginal people (Plate 1.15). Some of these powers originally intended to ‘protect’ Aboriginals, became a means to subjugate and imprison them. One such act, the 1886 Aborigines Protection Act, empowered police as ‘honorary protectors’ to arrest all Aborigines whether or not they were suspects or merely witnesses to stock raids. These police were given an allowance of two shillings and six pence per day ‘per knob’. Knob was the name given to any Aboriginal person, this included men, women, and children as well as the elderly who were rounded up, captured or placed in custody. This made it a very profitable occupation (Hunter 1993: 37, Smith 20002a: 77). Broughton remarks;

They came in a strange cavalcade past us...sullen and glum but defiant and with heads erect, six naked bush Aborigines, chained in pairs and all linked together...[behind] slumped lazily in his saddle, rode a bush policeman, dressed in khaki shirt and moleskin pants...telling us that the prisoners were all cattle spearmen whom he and the police boy had run down and arrested in the O’Donnell Ranges (Broughton 1965: 44).

In the 1901 Australian Constitution no reference was made to Aboriginal Australians. The West Australian Native Administration Act (1905 – 47) was established by Commissioner Roth in response to complaints about Aboriginal
treatment in the Kimberley after only a short period of occupation by pastoralists.

Commissioner Roth noted:

If the natives continue to be disposed of the country upon which they are dependent for their food and water supplies, by their lands being rented for grazing rights at a nominal figure – lands from which the lessees naturally desire to drive them – bloodshed and retribution will be certain to ensue (Royal Commission, State of Western Australia 1905: 28 cited in Smith 2000a: 78).

This act robbed Aboriginals of their personal freedom, by imposing restrictions and prohibitions and denying citizenship. It also ensured that the Aboriginals of the Kimberley remained on the cattle stations. A provision in the act which remained until the 1960’s, also denied them freedom of movement between cattle stations (Smith 200a: 78, Folds 2001). Until the cessation of station worker systems and the arrival of equal wages in the late 1960s life for Aboriginal people on these cattle stations was governed by the paternalistic attitude of cattle station managers. However, even though the Act set out to actively restrict Aboriginal peoples’ movement between cattle stations, there was no restriction of movement between cattle stations owned by the same company. As a result many Aboriginal people, including Thomas, moved freely between cattle stations throughout the early and mid-20th century.

1.5 Ration Stations

Hundreds of people were there, women, piccaninnies, blackfellas. There would be two lots there, two lots here, another lot here, another lot there – very many, all different – different camps (?): Miriwong, Gadjerong, Gulawaring, Wunambal, Lungga, Gidja, Djaru, Nyining all mixed. The Governments did that...Those people seemed to be very base I think- sick with the ‘flu, too much fever – and dying. They were also murdering one another...It was because they were all close together⁴ (Shaw 1980:266)

The provision of rations was used to entice Aboriginals to live in permanent camps on the cattle stations. The first was introduced at Moola Boola (Plate 1.16), Violet Valley Station (Shaw 1980: 266). There was also a ration depot established at

⁴ Sighted in Shaw 1980: 266. He says in his endnotes that “this statement was paraphrased from a section of the life history narratives of a Gadjerong elder aged about 70 years. He visited both stations noted (Moola Boola and Violet Valley) twice, while droving cattle and horses, once following the First World War and the second time around 1925.
Turkey Creek (*Warmun*) in 1901 (Aboriginal Art Online n.d.). Allocating rations was begun as a way to discourage spearing cattle which was particularly affecting the breeding stock. The Department of Native Welfare also set up reserve stations in an attempt to stem the killing of cattle and to control Aboriginal peoples’ locations. The reserves were places of assimilation where language and traditional culture was repressed. Another, more long-term reason for setting up ration stations was that they enabled pastoralists to control a cheap labour force (Coombs, McCann, Ross & Williams 1989: 11).

During fieldwork in the 1930s anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner remarked that the East Kimberley region was still “being ‘tamed’ with gun, strychnine, chain and dog” (1960:78) and that there was a breakdown of traditional social organization within Aboriginal groups in the area. Many of the preconditions of the traditional culture were gone; a sufficient population, a self-sustaining economy, discipline by elders, a confident dependency on nature, and with the preconditions went much of the culture (Stanner 1960:78, Folds 2001).

Many Aboriginal groups moved westward and northward away from areas of conflict and settled into the fertile valleys around the Ord River. Relocation into this area brought interaction with and eventually entrenchment into the cattle station way of life which resulted in ‘conformity’ to the wishes of the white station managers (Shaw 1980:265).

### 1.6 The Canning Stock Route

The Canning Stock Route…ran through the heart of one of the harshest deserts in Australia and was little used, despite the expense of its construction and the desecration of many sacred waterholes. Today it is a tourist attraction (Altman and Palmer 2005:151).

Thomas was bought into interaction with white settlers in part as a consequence of the surveying and sinking of wells throughout the Great Sandy Desert to the south of
the Kimberley region for the Canning Stock Route (Map 1.3). This route was to impact greatly on his family and kin who came from Kukatja, Wangkajunga and Walmajarri country in the Great Sandy Desert.

In the beginning of the 20th century Kimberley pastoralists were looking to transport their cattle to Wiluna the nearest railhead. To do so they needed to pass through the formidable deserts of the Little Desert, the Great Desert and the Sandy Deserts of Western Australia. Their destination was the markets in Perth and the southern goldfields. Between 1906 and 1910 Alfred Wernam Canning (1860–1936) (Plate 1.17) surveyed the route and sank fifty two wells. Canning’s party constructed the wells with the forced help of the indigenous Aboriginal people. Canning found it difficult to locate desert water sources. In order to gain Aboriginal assistance in locating water along the route he captured several Aboriginal men, chained them by the neck at night to keep them from running away and then waited until they got thirsty enough to lead his party to a native well. The route was used for the first time in 1911, but many of the wells had been damaged or destroyed by the local blacks as acts of retaliation for the often cruel and brutish behaviour of white men (Gard 1995:85,191). During one of the early cattle drives in January 1911 two white drovers, Thomson and Shoesmith, were killed by Aboriginals at Well 37 (Wilby 1989:95-98, Gard 1995:42-97).5

Before 1930 the route was not used regularly. This changed when wells were improved and so between 1930 and 1950 it was used on a regular basis by cattle drovers. Before the Second World War cattle were sent from Wyndham by ship (Gard 1995 24). In Michelle Jacka’s trek notes she points out that during the Second World War

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5 In an interview with ABC radio Clifford Brooks (Thomas’s nephew) relates a story concerning the early life of Thomas. Apparently Clifford’s father left Thomas by himself at Well 3 in the late 1930s. Both Thomas’s parents had died by this time. Clifford’s father went south to Wiluna with a droving party. He apparently told his young brother Thomas he would be back. However when he came back Thomas was gone. He followed a trail all the way up to Well 41. He tells of a massacre that occurred on his journey back from his searching for Thomas. He says that these people, his people, were massacred because some white men were speared at Well 37 (Mark 2007).
War the stock route was redefined and the wells brought back into operation in anticipation of an emergency evacuation should the North West of Australia be bombed. At the end of the war the shipping of livestock resumed and again the stock route was not required for its original purpose (Jacka 2006).

Nowadays the *Ngaanyatjarra* Aboriginal Corporation represents the Wiluna and *Birrilibur* claimants and the *Martu* native title-holders who are the traditional owners for the land stretching from approximately Well 1 (near Wiluna) to Well 40 along the Canning Stock Route. The *Martu* people are the native title-holders of the lands including and adjacent to the Canning Stock Route Wells 15 – 40 and they hold exclusive possession of native title to these lands (Jacks 2006).

1.7 Life on the Cattle Stations

Thomas’s life like many Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley in the mid-20th century (Plate 1.18) was defined by his connection with cattle stations, as well as the public issues or ‘histories’ throughout the region. The sense of exploitation and dispossession were all too real yet it is also tinged with a sense of pride in the work they carried out on various cattle stations throughout this area. The disintegration of relationships within the social structure of his society and the effect of interaction with different cultures led to huge adjustments and for Thomas this manifested in the hybridity one sees in his paintings.

Cultural hybridity is a term used to describe societies that emerge from cultural contacts of European ‘explorers’ and those ‘explored’. Instead of explaining these contacts as mere impositions of a major culture onto a minor culture, hybridity emphasises their mutual intermingling. Cultural theorist Homi Bhabha argues that contact between cultures results in fluid and ambivalent ‘cultural difference’. This is ultimately manifested in a hybrid space between two cultures where culture is never pure or original, but is influenced by other cultural meanings and identities.

Bhabha recognizes that colonial power carefully establishes highly-sophisticated strategies of control and dominance and that while it (the colonial power) is aware of its ephemerality, it is also anxious to create the means that guarantee its economic, political and cultural endurance. It forms a class of ‘interpreters’ between the colonisers and the thousands whom they controlled. A class of people is created of native blood and colour but Western in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect (Bhabha 1995). To some extent this is what occurred on the pastoral stations throughout the Kimberley where stockmen were trained. They were coerced into adopting western ways and were used as a conduit between the pastoralists and the ‘bush’ Aboriginals.
To comprehend this more fully it is necessary to look more closely at the changes that occurred in the East Kimberley pastoral industry:

I worked all through. I worked on Argyle, learned by Argyle, tossed up [grew up] by Argyle, not anywhere else...I wasn’t very long in bush. My parents brought me to Argyle and gave me to old M. P. Durack. He was staying in Argyle. He worked me there, picked me up, and learned me how to do everything. My parents left me there for work. I was still there till the Old Mother died. Oh, I was a big boy, same way as what I am now. See he brought me there and I worked there all through (Bulla in Shaw 1986: 73).

Some bosses might think that they had a slave labour force and they’d be telling this person and that person to do this at this moment. Well, Aboriginal people didn’t like that because they liked to organise the labour force themselves. They were, I guess the overseers, the supervisors, the head men and the head women. They’d say, ‘Okay I’ll get my uncle and my brother to do that job and they’ll start tomorrow. And then this lot they’ll be going off doing some ceremony somewhere else so they’ll come back in a week to do some other job’. If they didn’t have that control and weren’t able to fit in their own cultural priorities they would walk off the job. It varied from place to place (Historian Ann McGrath in Bundbury 2002: 26).

The rhythm of life for Aboriginals on cattle stations during the dry season (May to October) saw the men earning a living handling stock and looking after the station country, whilst the women performed basic domestic duties. Psychiatrist Ernest Hunter documented in his 1993 book *Aboriginal Health and History: Power and Prejudice in Remote Australia* that these women also often provided sexual services for the white station managers (Hunter 1993:39). In the wet season Aboriginal workers were allowed to travel to visit their kin. European clothing was discarded and with a few supplies they would head out into their traditional country (Plate 1.19). Large congregations of people would form with accounts of more than one hundred people settling in any given location. It was a time of re-establishing contact with people remaining in the bush, of renewing links with specific sites and fulfilling cultural and ritual obligations (Mulvaney 1996: 6, Shaw 1999:17).

The impact of the cattle industry on the social structure and family organization of the many Aboriginal Kimberley groups was demoralizing (Shaw 1990, Biskup 1973, Smith 2000b: 82). They were treated as if they were the lowest rung in the social order of the stations and survived in squalid living conditions. Inappropriate food, such as processed flour, jam, as well as the introduction of tobacco brought on increasing
malnutrition. There were many deaths through introduced diseases. Although in many cases people liked the convenience of provided food, in the long term, this style of food was detrimental to their health. As East Kimberley man Banggaldun says:

> Our mothers and fathers lived on kangaroo. When Bulla’s old woman, his mother took him on to the station they lived on bullock. We other mob lived on kangaroo and sugar bag (wild honey). All over anyway they lived on goannas and pussy cat, and down this way they ate dingoes…We cooked Johnny cake and made beef on the stations. The manager gave beef and rations from the home and we used bread then. Oh, Johnny cakes were better I reckon…Oh yes we could change and eat Johnny cake, mm, oh good one (Banggaldun in Shaw 1986: 54).

Many situations rendered *Gija, Jaru Miriwoong* and *Gadjerong* men powerless, exacerbated by the fact that the white station managers and stockmen used Aboriginal women for sexual gratification.

However, many Aboriginal people found that close relationships evolved with the pastoralists and that staying in the stations was a safer option than to be free but defenseless in the bush. According to Akerman, the Aboriginal men and women who worked on the cattle stations as domestic helpers, station hands and stockmen were a minority of the total population of Aboriginal people who lived in the cattle stations camps. Most were unemployed (K. Akerman, pers. comm. 16 March 2007). Enormous adjustments had had to be made in the aftermath of initial contact with Europeans and station life appears to have provided a form of stability where family groups could live together (Ryan, V. 2001: 247). As Bhabha argued instead of these contacts being the demands or proscriptions of a dominant culture onto a minor culture there were mutual benefits for Aboriginals and Europeans alike. This was very much the case in the Kimberley.

The Secretary of the Pastoralists Association states in 1927 that:

> …the Aboriginal is a valuable adjunct to the pastoral industry, and without him…it would be impossible to carry on under conditions that exist…Frankly until their profit and loss accounts warrant it, pastoralists think there should be no cash payment to or on behalf of Aboriginals employed by them (Smith 2003: 553).

Black workers became critical to the success of cattle stations because their bush skills and knowledge of the terrain were particularly suitable for station and stock work.
The cattle stations became micro-communities: small, remote, self-sufficient. Fence building, stock mustering, breaking horses, branding and those physical duties that required little training were carried out by Aboriginal men and occasionally women (Shaw 1992:17). According to some anthropologists such as Akerman and Shaw black stockmen gained a form of prestige by working with cattle (Smith 200b: 83) (Plate 1.20). However any prestige gained did not ever replace the hierarchical structure of traditional Aboriginal social and kinship relationships.

The station ‘mob’ was a complex entity formed over a period of ten to twenty years around a ‘white boss’ and his Aboriginal assistants. In actuality Aboriginals on cattle stations were reduced to a role of group dependency on ‘bosses’ or managers. The ‘new’ relationships developed between black and white on the cattle stations did ultimately force some changes to occur within the social structures of many Aboriginal groups especially when wages were introduced (Jedd2002:298).

Aboriginal people’s connection and ‘power’ in staying within their own ‘country’ on the cattle stations was restricted by the pastoralists (Smith 2000b:119). Commitment to station life was often the only way in which groups could keep connection to their traditional lands. As Shaw discusses, owners and managers of cattle stations preferred to leave ‘tribal matters’ alone as long as they did not interfere with the smooth running of the station. They permitted important Aboriginal ceremonies, including initiations, to be held during the wet season between November

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6 According to Fred Myers in his book *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place and Politics among Western Desert Aborigines* 1986, Pintupi people view “country” as the objectification of kin networks and a record of social ties. That “identification with country” lies with notion of “place always bears the imprint of person”, “Identification” relates to a set of relationships a person can claim or assert between himself or herself and a place. There are varying levels of ownership: by descent, by conception at place, by birth at place, initiation at place, residence around or death of close relative at place. All these issues of ownership are negotiable and quite political within the group (Myers 1986 127 – 130). The Pintupi people are closely allied in social structure with the Wangkajunga and Kukatja people of the Great Sandy Desert.
and March (Shaw 1992:18). *Miriwoong* man Bulla says of ‘holiday’ time during the wet season when he worked on the cattle stations:

> What they call the *Law*. We did that in the Wet too. We just went everywhere we wanted to go on holiday. The boss went out and chose a killer [bullock] wherever you were camped, in a big camp. He shot it now to feed the stock boys with beef. When you ran out of food the boss had to bring it out…Then Bannggalum sends word the same as you ring up, ‘I wanta a big mob, wanta *waringarri* [big mob] come up. We gotta meet up. We gotta Business to do.’ That meant to say we came in all together from Argyle to Ivanhoe, from Newry to Ivanhoe, see, all the *Miriwoong* people. And when most people were out, then we did the young men (Bulla in Shaw 1986: 159).

In fact the social and economic barriers between employers and black workers were only crossed for the practical matters concerning stock work and concubinage between Aboriginal women and white men. Some of the managers of cattle stations according to Banggaldun were respected. He says:

> I’ve been up to Legune and Carlton, Ivanhoe and then here, then Argyle and Lissadell. I’ve been working every way. I think the white fellers been all right. Some white fellers are good to you, you know. There was no money then. Some stockmen had a little bit (Banggaldun in Shaw 1986: 67).

A turning point in relationships between European and Aboriginal people came with the Second World War. There were fewer European workers available for employment on the cattle stations and the responsibilities for droving and caring for stock fell more to the Aboriginal stockmen who it appears realized that they were able to do the same as white men (Shaw 1980:268). *Malgnin* man Bill Laurie (b.1916 - d.1987) talked about the changes in attitudes towards workers on the cattle stations that occurred at this time. He said:

> Well since that 1941 war all the whitefellers left….Well they were short of whitefellers then and they reckoned, ‘Ah, this feller’s a capable man, what’s wrong with him? Let him take the bullock’… ‘Well Bill, bout you take the bullock in to the work [meat works at Wyndham]?’ ‘Well, I said, ‘I don’t know. Would the Government like it?’ Ah well they had to have the bullocks in there so we took them you see, took their word. Well that was all right. We had no trouble. We drove them in to Wyndham, did a good job and everything like that. We didn’t know whether we were going to get shot along the road or anything…That’s the time we came up with the white man I reckon. ‘Oh, somebody must like us in the finish’, I reckoned for doing the job. ‘Oh well, we must be getting up a little bit.’ Well that’s how we felt, ‘Now the white man give us a go now. Well we just like anybody now’ (Bill Laurie in Shaw 1992:100-101).

Payment to pastoral workers in the Kimberley was withheld until the 1950s. Anthony writes that the pastoralists behaved like feudal lords by paying Aboriginals
with food and clothing but not with money. They restricted the movements of workers and enforced dependence on station food and land (Anthony 2004). Another reason for not paying Aboriginals with money was the belief that money only caused ‘problems’ for Aboriginal people. This led to a wage fixing system with a ‘pocket money’ allowance (Hunter 1993:39). Welfare authorities began directly negotiating with pastoralists over who was responsible for rations to Aboriginal communities on the cattle stations in the 1950’s (Jebb 2002:298). The pastoral industry in the Kimberley during this time had little regard for upgrading conditions such as housing, rations, and hygiene as Welfare patrols were very infrequent. An aged pension was introduced in the early 1960’s and this was one reason Aboriginal people moved into the towns and reserves, increasing the subsequent dependency on Welfare and Social Security for economic survival when jobs on the stations started drying up (Jebb 2002, Smith 2000b). This dependency on welfare was strengthened with the en masse retrenchment of Aboriginal people from the cattle stations in the 1970’s (Smith 2000b:119).

The advent of new technologies and new marketing strategies and the need for more skilled workers in the cattle stations in the East Kimberley in the 1950’s and 1960’s led to intense competition in selling cattle throughout the region (Christensen 2003: 57, Shaw 1992 14-26). Much of the harsh administrative and legal regimes of rules and regulations were being dismantled. For example, in 1962 the right to vote was given to Aboriginal people in most parts of Australia except the Kimberley. They did not receive the vote till 1971. The National Referendum of 1967, which approved the inclusion of Aboriginal people in the census, gave the Federal Government the power to make laws with respect to Aboriginals throughout Australia (Shaw 1992:20). Demands for better pay and conditions by Aboriginals intensified. The pastoralists were being forced to pay better wages to Aboriginals to keep their services but at the same time
were growing unhappy about having to keep supporting non-working Aboriginal populations on their properties. Change appeared to be inevitable.

1.8 Changes to Pastoral Industry in the East Kimberley

The labour provided was cheap and usually inefficient. Indeed the white man regarded the Aborigines as incapable of doing anything except precisely outlined tasks. The Aborigines, for their part, were satisfied; they were not concerned with efficient service, but only with being as little disturbed as possible and at the same time getting from the newcomer the goods they wanted. Instead now of being intelligently adapted to nature, they became largely dependent on the settler and the pastoralist (Elkin 1966:53).

Until the late 1960’s the station lifestyle remained relatively unchanged. Equal pay for Aboriginals (Pastoral Award) was awarded by the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission in 1965 but it was not implemented in the Kimberley until 1969. Cattle station owners were then compelled to pay Aboriginal workers equal pay. Until this point several generations of Kimberley Aboriginal men and women had often been born and grown up on the East Kimberley cattle stations, providing a cheap source of labour in return for their keep. In 1987 one Gija man said:

When we working longa gudiyas (kartiyas)7 place he didn’t like us. He kick us out. We make him millionaire. We want to be independent (Coombs et al 81).

The Pastoral Award, with hindsight, resulted in enforced mass migration, and certainly marginalised much of the previously employed Aboriginal population. The social dislocation that occurred was severe as different language communities were forced together in Kununurra, Hall’s Creek and Wyndham. Economist Herbert (‘Nugget’) Coombs points out that with traditional lands a long way away Aboriginal men and women began to lose language and culture. The marginalization and

7 Kartiya, (gadia., gadiya or gudiya) 1. N. a person of Caucasian ancestry (white person). 2. Adj. The adjective kartiya is used to indicate that a particular activity or item was introduced by settlers and did not form part of pre contact Aboriginal culture: eg kartiya paint (acrylic or commercial paint). The term is sometimes used in a derogatory way to describe non-Aboriginals.
dislocation of Aboriginals in this area also broke down the long-standing relationship between pastoralist and pastoral worker and de-skilled many experienced men and women. Former station dwellers and their families were often forced to live in proximity to people who had hitherto been enemies or strangers and to accept welfare as a way of life. Most tragically, they were no longer on or near their own country. Work for the pastoralist had at least enabled them to visit important places, go hunting, observe ceremony and preserve much of their culture. This new dislocation had a tremendous psychological impact as it left people without continuous access to their traditional lands, without jobs, and at first also without incomes (Ryan V 2001:248, Coombs et al 1989:24). Aboriginal people were forced to build up communities and adjust to life as dependents of the government. The combination of being unemployed, receiving unemployment benefits and gaining access to alcohol had devastating repercussions.

By the 1970’s many Aboriginals were forced off the stations or left voluntarily and moved to the fringes of towns or into camps. The sudden exodus of displaced workers and families from the stations caused great strain for individuals, communities and the capacity of towns like Fitzroy Crossing, Kununurra, and Halls Creek to absorb hundreds of uprooted people. ‘A genuine part Aborigine descended from Afghans’, as he called himself; Edgar Birch (1912 – 1978), in an interview in 1973, said about the move from the stations to the towns:

There is one thing I notice, this is true. Years ago you never saw an Aboriginal out of a job. Now they have no jobs. That’s a big change. You never saw a native starving or looking for anything, never in want of anything but now all that’s gone. They’re in sort of poverty. Money is given to them. It’s no good to them...Well I think that having to move from the stations to the town might be the cause of it. Everyone were contented on the stations, everybody were happy (Shaw 1992: 170).

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8 The name Kununurra is derived from the Miriwoong word gananurang, which identified the section of the Ord River that ran from Bandicoot Bar where the Diversion Dam was built to the head of the Ord River Gorge (Shaw 1986: 9).
An example of the conflict that developed in the Kimberley in 1970’s, as a consequence of the Pastoral Award, is the Noonkanbah oil drilling dispute on Noonkanbah station situated near the Fitzroy River. The dispute which began in the late 1970’s culminated with the West Australian State Government sending a paramilitary force to quell the dispute (Beatty n.d). Aboriginals were employed as station hands, stockman and domestics by the station owners until 1971 when they walked off over pay and conditions. In 1976 the station was purchased by the Aboriginal Land Fund to be developed by the traditional owners; the Yungngora Community. The station was the scene for an intense political dispute when the government of the day allowed exploration company American Metal Climax (AMAX) to drill for oil in sacred sites. Noonkanbah was the impetus for the formation of the Kimberley Land Council and helped politicise land title issues throughout the region.

In a 1995 interview Peter Yu who was Executive Director of the Kimberley Land Council at that time said:

There was concern about the breakdown in the social and cultural discipline in the community. People were pushed off their traditional country. A lot of the senior people got very concerned about that. Many different peoples were brought together on somebody else's country, on somebody else's land. There was a desire on the part of some of the old people to move back to their traditional country; to their land. I think that moving into town was too much for a lot of old people, people died. They were ravaged by alcohol and conflict between different groups. People who did try to move back to their country found that they were confronted with exploration and mining activity. There were mining companies running around everywhere in the early, mid, and late '70s in the Kimberley region (Peter Yu in Libesman 1995).

During this period many other changes occurred throughout the East Kimberley. The Ord River Diversion Dam at Kununurra was built in 1962 (Plate 1.21), and the Ord River Irrigation project was opened. Kununurra was developed as an administrative centre for the Ord River Irrigation Scheme with a subsequent influx of non-Aboriginal people. The Argyle Dam was built across the Ord River and was opened in 1972. The dam caused large tracts of land to be flooded with many Aboriginal dreaming sites obliterated. In 1979 diamonds were discovered south of Kununurra in Gija and Miriwoong country and the Argyle Diamond mine (Plate 1.22) was established north of
Warmun (Christensen 1992: 32). All these factors contributed to the marginalisation and dislocation of Aboriginal people in the region during this period.

1.9 Cattle Station Times – Rover Thomas

I bin drovin’ cattle first, from Texas, Lissadell, Argyle all about some place. I’ve been working all that part [eastern Kimberley pastoral country] (Thomas et al 1994: 22).

Thomas worked first as a drover and later as a stockman on many stations during the thirty years he worked in the cattle industry. His life would follow a pattern similar to most Aboriginal people (Plate 1.23) in this area. He had settled periods on cattle stations as cheap labour juxtaposed with periods of dislocation, moving from station to station with the vagaries of the weather and managers, with the boom or bust cycle of the beef and cattle industry setting the pace (McCulloch 1999:11). Many of the stations he worked on lay within Gija, Worla, Jaru and Miriwoong country, and include Lissadell, Argyle, Mabel Downs, Bow River, and Texas Downs cattle stations.

The movement away from traditional country by young Aboriginal boys such as Thomas onto cattle stations or being ‘picked up’ by drovers was a typical practice throughout the Kimberley and south in the desert regions around the Canning Stock Route. These young men or boys were separated for long periods from their own families and were introduced to the skills and authority of cattle station life (Jebb 2002: 178). The learning process was often harsh and involved a range of punishments including kicks, beatings, verbal abuse, food and water being withheld and being tied to trees. East Kimberley man, Peter Ngunung (1917 – 1990) says of his life as a young boy on Bradshaw cattle station near Timber Creek, Northern Territory:

On the stations the whitefellers looked after us when we were babies and young boys. They grew us up. Never mind getting a hiding from the manager. When I was a kid I got a flogging, smacking. I got a flogging with the whip from a whitefeller. Well I learnt from the white man to ride horse, throw bullocks and brand them. I was pretty quiet then (Peter Ngunung in Shaw 1992: 48).
Aboriginal youth delivered messages to muster camps, helped with goat-herding, gardening, household jobs and a score of non-skilled jobs. They did however, also learn the overall skills of station life and the most important rule of all: to move quickly if the white boss was around and never to question his orders (Jebb 2002: 180). Despite harsh treatment the young men entered a privileged arena of rations and relative security. According to Jebb it was after this period of separation from family that the young Aboriginal men who could be trusted not to run off were then allowed to participate in initiation ceremonies in the wet season or go to off to ‘holiday’ camps to complete ceremonial obligations and meet other Aboriginal groups (Jebb 2002: 184). From a life of carefree independence they adjusted to settling down and taking orders, at the same time as they acquired countless new skills, not the least a strange and very different language (Richards et al 2002:137). This practice is mirrored in Thomas’s experiences during his early adulthood with Wally Dowling whilst droving and working as a station boy at Bililuna Station. This practice of shifting initiation and ceremonial practice to the wet season continues today and coincides with events such as the long school summer break (Shaw 1980: 265-6, Kim Akerman (2007), pers. comm. March). From a non-Aboriginal perspective Thomas’s lifestyle would have seemed harsh and viewed as slavery. However the perception by most Aboriginals including Thomas was quite different. Bill Laurie (c1916-1987) who worked as a stockman on several East Kimberley cattle stations in 1973 said of the cattle station life:

What I like most was chasing cattle and branding up and everything like that. I didn’t like anything else, only to work on the station. I used to follow up this cattle game all my life and enjoy it for everything. That was our life….Well why we liked this cattle life better we went from daylight till sundown but you just knew your work what you were doing all the time (Bill Laurie in Shaw 1992:96)

Well the blackfellers are the ones who’ve been carrying these stations up. You might have one head stockman, one manager, one bookkeeper and one or two cooks. Well that’s all you had in the place. That was a good life. You knew who you were working for and everything. And now this life it’s hard to put up. The boy’s don’t know what work’s to be done (Bill Laurie in Shaw 1992:105).
Queenie McKenzie (c1924-1998), a well-respected and senior painter in the Warmun community, who was born on Texas Downs Station and knew Thomas, said about this period on the cattle stations:

At Texas (Downs Station) we get no money, only rations, food, little tobacco, some clothes, no money. Everyone get shipped off Texas (Downs) when government say boss gotta pay us. All got kicked off, not even one can stay (Queenie McKenzie in Cornall 1998).

Thomas developed strong personal relationships with Gija people and their country. He was ‘adopted’ into the social and cultural practices of the Gija people through his marriage to Rita Tinmaree, a Gija woman. Later, after leaving the cattle stations and when he began to paint he often painted Gija country. The painting Joondagal (East of Turkey Creek) 1990, (Plate 1.24) shows Joondagal country on Texas Downs Station in Gija/Mirirwoong country where the dreaming snake travelled (Kelly n.d.). Doomooriny (meaning any dangerous country) is the hill where the snake left his urine and people are warned not to go there or they will get sick. Garloomboony (the place of the spear), in the top left of the painting, is a sharp hill which can be seen from Turkey Creek. It is a rain stone hill. This means if anyone picks up a stone from that hill it will rain. Balangerr is the long hill, in the lower left hand corner, on Texas Downs where the snake travelled (Waringarri Aboriginal Arts n.d.). This painting was produced with intimate knowledge of the topography. Because of his close connection with the Gija people it included an understanding of the ancestral stories related to the country surrounding and included within the cattle station.

Thomas met McKenzie whilst working at Texas Downs Station early in his stockman life. McKenzie was the mustering cook. McKenzie said of Rover Thomas:

Rover, he came to Texas Downs when young man. I call him Cowboy. He nice boy, good worker, good rider and a nice boy and a lucky one (Lancashire 1998).

McKenzie, a life-long friend of Thomas and known for her blunt, outgoing nature would later lead the East Kimberley women’s painting movement. Thomas and McKenzie’s husband, Charlie McKenzie, were good friends. However McKenzie was
not impressed with Thomas’s drinking (Ron Barton (2008), pers. comm. 11 January).
During his life, Thomas worked chiefly at Texas Downs Station with Hector Jandany (c1929–2006), Paddy Jaminji (1912-1996), Jack Britten (c1920-2002), George Mung Mung (1921-1991), Henri Wambini (c1934-d.2003), Beerbee Mungnari (1931-), Churchill Cann (1947-) and also with Timmy Timms (c1916–2000) and his son, Freddy Timms (1946-); all of whom would become leading Warmun artists (Plate 1.25, Plate 1.26).

During the period of the cattle station times there was an influx of new ceremony practices from the east, south west and south east. The increased frequency can be attributed to the older, more conservative people who did not do any stock work and had time to learn and create new rituals and dances. They were in more or less large static groups instead of scattered all over the region in small family groups. The transmission of new ideas and ceremonial practices can also be attributed to the impact of the migration of dissimilar groups of Aboriginal people into different areas who were away from their traditional lands. These ‘new style’ ceremonies, according to Akerman, moved rapidly throughout this area and this was probably due to the larger more centralised populations in settlements, towns, missions and stations (Kim Akerman (2007), pers. comm. March). An example of this was stated several years ago by Tiger Moore, ‘boss man’ at Doon Doon Station, who told art dealer Pam Linklater that during his grandfather’s time ceremonies were ‘traded’ from places such as Oombulgurri, in the north, in exchange for pearl shell ornaments which were then given to young men on initiation (Pam Linklater (2007), pers. comm. October). Thomas’s ‘finding’ the Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremony, which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5, can therefore be seen as part of this transmission of new ceremonial practice which had its genesis in different areas of the Kimberley and the desert regions and was an important product of Thomas’s cultural hybridity. The formation of the Warmun
painting style led directly from the ceremonial paraphernalia presented in this ceremony.

This chapter has shown how disruptive and dislocating white settlement was in the Kimberley for the Gija, Miriwoong, Gadgerong, Wangkajunga and Kukatja groups that Thomas identified with.

The next chapter explores the roles that language, kinship ties and social organisations played. Thomas’s movement towards modernity in his life and experiences was directly affected by the changes which occurred in these ‘traditional’ social functions.
Plates – Chapter 1: Historical Overview of the East Kimberley


(Plate 1.4). Richard Bridges Beechey (1808-1895). *Lt J. Stokes speared in the lungs while discovering the Victoria River, Australia*, 1839, oil on canvas, 64.6 x 91.6 cm (Image: National Library of Australia Collection in Michael Cannon (1999), *The Exploration of Australia*, p 121).

(Plate 1.5). Sir George Grey (1812-1898) (Image: Michael Cannon (1999), *The Exploration of Australia*, p.18)

(Plate 1.6). Grey’s Sketch of a painting seen 1837 which caused much speculation (Image: I M Crawford (1999), *The Art of the Wandjina*, p.66).

(Plate 1.8). An engraving, from a drawing by Thomas Baines, a member of Gregory’s Expedition in northern Australia in 1855 (Image: Rex and Thea Reinits (1969), A Pictorial History of Australia, p.180)

(Plate 1.9). Alexander Forrest’s party of eight. Members were Forrest’s younger brother, geologist Fenton Hill, Arthur Hicks, John Campbell, James Carey, Tommy Dower and Tommy Pierre, who had served with John Forrest on his explorations (Image: Battye Library of Western Australian History Collection in Michael Cannon (1999), The Exploration of Australia, p. 240).


(Plate 1.11). Argyle Downs Station Museum (Image: www.larkeargyle.com)


(Plate 1.16). Moola Boola Natives c1920. A group of men with pubic coverings and women in front of a dwelling thought to be at Moola Boola Station (Image: University of Western Australia Collection).

(Plate 1.17) Alfred Canning Plaque near Well 26 on Canning Stock Route (Image: www.globalgypsis.com/images/csconvoy.jpg)

(Plate 1.18). Typical scene in the 1920s throughout the Kimberley as Aboriginal people queue for a handout of food (Image: Mortlock Library of South Australia Collection in S. Coupe (Ed) (1993), Frontier Country, p.221).

(Plate 1.19). Aboriginals were widely employed for stock work on cattle stations. This photo of a group of stock boys and camp Aboriginals was taken at Sturt Creek Station in Kimberley in 1920. According to Anthropologist Kim Akerman it was quite common for Aboriginal people to only wear European clothes when working then shedding these clothes in their own camp environment (Image: The Australian Investment Agency Pty Ltd Collection in S. Coupe (Ed) (1993), Frontier Country, p.307).

Diversion Dam completed in 1962, Kununurra (Image: Catherine Carr October 2006).

Argyle Diamond Mine site near Warmun (Image: www.kununurratourism.com).

Aboriginal Stockmen in the Kimberley in the 1950s. In return for their labour they received food and protection, and the emotional satisfaction of working on their own land (Frank H. Johnson Collection National Library of Australia in S. Coupe (Ed), Frontier Country, p.222).

Rover Thomas Joonagal (East of Turkey Creek) 1990, natural earth pigments and natural binder on canvas 120 x 160cm Private Collection (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts AP3183).

(Plate 1.26). Some of the old men artists at Warmun (L to R) Hector Jandany, Jack Britten, Henry Wambini and Rover in the mid-1990s. All had worked together as stockmen (Image: photographer unknown; date unknown: Jane Yalunga Collection).
CHAPTER 2: LANGUAGE, KINSHIP AND SOCIAL ORGANISATION IN
THE EAST KIMBERLEY
Previous Page: (Plate 2.1). Older men helping in teaching cultural practices at Ngalangangpum School at Warmun. Note young boy and girls with their skin names on headbands (Image: Veronica Ryan (2001), *From digging sticks to writing sticks: Stories of Kija women*, p.102)
2.1 Introduction

In the East Kimberley, as with other areas of Aboriginal Australia, the relationship of an individual to other members of his or her language group was largely determined by different aspects of the classificatory kinship system. This system was introduced into anthropological studies in Australia by social anthropologist A. F. Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955) in the 1930’s. This flexible view of kinship was formulated in British social anthropology. Radcliffe was among the first to attempt to break out of universalizing assumptions and theories about kinship and asserted that kinship relations were best thought of as concrete networks of relationships among individuals (www.anthrobase.com).

In this system, firstly, there was his or her skin group which designated membership of one of the eight skin groups or subsections within the skin differentiation system in the East Kimberley (see Appendix II for a more thorough explanation). According to Karberry this kinship system despite its seemingly rigid structure exhibited a deal of flexibility based around individual cases and relationships (Kaberry 1937: 439). Another important aspect was his/her inherited relationship with, and responsibility for, a particular ‘country’. This was a tract of land where relationships were permanently linked regardless of skin group affiliations. Since the introduction of painting on board and canvas for economic benefit began in the 1970’s in the East Kimberley the ownership of ancestral stories became extremely important to each artist. This chapter explores the changes in language, skin groups, and affiliations to country and the relationships to ancestral stories that occurred in the East Kimberley after white settlement. It investigates the implications these changes had on Thomas and the broader East Kimberley community.
2.2 Linguistic Breakdown Due to Invasion by European Settlers

... I understand the cosmology of people of this region is that language is connected to country not to people, and people’s connections are both dynamic and complex (Ian Kirkby (2007), pers. comm. 9 October).

Well we learnt their language and I used to stick with mum and talk her language. I have a bit of both languages, mostly Wunambal and I can understand my father’s language Lungga. I speak a few words. I can understand Djaru and speak back Djaru in different words you know. Well when it’s all boiled down it’s all Gidja from Hall’s Creek back. From Bedford Downs, Alice Downs it’s all Gidja. Lungga is the same language. Gidja and Guluwaring are the same language. But Wunambal was my mother’s language and Worora. Miriwoong and Gadjerong are just, you know a little bit different in the both languages but they can still understand each other (Stephen Edwards in Shaw 1992: 181).
One crucial issue which related directly to Thomas was the fracturing and fragmenting of Aboriginal languages that occurred due to the invasion of European settlers and the subsequent introduction of the English language into the Kimberley region (Map 2.1). These changes and breakdowns in indigenous languages occurred throughout both this region and the desert areas.

Linguists have classified Australian Aboriginal languages into two broad categories. One group of languages covers about nine-tenths of the continent and was called the *Pama-Nyungan* group of languages. The other one-tenth which encompasses the Kimberley was known as the non *Pama-Nyungan* language group (Hudson et al. 1996).

The languages of the Western Desert region which include *Jaru* was spoken at Halls Creek, *Kukatja* was spoken at Balgo, and *Walmajarri* and *Wangkajunga* which was spoken by people at Fitzroy Crossing, all fell into the *Pama-Nyungan* family. These language groups were all related culturally, ritually and artistically. Linguist Kenneth Hansen's work, however, points out the futility of attempting to correlate language and location in the desert. While the high mobility of Aboriginal people in the desert had blurred language/location links (if there ever were such links) it had also led to the fixing of 'communilects' (communication dialects) in settlements today (Hansen: 1984).

The non *Pama-Nyungan* Kimberley languages (Map 2.2) are more complex and fall into several different families of languages. One such was the *Jarragan* language family which included *Gija* from Warmun south to Hall’s Creek, *Miriwoong* from the Kununurra area and *Gadjerong* which was traditionally spoken in the country north of Kununurra (Ryan 1993: 3).

According to Morwood a relationship can be seen in the distribution of non *Pama-Nyungan* languages in the Kimberley, Arnhem Land and south-east Cape York
Peninsula and the greater complexity of rock art styles existing in these areas (Morwood 2002: 62). It is significant that in ethnographic terms, both artistic and linguistic differences between groups served as a social boundary function.

These areas across the northern part of Australia, which include the Kimberley region, show evidence for the greatest linguistic diversity, as well as the most distinctive and complex rock art. Morwood also states that changes to the distribution, context and content of rock art over the past five thousand years was likely to reflect the development of more bounded social networks, coinciding with increases in population densities, restriction on territorial access and more formalised interaction between groups (Morwood 2002: 63). Although impact from other non-Aborigines had occurred in parts of northern Australia from Malays, Japanese pearlers, European explorers and traders in the 17th, 18th and also the 19th centuries, it was contact with white European colonists that has had the greatest and most lasting consequences for Aboriginal people.

Thomas spoke Kriol (Australian Aboriginal) which was a language that developed out of the contact between European settlers and Aboriginal people in the Northern regions of Australia. Despite the language’s similarities to English it had a distinct syntactic structure and grammar. In the Kimberley the pronoun ‘he’ was gender neutral and referred to both male and female. Much of the phonetics and grammar of Kriol reflected traditional Aboriginal languages, although often the use of English terms had quite different meanings (Koford 1992: 6). Thomas’s English was poor (Cochrane 1994) and he only spoke broken Gija (Eccles 1997b). In correspondence with Akerman, he stated that Thomas spoke Kriol, Walmajarri, Jaru, Kukatja and broken Gija (Kim Akerman (2006), pers. comm. 3 August). In a talk in Kununurra in October 2006, Mark Nodea, an Aboriginal artist at Warmun, who knew Thomas, said “That old fella Rover he talk twenty languages” (Mark Nodea (2006), pers. comm. October). Apparently Thomas spoke many desert languages. However I felt that twenty languages is probably
an exaggeration. *Jaru, Kukutja, Walmajarri, Wangkajunga* were the languages Thomas was born into and all are *Pama-Nyungan* while the *Gija* and *Miriwoong* which he learnt later was non *Pama-Nyungan*.

(Map 2.3). Kimberley languages shown where they were traditionally spoken. Since non-Aboriginal people came to the area, there has been considerable change. The arrows indicate the general trend of movement (Image: Courtesy of Kimberley Language Resource Centre).

When Thomas first worked as a stockman he would have firstly learned to speak in pidgin as a means of communicating, not only with non-Aboriginal bosses, but with other dissimilar Aboriginal language groups (Map 2.3). This form of communication was probably brought from Queensland by some of the Aboriginal stockmen who came over with the cattle herds. Other Aboriginals as well as Thomas were quite culturally
isolated as a result of their dislocation from their traditional ‘country’ (Drury & Voigt 1999: 76). However, in the late 1960’s and 1970’s when many Aboriginal people were forced to leave the cattle stations and then drifted towards local towns in the region, this cattle station pidgin language expanded its vocabulary. (Map 2.3). Kimberley languages shown where they were traditionally spoken. Since non-Aboriginal people came to the area, there has been considerable change. The arrows indicate the general trend of movement (Image: Courtesy of Kimberley Language Resource Centre).

Impact with government officials, teachers and other language groups had created a Kriol language which then became the common language (lingua franca) of the East Kimberley region (Koford 1992: 6, Hudson et al 1996: 8). This breakdown of traditional languages in this region further isolated and marginalised many Aboriginal people.

2.3 Skin Names and Kinship Affiliations

The reason why you will not find all the answers regarding language or cultural groups or the other questions you specifically have in regard to Mr Thomas in the 'literature' is because the 'literature' is written by non-Aboriginal linguists, anthropologists, art researchers and other researchers. They can only document what they document, and don't always get it right. (Siobhan Casson (2007) pers. comm. March).

As previously stated the relationship of an individual to other members in the Kimberley of his or her language group (and beyond) was largely determined by two separate aspects of the kinship system. Firstly a person’s skin defined his/her formal social relationship to members of other skin groups within and beyond the language group. And the other was the ownership of his/her ‘country’. Skin names were a class identifier, not a personal name, and in different language groups the name would reflect the individual language group (K Akerman (2006) pers. comm. 16 March). (Refer to Appendix II) According to Kjellgren the ‘skin’ systems of the Miriwoong, Gija and Gadjerong peoples were closely related to those of the Aranta and Walbiri people of the
southern desert areas (Kjellgren 1999: 61). Names, relationships and social relationships have a similar dynamic. There were eight named ‘skins’ or subsections. All male skin names in the East Kimberley began with a J and all female skin names with an N. There were many rules concerning specific relationships; for example, mothers in law were to be avoided; and a boy’s maternal uncle had responsibility for educating him through adulthood (Muecke & Shoemaker 2004). A primary function of skin names was the determination of appropriate marriage partners. In previous times wrong skin marriages were subject to severe penalties up to and including death for both partners. In contemporary times marriage restrictions have been relaxed but it is still considered preferable to follow skin names in marriage especially by the older members of the community. The system of ‘skin’ names rotated through succeeding generations and membership in a particular ‘skin’ group gave the member a fixed set of classificatory kin relationships with members of all other ‘skin’ groups. Therefore, for example, all Julama men will be ‘brothers’. Although formal social relationships and taboos were followed more strictly with biological kin, classificatory relationship defined the individual’s social and ritual relationships with every member of the community (Kaberry 1938: 444).

Thomas’s skin name Julama (Joolama) was a Miriwoong subsection or skin group from an East Kimberley perspective (Thomas 1994: 4). It seems that although he spent much of his life in close association with Gija people, as all the references state, he had a Miriwoong skin name. Several Aboriginal people at Kununurra told me that if he had been given a Gija skin name it would have been Jawalyi [Dingo] (Mark Nodea

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9 I talked to Aboriginal artist and resident of Warmun, Mark Nodea about Thomas at Our Land Gallery in Kununurra in October 2006. Mark had known Thomas since he (Mark) was a small boy, he told me that Rover’s skin name was Miriwoong not Gija. Thomas’s Miriwoong skin name confirmed by Dr. K J Olawsky, Senior Linguist/Co-ordinator of Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre at Kununurra 2007.
and Churchill Cann (2006) pers. comm. October). As to why he was given a *Miriwoong skin* name is open to conjecture as he lived and identified more with the *Gija* people around Warmun than the more northward *Miriwoong* people. Akerman feels that Thomas was typical of Aboriginal people from different areas who were drawn together in the station system. He was not adopted *per se* but tribal systems of kinship were altered to accommodate everyone living together away from their traditional lands. The system of kinship was quite fluid. Thomas’s *Miriwoong* skin name, *Julama* and variations of spelling, Akerman says, occurred widely throughout many parts of Northern Australia; east towards Timber Creek, Northern Territory and southwards to Alice Springs (Kim Akerman (2006) pers. comm. 31 October). Kirkby agrees with Akerman and says that the assumptions that identity and language were fixed was wrong; language and identity were extremely fluid in the East Kimberley. He points out that the senior members of the families who claimed connection to the ‘country’ at Texas Downs stations identified as *Malngin* or *Malngin/Miriwoong* prior to moving to Warmun in the 1970’s (*Malngin* people lived to the east of Texas Downs, over the border, in Northern Territory). Subsequently, when people walked off Texas and went to Warmun and were joined by Aboriginal people from surrounding cattle stations, it was then that *Gija* became *linga fanca* at Warmun. Thus many people identified as *Gija* when at Warmun. However in other circumstances they identified differently, particularly in response to superficial questions from non-Aboriginal people. And thus the fact that Thomas had a *Miriwoong* skin name is quite understandable (Ian Kirkby (2007) per. Comm. 9 October).

Thomas, as a traditional man, would have been given a *Kukatja* skin name at birth, so when he moved north into *Gija* and *Miriwoong country* this skin name would

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10 In an article by J. Flood and B David in *The Artefact*, reference is made to Wardaman Skin names. In *Wardaman* language, the *Miriwoong* language skin name, Julama is Jurlama (Flood 1994:8).
have had a corresponding *Gija* or *Miriwoong* skin name (Muecke & Shoemaker 2004). According to Kirkby, Julama is also a *Malngin* term or label, not just *Miriwoong* (Ian Kirkby (2007) pers. comm. 9 October 2007). Akerman points out that it was because non-Aboriginal workers in the art centres needed to provide a skin name for biographic purposes, and that *Julama* was given to Thomas (Kim Akerman (2006) pers. comm. 8 November). Educator Sister Veronica Ryan claims it was common practice for strangers to be ‘adopted’ into an appropriate skin group (Ryan V 2001: 95). Another reason was put forward by Koford that *Gija* people at Warmun sometimes gave *Miriwoong* skin names to identify these people as coming from outside the community (K.J. Olawsky (2007 pers. comm. 15 January).

### 2.4 Country Affiliations

No English words are good enough to give a sense of the links between an Aboriginal group and its homeland. Our word ‘home’, warm and suggestive though it may be, does not match the Aboriginal word that may mean ‘camp’, ‘hearth’, ‘country’, ‘everlasting home’, ‘totem place’, ‘life source’, ‘spirit centre’ and much else all in one. Our word ‘land’ is too spare and meagre… When we took what we call ‘land’ we took what to them meant hearth, home, the source and locus of life, and everlastingness of spirit…Particular pieces of territory, each a homeland, formed part of a set of constants without which no affiliation of any person to any other person, no link in the whole network of relationships, no part of the complex structure of social groups any longer had all its co-ordinates (Stanner 1969:44).

The second important aspect to the kinship system of an Aboriginal man or woman in the Kimberley and Western Desert was the inherited relationship with and responsibility for a particular ‘country’. In this context ‘country’ refers to an area of land to which he or she and their respective relatives were permanently linked regardless of their ‘skin’ affiliations. At birth each member of an Aboriginal society inherited the rights to a specific ‘country’ within the region owned by his or her language group. People sharing the same country closely identified themselves with both ‘country’ and each other. In pre-contact times a person was dependent on the resources of his or her ‘country’ for survival and generally lived the whole of his or her life within its borders. People became familiar with its natural landmarks; waterholes,
creeks, caves, hunting grounds, camping places as well as its dreaming places, sacred
sites and supernaturally dangerous or taboo places. An individual was therefore
intimately and intrinsically interwoven with ‘country’, with landscape and Dreamings
and with the power and responsibilities that they demanded (Kaberry 1938: 447).

Before the dislocations of the colonial period, people generally lived within their
father’s home ‘country’. Little information is known about where Thomas lived during
his early life. However it is probable that he would have moved in an area south west of
Balgo around the area of Lake Gregory in his father’s ‘country’ and north-easterly into
the Tanami Desert in his mother’s ‘country’. This region (Plate 2.2) was included in the
area now known as the Kutjungka region (Watson 1999) and encompassed the language
group areas of Jaru, Walmajarri, Kukatja, Pintupi and Ngarti. Wangkajunga language
dialect was considered to be very closely linked to Kukatja and Walmajarri (Map 2.4)
(Thieberger 1996).

Thomas in his paintings gave a strong indication of his relationship to land. This
can be seen in the painting Paruku 1991 (Plate 2.3) which references an area of
enormous spiritual significance to the traditional owners of the ‘country’. Thomas was
connected to this area through his father’s and mother’s ‘country’ affiliations.

Paruku was the Walmajarri name for Lake Gregory; Lake Gregory was also
known as the township of Bililuna (Kururrungku). It was at the end of a long Dreaming
track that bound together a large number of people living across this wide area. A
Dreaming track is the name given to places where the ancestors, on their creation
journeys, apportioned tribal groups their ‘Dreaming’ or sacred sites, their waterways,
their hunting territories and their boundaries. These ancestral journeys and the
associated waterholes and other Dreaming sites became enshrined by tribal groups.
When viewed in relation to a whole chain of sites connected with the particular
ancestral being they constituted a mythology or story, familiar to all other tribal groups in the region and then known as a Dreaming track (Berndt 1966: 47).

For the traditional owners the name *Paruku* also represented the system of salt water lakes at the end of Sturt Creek. Mulan Lake (Lake Gregory) itself was of intense spiritual significance as several other Dreaming tracks also terminated within the lake.

The traditional owners resided in several towns and communities; particularly Halls Creek, Ringer Soak, Billiluna (Kururrungku), Mulan (Malarn), and Balgo (Wirramanu). A brochure at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts centre at Kununurra tells how Bililuna was a major meeting place. Each language group would make camp outside of the law ground on land closest to its own country (Waringarri Art Centre brochure (2006).

Christensen states that the *Wangkajunga* were more heavily affected by the influx of colonists into the area through conflict and disease than the more southerly *Kukatja*. However neither group escaped from the resulting death and dislocation. The southern group could be considered probably the least affected by European influences as this contact came much later than in other parts of Australia (Christensen 2003: 55).

Historian Dick Kimber says that intermittent contact with Aboriginal people had been established south of Halls Creek with the establishment of the Canning Stock Route. Conflict did occur between traditional owners and drovers at times. In the late 1920’s because of a severe drought, many Aboriginal people were forced or moved into white settler areas, such as cattle stations and missions, with the lure of more permanent water and food (Kimber 2006:6).
Benny ‘Doctor’ Tjapaltjarri, a Pintupi from Western Desert region said about tasting European food for the first time:

I opened that stuff and had a look, then took a stick and licked it…”Oh! This is good,” I thought…I drank the jam and finished it off…I said, “Leave that old bush tucker, this food is for us!” (Batty 2006: 44).

Anecdotal information showed that Thomas’s family were very affected by the extended regional drought periods of the 1920’s, 1930’s and 1940’s as his father, Bull Camel and one of Thomas’s brothers died during this period. They were buried at Yalda Soak (Kevin Kelly (2006), pers. comm. October).

Historian Jeremy Long asserts that Aboriginal people made choices to move to white settlements and that they were active participants, not helpless victims. He hints that a ‘curiosity factor’ was involved rather than the Government ‘round ups’ of the first part of the 20th century (Long 1989:13). This statement however seems at odds with much evidence that showed the huge changes that occurred to Aboriginal people created
by explorers, settlers and pastoralists by their mere presence in these regions. Akerman suggests that the impetus for many Aboriginal people to travel to the settled areas accelerated as neighbouring lands were vacated and people became lonely in their own homelands (Kim Akerman (2007), pers. comm. 16 March).

According to the Kjellgren, in pre-contact times in the East Kimberley, the father’s ‘country’ was of greater importance than the relationships to mother’s ‘country’. However in his discussions with artists in the mid 1990’s they made equal claims to stories, sites, history and Dreaming stories of both mother’s and father’s ‘country’ which indicated a shift to parity of importance in both allegiance and identity (Kjellgren 1999:68). This was reflected in Thomas’s paintings with references to his mother’s and father’s ‘country’s’ stories being approximately equal in number.

2.5 ‘Right to Paint’

Art is sensual and full of power and meaning which comes from its status as an event achieved in ritual or ceremony. Songs and dances accompanying the visual allow the participants to impregnate their bodies with the story of the ancestor (Elkin 79:1974 cited in Muecke and Shoemaker 2004:106).

That’s mine’ Rainbow Snake. He got corroboree that one…that’s the snake now. From Darwin. What about that Wungurr there! That Tracy, Darwin. Cyclone Tracy. White man kill em all. This is Cyclone Tracy (Thomas et al 1994: 59).

Kjellgren in his dissertation noted that Gija laws on ownership of stories were still quite strict and Thomas in his time contravened these Gija laws (Kjellgren 1999: 240-245). So to understand Thomas’s ‘right to paint’ various significant stories and sites in Gija/Miriwoong ‘country’ it is necessary to comprehend the protocols of traditional ritual knowledge.

Berndt says that this knowledge was communally owned for the benefit of the whole community or clan group. One factor that was common to all groups was that traditionally laws generally existed which governed how cultural material, in this case stories, songs, ceremonies and paintings, could be used and dealt with. As the market in
Aboriginal art grew in the 1970’s these laws were concerned with responsibility for cultural knowledge and there was the need to ensure that culture was maintained and protected so that it could be passed on to future generations. To this end there was often an individual or custodian who acted as a caretaker to a particular item of cultural heritage (Berndt et al 1999). In Thomas’s case his responsibility was for his Dreaming stories, arising from the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* and from his mother’s and father’s ‘country’. Custodians like Thomas were empowered like trustees in relation to the cultural item such as, in Thomas’s case, the stories he used in his paintings. Their actions in relation to it must conform to the wishes of the community as a whole (Berndt et al 1999).

After speaking to Aboriginal people on the ways of passing on knowledge and stories, Stanner in 1965 commented that conversations with Aboriginal people tended to follow a conventional manner. Following is an example of a typical response:

> There is my Dreaming [place]. My father showed me this place when I was a little boy. His father showed him…Your Dreaming is there, you want to look after this place; you don’t want to let it go [forget, be careless about it]; it is from the first [totemical] man (Stanner: 1965).

The Dreaming implied, in such a context, a code of conduct, a form of behaviour and a pattern of life. It required active custodianship of land, of sacred sites and relationships with people. It was not a chronological concept but a focus on, and an essential connection with, ancestral beings that traveled the entire continent creating the natural features of the landscape and social relationships with humanity at the same time (Mueke and Shoemaker 2004:35, Glowczewski 1999:4).

The definition of an ‘artist’ in Aboriginal society was not the same as in Western art circles. An artist, in a culture such as the *Gija* and *Miriwoong* people, was usually confined to working with set patterns and designs and conforming to subject matter strictly relevant to his own social group. Anyone in this social group could paint as long as they were initiated and had the required religious knowledge. However, as Berndt has observed there were always people in any group who were more competent artistically.
Some showed early aptitude and were tutored by older artists (Berndt 1979: 375). For example, this was the case with Paddy Jaminji (c1912 - 1996) who had an artistic reputation for carving wood and engraving boab nuts for the tourist trade in the 1970’s in the East Kimberley (Eccles 1997). He tutored Thomas in painting techniques in the early 1980’s. An artist’s presentation of subject matter was preordained through ritual practice. However, as cultural ethicist Elizabeth Coleman points out a certain amount of artistic license was socially acceptable and the evaluation of a specific work by senior members of the group would be confined to its ritual importance and subject matter. Questions relating to graphic representations, composition and overall technical ability would be taken into account but ultimately the real judgment on the works appropriateness would be concerned with cultural correctness and adherence to local design. Berndt states that permissible innovations were more pronounced in western and eastern Arnhem Land than in the Western Desert regions (Berndt et al 1999:29, Coleman 2001). Painting was a way of passing on from one generation to the next an understanding of how personal and cultural identity relates to ‘country’ (Kranenbarg 2004:65).

Contact with Europeans gradually changed this situation from the first contacts in the Kimberley in the late 19th century to the development and marketing of paintings with a distinct regional style in the 1980’s. Where once there was criticism of any variations from the socially accepted formulas for artistic endeavour in the Kimberley by Aboriginal groups now other circumstances were changing customs. New materials and changing circumstances altered many of the rules which governed artistic activities in communities where traditionally an artist carved or painted for ritual purposes. The object produced was usually discarded and left to deteriorate naturally, an example being ritual paraphernalia such as masks and boards. During the 1970’s in the Kimberley the role of the artist changed with the disturbance caused by increasing
European pastoral activity and the removal of many Aboriginal people from their traditional lands and with the introduction of equal wages for pastoral workers.

In 1973 Macha\textsuperscript{11} was employed as ‘manageress and field officer’ for Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Pty Ltd which was set up by the Government. From this time she commenced marketing and buying Aboriginal artifacts in the East Kimberley (Carrigan 2003:58). An artist in the Kimberley could now devote his time to painting, or producing art of any form, and make a reasonable living from this work (Berndt et al 1999:32) as he received materials and money directly from Macha on a regular basis. This change, as outlined by Berndt, necessitated the imposition of a different set of social standards and rules by the dominant governing society leading to a juggling of demands in the artist’s own community (Berndt et al 1999:32). In some cases this switch in the role of the artist in Aboriginal society from ceremonial to commercial was seen in the production of paintings for economic reasons instead of paintings for ceremonial reasons. In the Kimberley this change allowed for genuine innovative procedures to be developed for individual artists (Berndt et al 1999: 32).

Writing about painting in the East Kimberley is meaningless without an implicit understanding that the paintings refer directly to the artist’s ‘country’, people and places. Consistently, East Kimberley paintings were about the individual artist’s ‘country’ and the transformative power of the landscape (Watson et al 2003). In Thomas’s case, his paintings, while adhering to this notion, also appeared to lean towards an autobiographical interpretation of his life in a geographical framework. His

\textsuperscript{11} In the early 1980s Mary Macha was employed as ‘manageress and field officer’ for Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Pty Ltd. This organization was set up by the Western Australian Government to buy artifacts from Aboriginal communities. She began to market firstly Jaminji and later Thomas’s paintings from 1983-4. Macha was instrumental in getting Thomas’s paintings in collections all over Australia. She became his agent and lifelong friend.
paintings documented his life, where he had been and what had happened in the landscape at these places.

To understand the special conditions of Thomas’s position as an artist in the East Kimberley area, and in particular at Warmun, one must understand his fractured life. By the 1970’s most of Thomas’s relatives from the Great Sandy Desert lived in settlements along the Fitzroy Valley and in the desert in his father’s ‘country’ around Kintore while others lived in other parts of the Northern Territory (Kjellgren 1999). Tribal law usually restricted an artist to depicting sites relating to his mother’s or father’s ‘country’. In September 1995 Thomas revisited his place of birth and afterwards produced a large body of work centred on this trip in the final years of his life. Thomas’s home ‘country’ lay southwest of Warmun in the Great Sandy Desert but because of his ‘adoptive’ status of living and working in Gija country and his marriage to Gija woman, Rita Tinmarie, against traditional practice, he was allowed to paint Gija ‘country’. His painting of specific dreaming stories in and around the Kimberley was as a result of his ‘finding’ the Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremony. Thomas’s right to paint specific East Kimberley ‘country’ was both acknowledged and defended by other painters who often examined his works and understood that many paintings depicted East Kimberley subjects (Kjellgren 1999: 241). When Jandany who was both a painter and a Gija elder was asked by Kjellgren how it was possible that Thomas painted ‘all different ‘country’ (i.e. ‘country’ that was not his own), Jandany firmly denied this saying:

No. He [Thomas] painting his ‘country’. Yeah, somewhere about that way. And they’ll know at that community[Warman]. He painting that way. He him way. He don’t paint him ‘nother way, you know. I always look la every painting. He painting his way. (Kjellgren 1999: 241).

Were it not for Thomas’s long association with the Gija people in the East Kimberley cattle stations and the changes wrought by the coming of Europeans, this claiming and corresponding acknowledgment of right of claim of Thomas’s to paint portions of the East Kimberley landscape as his own ‘country’ would not have been
allowed by traditional owners of the ‘country’ around the East Kimberley. This permission, especially by Gija and Miriwoong people, for Thomas to paint other people’s stories reinforces, that ‘ownership’ of ‘country’, and by definition the stories attached to the ‘country’, is not a fixed but a socially negotiated phenomenon which exists only when recognized by others (Myers 1986).

Nonetheless the issue of ownership of stories and depiction of ‘country’ in Thomas’s paintings of the East Kimberley still remains contentious. In my conversation in October 2006 Cann, who had been at Texas Downs Station with Thomas, he said that Thomas did get into quite a deal of trouble over painting other people’s ‘country’ but he still did it and his digressions were overlooked: “But he good bloke, old fella Rover” (Churchill Cann (2006), pers. comm. October). This contention could also be due to the breakdown in ‘traditional’ communities which led to the weakening of traditional proscriptions. This assertion was also backed up by Kelly who knew Thomas for many years. He says that Thomas was extremely well liked by everyone and that the community at Warmun made concessions. But Thomas did get into trouble from time to time and he would say to Kelly that:

…he was in trouble and they [Warmun painters] wouldn’t let him paint for a while and that he [Thomas] might as well paint the sky (Kevin Kelly (2006), pers. comm. October).

Also Macha who knew Thomas throughout his painting career said that:

It seemed to me that [Paddy] Jaminji never quite approved of Rover Thomas’s “slight lack of conformity” (Macha 1997).

MacLeod, Thomas’s brother-in-law, commented that the locals in the East Kimberley, even after Thomas became more widely known for his painting, tended to ignore him and on one occasion he set up camp on his own outside Kununurra (Carrigan 2003: 49). The art adviser Megan Buckley at Warmun Art Centre told me that Thomas was not a very popular man in the Warmun community due to his painting of anyone’s ‘country’ and stories (Megan Buckley (2005), pers. comm. June).
Although Thomas was acknowledged by many to be ‘boss painter’ at Warmun while he was alive, it was Jaminji who was in reality ‘boss painter’. This was because Jaminji ‘owned’ significant Dreaming stories and painted the original *Kurrurr Kurrurr* boards even though later some of the boards were found to be painted by other members of the community (Kim Akerman (2006), pers. comm. 31 October).

During his time as an artist Thomas was to hand down many of the stories of the *Kurrurr Kurrurr* and his painting techniques to other people in the community. Many of the younger painters at Warmun, including his daughter Jane Yalunga (1972-) now do ‘tribute paintings’ (Plate 2.4, Plate 2.5, Plate 2.6 and Plate 2.7) of some of Thomas’s works. This was an acknowledgement by these artists of Thomas’s influence on their practice and for once being ‘boss’ painter at Warmun.

In chapter 3, I will explore rock art conventions in the East Kimberley as well as the desert region to the south of the Kimberley. This investigation highlights one of the pertinent links to understanding the East Kimberley art style and refines the question - *What is a Rover Thomas Painting?*
Plates – Chapter 2: Language, Kinship and Social Organisation in the East

Kimberley

(Plate 2.2). Satellite photograph of Lake Gregory which is part of Thomas’s traditional lands (Image: Resource Imaging Australia www.earth.jsc.nasa.gov).

(Plate 2.3). Rover Thomas Lake Paruku (Lake Gregory) 1991, earth pigments on canvas, 168 x 183cm, Art Gallery of South Australia Collection (Image: Art Gallery of South Australia).

(Plate 2.4). Warmun artist Charlene Carrington with ‘tribute painting’ Barramundi Dreaming 2007, ochre on canvas, 60 x 90cm, at Our Land Gallery, Kununurra (Image: Courtesy Our Land Gallery).

(Plate 2.5). Rover Thomas Lundari (Barramundi Dreaming) 1985, earth pigments and natural binders on plywood, 90.5 x 180.5 cm, Holmes a Court Collection (Image: www.abc.net.au/news/arts).
(Plate 2.6). Artist, and daughter of Rover Thomas, Jane Yalunga with ‘tribute painting The Shade from the Hill 2008, ochre on canvas, 60 x 90 cm, at Our Land Gallery Kununurra (Image: courtesy of Our Land Gallery).

(Plate 2.7). Rover Thomas The shade from the hill comes over and talks in language 1984, earth pigments and natural binders on plywood, 90.8 x 180.8cms, Holmes a Court Collection (Image: Belinda Carrigan (2003), Rover Thomas: I want to paint).
Previous Page: (Plate 3.1). One of the rock shelter sites at Jinumum in the Keep River National Park in the East Kimberley (Image: Catherine Carr October 2007).
3.1 Introduction and Definitions

Rock art is the blackfella’s schoolbook (Gija artist Rusty Peters in Watson 2007:19).

In this chapter I explore the major influence of rock art styles in the East Kimberley and the Western Desert including the Great Sandy Desert. This was one of the influences instrumental in creating Thomas’s unique painting style and the stylistic characteristics of contemporary East Kimberley painting.

Detailed archaeological studies of rock paintings and drawings can show sequences of styles through time and can suggest reasons for style changes (Kjellgren 1999:137). When viewed this way the characteristics of Thomas’s distinctive approach are placed in a wider geographical and cultural context.

(Map 3.1). Kimberley Art Provinces:

1. The Dampierland Peninsula
2. The Central Kimberley Plateau
3. The Ord River Basin

According to Akerman there are four main zones of rock art displayed in the Kimberley region (Map 3.1): 1. Dampierland Peninsula; 2. The central Kimberley Plateau; 3. The Ord River Basin; 4. The arid zone margins of the south Kimberley and
the central Fitzroy River Basin. I will use this framework to examine rock art aesthetics in this region.

Listed below are the definitions that I used when examining rock paintings observed on fieldwork around Kununurra in 2007. These very simple definitions allowed me to form opinions on some of the clusters of particular characteristics I saw in rock paintings in the rock art sites I visited. The aim was to identify the dominant rock art style in the East Kimberley.

**Definitions:**

**Schematisation = artistic convention:**

**Rock Art:** is an organised way of exchanging information both sacred and secular (Flood and David 1994:6). It is the collective term used for various forms of artistic expression by humans and their immediate ancestors by incising, etching, painting, pecking, or otherwise physically changing the faces of outcrops or the walls of caves, or simply by moving or piling rocks on the landscape to form a design or pattern (archaeology.about.com).

**Rock paintings:** an additive process; and refers to marks made by adding some coloured material to rock surfaces. Two strands: 1. Mechanical:
   a. Stencil consists of a blank space surrounded by a border of splattered paint
   b. Imprint consists of an object which has been dipped in wet paint pressed on a rock surface
2. Delineated:
   c. painting (wet),
   d. drawing (dry)
Both composed of coloured lines or solid areas applied under manual control (Maynard 1977:393).

**Style:**

‘Style’ is the term used for the total design or pattern of a figure, whether it is in outline, linear, solid or bears a line design. It is the final composition of the engraved, scratched, abraded, pecked or painted marks with which a figure is depicted; that is, the manner in which the marks of the technique are distributed in a figure (McCarthy 1968:125).

‘Style’ of one figure is the sum total of its technique, form, motif, size, and character. Figures within a particular geographical location display a narrow range of traits so the style of a group of figures is the sum total of a small number of traits selected from these five descriptive levels (Maynard 1977:399).

**Technique:** Technique is determined by the tools and materials available and chosen (Maynard 1977:391).

**Form:** the organisation of dots, lines and masses which comprise individual figures (Maynard 1977:393).
Motif: is a recurrent visual image which has a particular arrangement of components. (Maynard 1977:396): the objectified expressions of schemata – the standardised pictorial forms which result from consistent (within the cultural group) mental templates (Gombrich 1968).
1. Figurative: resemble known objects

Size: gives relationship to object on which the schema is modelled. There is a very wide variation in scale in figurative rock paintings in Australia from giant representations to tiny miniatures (Maynard 1977:397).

Character: this constitutes those motifs that standout in some way; e.g. Shape: elongated, stick figure, enlarged genital, profile depiction. These characteristics often are repeated and then distinguish the figure as a sub-group of the motif (Maynard 1977: 398).

Simple Figurative style: widely found at sites in the north, east, and west of Australia but rarely in the interior. It is characterized by somewhat loose silhouettes with monochromatic infill of human and animal forms.

Complex Figurative style: shows a degree of sophistication expressed through the depiction of action, elegant and highly decorative features and ornaments, and delicate linework used to portray features including internal anatomy. For example: Wanjina figures, x-ray figures of western Arnhem Land.

Anthropomorph: Having the general shape or can be recognized as being human. They can be as simple as stick figures to elaborate representations of the human figure.

Zoomorphs: Animal-like representations. Can range from simple stick figures to very detailed figures which depict Ancestral beings and totems.

Panaramitee style: An art style found in many parts of Australia involving rock engravings featuring circles and tridents (possibly kangaroo and emu tracks) and dating to Pleistocene times. It is found at Panaramitee Station in the Flinder Ranges, South Australia, and arid regions in south Australia, New South Wales, north Queensland, and the Northern Territory. The designs include dots, spirals, mazes, and crescents, human footprints, lizards, radiating lines. The art is thought to be of considerable antiquity (McCarthy: 1958).

Rock Shelter: an overhang such as a cliff face used as protection or shelter from the elements; often a temporary camp or permanent living area favoured because a fire in a cave could suffocates the occupants (www.geocities.com).

According to archaeologist Lesley Maynard, Aboriginal figurative rock paintings across Australia were generally naturalistic, faithful to the general proportions of the subject on which it is modelled but not very ‘realistic’ compared to European Palaeolithic or African Bushman figurative art. Some motifs displayed little variation
throughout the continent and this was especially true for depictions of birds and animals. Most figures had no decorative infill, or only very simple forms as stripes or dots. This also holds true for the non-figurative motifs being simple rather than elaborate in execution (Maynard 1977:398). Akerman, as well as K. Mulvaney, pointed out that East Kimberley rock paintings was directly related to the rock art of the Ord/Victoria Basin which he saw as a cultural unit, as opposed to the units that make up the south Kimberley, or the central Kimberley Wandjina/Bradshaw bloc (Pers. Con. Kim Akerman November 2007, Mulvaney, K 1996: 19). East Kimberley rock art sites display predominately representations of anthropomorphic, animal representations and zoomorphic figures.

Anthropologist and archaeologist Paul Tacon and his associates in 2003 devised a chronological sequencing for rock paintings in the Keep River district, which is part of the Ord/Victoria River bloc, and I used this for understanding rock painting sequencing in the East Kimberley including areas around Kununurra, Dunham River and south to Warmun:

**Sequencing of Rock Art in Keep River NP in Northern Territory**

- purple-red object imprints, purple hand stencils, human figures, animals (various superimpositions) >17,000 or >4000 BP
- red figures/stencils, red hand prints <3000 BP
- red figures/stencils, yellow figures/stencils <1000 BP
- red figures/stencils, white figures/stencils, white outline figures, dry red figures, red+white figures <500 BP
- curvy red figures/beeswax figures related to sorcery <150 BP
- charcoal figures <100-55 BP
- white outline figures >55 BP
Tacon noted in 2003 that there was a shift in subject matter throughout the one hundred and seventeen rock art sites in the Keep River National Park (NP) his team examined:

…the art has shifted from (a) humans (75 per cent of sample) with a less concern for mammals and reptiles to (b) mammals and birds (67 per cent of sample) to (c) humans and reptiles (just under 80 per cent). The subject concerns could relate to perceptions of changes in the environment, as well as cultural shifts in the selection of motifs for rock art production (Tacon et al 2003:10).

For the purpose of this research into Thomas’s paintings, my interest lies in the recent white outline figures which were widespread throughout the East Kimberley in the fifty years or so before the 1950’s.

According to Morwood ‘in some areas traditional art that was once painted on rock is now done on other media’ (Morwood 2002: 92). Throughout the texts on rock art in the East Kimberley, researchers stated that this connection to new art forms however no actual comparative stylistic analysis has been carried out. Later in this chapter I will describe a typical example of rock painting at the Martins Gap rock art site, north–east of Kununurra, demonstrating the definite link between the rock art techniques and the painting practices of the East Kimberley artists, specifically Rover Thomas. These observations come from fieldwork I carried out in 2007. (Catherine - where is this description? Do you mean - as follows?)

3.2  The Arid Zone Margins of the South Kimberley and the Central Fitzroy River Basin Rock Art Including the Great Sandy Desert Region

An overview of Thomas’s paintings necessitates a consideration of the role of art from the desert regions and how this affected the development of his unique style. Throughout Western Desert regions the simplicity and beauty of the curved line, circles, U-figures, spirals and concentric circles dominates the rock art style. According to
Morwood, when anthropologist Walter Baldwin Spencer (1860-1929) and amateur ethnographer Frances James Gillen (1855-1912) in the late nineteenth century and later anthropologist Nancy Munn in 1973 carried out research in Central and Western desert regions of Australia, their most important finding was that one symbol can have many meanings and depended on context and that the choice of motifs reflected the function of the rock art. They found that overall the meanings of rock art could only be understood in terms of interaction with other elements of the social system (Morwood 2002: 93). In the desert region of the Great Sandy Desert and Little Sandy Desert (Plate 3.2) rock art galleries reflected a non-figurative desert rock art style showing complex geometric designs and these designs served as metaphors for the way in which the world was perceived (Berndt et al 1999: 33).

The Jaru, Wankajunka, Kukatja, Walmajarri, Ngardi, Pintupi and Walbiri artists whose countries all lie to the south of the East Kimberley have a range of motifs in rock art painting which were based more on geometric patterns of dotted, linear lines and circles rather than schematic representations, and were found both in rock art and contemporary acrylic paintings (Kellgren 1999:121). Rock paintings included both figurative and non-figurative components; shown here in Plate 3.3; an image from a rock art gallery in the Selby Hills south east of Bililuna in the west Tanami Desert in the northern arid region zone illustrated in Map 3.1. Rock paintings were used in both sacred and secular contexts: secular art was predominately figurative and considered 'play-work' while sacred paintings were almost exclusively non-figurative and were undertaken at specific sites. Morwood notes that sacred rock paintings were more akin to body painting and served to preserve totemic body designs used at the site (Morwood 2002:103).

As previously noted, the movement of Aboriginal people from the desert regions in the early 20th century to the cattle stations and missions established on the fringes of
the Western Desert meant that people were encountering and internalising new elements of information; new ceremonies, other mythological modes and new languages. According to ne Berndt art was not traditionally expressed on ‘moveable sheets’ but on the body and the ground. The designs used, which were of a highly conventionalised style, were mytho-topographical and depicted ancestral beings, events and places of religious significance (Berndt 1986: 2).

For the groups of Jaru, Wankajunka, Kukatja, Walmajarri, Ngardi, Pintupi and Walbiri people who moved northward to the Kimberley, the desert influences became integral to their new way of life on cattle stations and mission settlements. Many artists initially used natural materials; ochres and natural binders as a way to reinforce former patterns of living in the semi-nomadic desert lifestyle (Stanton 1989:8). However this has largely been superseded by the use of acrylics in these desert regions. Tess Napaljarri Ross talks about the handing down of knowledge of designs for painting:

> They told them [the children] a long time ago in the bush by drawing on their bodies, on the ground, and on the rocks. This was the way men and women used to teach their children…They want to them to keep and remember it (Tess Napaljarri Ross in Warlukurlangu Artists 1987:9)

Highly abstract art forms depended on accompanying oral communication because interpretations depended on the sophistication of the communicator. Recurrent simple designs were used over large areas of rock galleries with similar meanings. Without the aid of the design’s owners it was not possible to interpret or understand the overall design from one area to the next. The evidence from both artists and scholars such as Berndt, K. Mulvaney, and visual anthropologist Eric Michaels stressed that a continuity of style does not necessarily mean continuity of understanding. Changes in ritual and social practice over immense stretches of time have often changed the actual meaning of rock art designs, so the exact meanings of rock art are impossible to categorise (Berndt et al 1999: 36, Mulvaney 1996, Michaels 1987:136).
A specific example, (Plate 3.4) of rock art described below, is from an isolated site in the Paterson Range in the southern area of the Great Sandy Desert. The rock painting highlights the non-figurative motifs of the central and western desert regions. The dots were made with the fingertip and the outlined motifs designs reflected a similarity with the desert areas over two hundred kilometres to the north-west near Yuendumu (Morwood 2002: 102). I found another example showing figurative motifs (Plate 3.5) at Wilitijartu Hill near Christmas Creek in the Pool Ranges, in the northern region of the Great Sandy Desert. The painting showed stylised anthropomorphic figures with white conspicuous, star-like or rayed extensions on the heads. When compared with the sorcery figures, one with a tall rayed headdress, depicted on a rock gallery at Doon Doon Station near Kununurra in Plate 3.6, the figure motifs appeared to be stylistically linked to the Ord River Basin region. These two examples of artwork highlighted cultural interaction and exchange that existed among relatively small groups of people spread out over vast areas where the similarity of the environment was a common denominator (Walsh 1988:162, Crawford 1972: 307).

Crawford states that the main difference between Kimberley rock art and Western Desert rock art was that Kimberley art was not secret and that women, children and uninitiated people were able and encouraged to visit the sites. The other major difference was the rock art in the desert was recognised by local people as made by specific people and in the art itself not especially sacred, even though it was associated with sacred and secret places (Crawford 1972: 307). This was in comparison to the ‘autobiographical’ character of the Wandjinas. And this in turn was due to many Aboriginal people in the Kimberley believing that the ancestral being himself had painted the images on the cave walls (Crawford 1968).

The large numbers of superimpositions, the lack of Aboriginal knowledge of many of the paintings depicted in the rock galleries and even the evidence of
obliteration at some sites, all pointed to a of loss of knowledge of previous eras in the
Desert. In contrast to fieldwork I had undertaken at several rock art sites in the East
Kimberley and the case study of the rock shelter site at Martins Gap (detailed below),
my research demonstrated that the history of rock art production and practices in the
East Kimberley linked directly to contemporary art practices. In the production of
painted canvases it is evident that the Gija/Miriwoong artists used similar spatial
compositions in their designs to those in the rock paintings; notably by their use of large
areas of unbroken colour, edged with white and employing similar painting materials
(ochres, natural binders), techniques and methods.

3.3 Central Kimberley and Ord River Basin Rock Art

Painted along the ceiling of the shelter is an elongated white outline human figure and a solid red
snake with white outline, over the upper portion of the human figure...The story behind this
combined painting is that Bubble Bubble Dick while out hunting, caught a large python,
returning to the camp he went over to an old man who was sleeping and draped it over the
hapless fellow. On waking, the old man got such a fright that in panic he leapt into the waterhole
where crocodiles were known to reside. This action caused much amusement for everyone
present and the story is told today with much mirth. Old Dick subsequently painted the incident
within the rock shelter so that people could remember and laugh over the story (Mulvaney

Western archaeologists such as Morwood, Rosenfeld, A. Watchman and D. J.
Mulvaney have dated the Aboriginal presence in northern Australia, specifically in the
Kimberley as far back as forty thousand years (Rosenfeld 2000:105). Some early sites
contained pieces of red ochre pigment as well as stone artefacts, indicating that some
form of artistic endeavour was carried out at these sites (Morwood 2002: 140). An
example is Carpenter’s Gap, a limestone shelter in the Napier Range in the Kimberley
dated as existing twenty thousand years ago. (Watchman et al 001).

My research emphasised that canvas paintings produced by Aboriginal artists
since the 1970’s in the East Kimberley contained ideas and values of the present time,
while retaining a link to the older expressions and values seen in the rock art in sites in the East Kimberley such as Martins Gap, Maxwell Plains, and Keep River National Park. The subject matter may be more expansive but the underlying stories remained anchored in the past.

Most rock paintings were produced prior to European contact and were statements concerning social and cultural connections to land not just any piece of land, but specific tracts of land. These tracts of land were identified through mythological associations and rock paintings were a record of personal and social ownership by people with associated connections to the same mythic beings. Kjellgren and Berndt listed more than five possible motivations behind producing rock art; documenting personal experiences, marking ownership, instructive purposes, sorcery and depiction of Dreaming beings seen in dreams or visions (Berndt et al 1999: 28, Kjellgren 1999.137).

The interpretation of specific rock art paintings in the East Kimberley (or anywhere else in Australia) is almost entirely dependent on their geographical location and the particular Dreaming ancestors or beings and events with which that section of the country is associated. Berndt recounted that the clan territory of, for example the Miriwoong, was connected with the ancestors creative activities in the Dreaming linked with a rock art site. An example is the depiction of Ganji-ngarnany, the first Miriwoong men on the ceiling at Nganalam site, Keep River N. P. (Plate 3.7).

Within the main linguistic clan groups in the East Kimberley; Miriwoong, Gadjerong, Gija, Worla and Jaru there were recognised smaller groups, each having their own defined territory and formed by members sharing a common totem. These totems were living species or natural phenomena relating to a particular ancestor being (Berndt et al 1999: 25, Walsh 1988:36). Within the Miriwoong this association is called gooning. Gooning is usually an animal that is like a family member to each Miriwoong family (Ju Ju Wilson (2007), pers. comm October).
Rock art was principally a ritual activity, and often involved the singing of songs associated with a specific ceremony whilst painting was being carried out. As Berndt says:

A person’s descent, birth or conception defines that association and conveys with it the right to produce particular material representations. Others may help, because of their linkage through their mothers or mother’s brothers, or other close relatives. However, ownership and rights – in regard to a specific design or image, a segment of a certain myth or ritual, in the relevant land, in the sites where mythic transformations took place…these rights were and are not questioned, and are vested in the person or persons who are spiritual ‘counterparts’ of that mythic being (or beings) (Berndt et al 1999: 29).

Being born or conceived at a particular mythic site implied a linkage with the supernatural being associated with that site and the person was considered a living representative of that being. As a consequence, an artist linked to a specific site was in a position to recreate the images and objects from his own mythic background (Berndt et al 1999: 24). According to Stanton, in some circumstances, certain Aboriginal people believed that a mythological being made him or herself into a painting, leaving an imprint on a cave wall from the beginning of time and this painting could only be re-touched as part of ritual activity (Stanton 1982:5). An example of this was the yearly ritual of the re-touching of the important *Wandjina* figures in the northern and western Kimberley in a belief that continued maintenance will ensure continued fertility of species for hunting and furtherance of the cycle of the monsoon (Crawford 1972: 306).

An important function of rock art was to demonstrate or teach the younger generation matters of culture or law. *Gija* painter Jandany commented to Kjellgren in mid 1990s:

I was read him [learned to paint] right here from old people. Their meeting there. I can [do] painting…My mother used to teach me painting. I never do school. I bin stay with them bush school. Understand? (Hector Jandany in Kjellgren 1999:130).

It was also used to make marks of ownership or a visual declaration of one’s presence at the place where rock art was produced. Hand stencils of individuals were carried out as markers of ownership or just to remember one’s presence at a site. In the same way the act of painting specific places of significant meaning and incorporating
the hand stencil icon on canvas, as Thomas included in several of his paintings, (See Chapter 8: Plates 8.27, 8.29, 8.30) continues the process of assertion of ownership (Kjellgren 1999: 140, Mulvaney 1996:10, Flood and David 1994:6).

An ‘artist’ in traditional Aboriginal society such as the Western Desert region and to some extent the Kimberley was confined to working in patterns and designs and conforming to a subject matter specifically relevant to his own social group and anyone in this group if they had been initiated could produce work (Berndt et al 1999: 29). However in reality there were always some people more artistically inclined who produced the paintings and who in turn trained the younger generation.

_Gadjerong/Miriwoong_ artist Paddy Carlton (1936-2006) reflecting on his early days as an artist said:

> My father and the old people taught me how to paint when I was young. I painted on cave walls and did body painting for ceremonies and dancing...I like to paint, it gives me a good feeling in my heart...I do this so that my people can know the stories...so that those stories won’t get lost (Paddy Carlton in www.aboriginalartprints.com).

Anthropologist Robert Layton and K. Mulvaney stated that there is data that rock art often played a didactic role in transmitting religious traditions however, the right to see and learn about the figures was restricted by owners of the specific ancestral sites and stories (Layton 1992:49, Mulvaney 1996). An explanation was given to K. Mulvaney by Aboriginal elder Paddy Kwanbine during a visit to a rock art site in the Keep River N. P:

> They bin draw him all that just only for remember, remember for that business (Paddy Kwanbine in Mulvaney 1996:18).

In the Kimberley as elsewhere in Australia artists have tended, when using figurative motifs, to reduce any details that were considered unnecessary or which may confuse identification. For example in Plate 3.8 the billabong tortoise has been reduced to a basic outline but given all the features necessary to identify the species. My
Aboriginal guide Ju Ju Wilson who took me to several rock art sites near Kununurra identified this species because of the ring on its shell. She said:

Old women would go along the billabong with long sticks jabbing the bottom until they could feel a hollow sound and then they knew it was a tortoise – good eating. Tortoise has a ring on the back [indicating rock painting] that one billabong tortoise (Ju Ju Wilson (2007), pers. comm. October).

Physical features such as breasts, vulva and penis identified sex and when exaggerated were done so to indicate specific messages, for example a love potion (Mulvaney 1996: 9, Flood and David 1994). Thus to an informed observer key identification markers can quickly and positively identify the purpose behind the motifs. An example of this is Plate 3.9 from an unnamed site which shows an inverted female ulu sorcery motif which depicted enlarged genitalia and represents a specific message. According to Akerman the upside down position of a anthropomorph equated to either ailing or death and the exaggerated genitalia related to a popular sorcery method whereby a person’s bladder/genitalia was sung to cause pox, granuloma, or for their bladder to burst (Akerman (2009), per. comm. September).

Throughout the Kimberley the depiction of snakes is pervasive and important, more so in the East Kimberley where it appears to play almost the same role as the Wandjina in the West Kimberley. Snakes are associated with the weather, with child spirits and fertility as are the Wandjina figures. The snake mythologies in the East Kimberley related to travels of the snakes from the east towards the west down mythology tracks that involved the Ord River Basin area, and then moved north towards the Forrest River and then south following the making of the rivers and eventually reached the north-west corner of the Kimberley (Crawford 1968:103). It has been suggested by Crawford that many of the mythological cults have spread from the south or east. There was also a suggestion by linguist Arthur Capell that snake mythologies post-dated the Wandjina cult (Capell: 1939).
Certain types of Dreaming beings for example The Rainbow Serpent (Gija = goolarbool, garlooroony, or dalyoony, Miriwoong = galeroong, garrimalan) were depicted with relatively fixed characteristics throughout the East Kimberley. The painting and mythology of snakes in rock painting, for example at Jinumum and Nganalam art sites in the Keep River N. P., were dominant and impressive motifs painted forcefully in images often 5 metres long as at the Nganalam site (Plate 3.10). These paintings are characterised by Crawford as having a simple figurative style (Crawford 1968: 103). Examples of depictions of powerful Rainbow Serpents in rock painting are at Jinumum and Nganalam sites in Keep River N. P. and at Layawon cave on Doon station west of Kununurra in the East Kimberley (Plate 3.10, 3.11 and Plate 3.12).

In this region the Rainbow Serpent was considered one of the most numerous Ancestral beings and was interrelated with the great *Wandjina* figures of north-west Kimberley who controlled the tumultuous weather, the storms and the cyclones of the seasons. The Rainbow Serpent was often associated with gleaming objects, such as pearl shells, and even semen, demonstrating a responsibility for regeneration and fertility (Crawford 1968). Many deaths from drowning in Gija country were attributed to the Rainbow Serpent (Kranenbarg 2004: 46).

The belief in the Rainbow Snake, a personification of fertility, increase (richness in propagation of plants and animals) and rain, is common throughout Australia. It is a creator of human beings, having life-giving powers that send conception spirits to all the waterholes. It is responsible for regenerating rains and also for storms and floods when it acts as an agent of punishment against those who transgress the law or upset it in any way. It swallows people in great floods and regurgitates their bones, which turn into stone, thus documenting such events. Rainbow snakes can also enter a man and endow him with magical powers, or leave 'little rainbows', their progeny, within his body which will make him ail and die. As the regenerative and reproductive power in nature and human beings, it is the main character in the region's major rituals (Chaloupka 1993:47).

From another perspective, a story was told by Aboriginal ‘Old’ Gordon from Kundat Djaru (Ringers Soak or Gordon Downs) in the East Kimberley to researcher
Douglas Goudie in 2003 who told of the continuing relevance of the ancestral Rainbow Serpent:

The rainbow serpent would move all around here and form the cloud, and start to make the strong wind blow. The rainbow serpent is still here in the soaks. When a truck came here in the 1980s to drill for water, the drillers felt something moving down there at Banana Springs. They could feel it moving through the drill rig. From deep down they pulled up charcoal. That was from the Dreamtime burning. From the fire Dreaming...When the drillers felt something moving, the old people though it must be the rainbow serpent (‘Old’ Gordon in Goudie 2004: 84).

According to Tacon and K. Mulvaney Kimberley rock painting shows many elements quite different from other areas of rock art in Australia. They noted that the Kimberley artists particularly engaged with the depiction of ‘human figures’ or anthropomorphs. Very early depictions of these figures: the Bradshaw figures have more of a secular nature than the sacred depictions of ancestral beings (Mulvaney 1996, Tacon et al 2003). The Panaranittee style of tracks and non-figurative desert forms of rock art found in the desert regions (Plate 3.13) was almost non-existent in the paintings in the East Kimberley. The simple figurative style (Plate 3.14) followed the Panaramittee and was quite common throughout the Kimberley region (Walsh 1994: 15).

Kjellgren argued that Aboriginal people made no distinction between images in rock art and other natural features of the landscape such as rocks, trees, or waterholes, which were believed to be the physical manifestations of Ancestral Dreaming beings or their activities. He said for Aboriginal people the images white people described as paintings were the ‘shades’ or marks left by the Dreaming beings as they passed into the rock in the ancestral dreaming period. Gija artist Paddy Carlton said that the rock itself was the body of a Dreaming spirit and after its journeying, “bin turned into rock” (K.Mulvaney 1996, Kjellgren 1999: 136). A senior man from the Victoria River region was to say on the subject;

Whitefellows reckon man made these paintings but that’s bullshit. Dreaming made them (Kjellgren 1999:135).
Not all rock art in this region was of this sacred category and contemporary Aboriginal people have recognised that a lot of the rock art was of human origin. This can be seen in the extensive hand-stencilling (Plate 3.15) and depictions of many varieties of ‘bush food’ that occurred throughout the rock art galleries in the region (Plate 3.16) (Godden 1982: 60).

The two most dramatic figurative styles of rock art in the Kimberley were the Bradshaw figures and the Wandjina although neither of these two styles had any direct influence on Thomas. I will briefly describe each style in order to provide a contrast to the simple figurative rock art style in the East Kimberley rock art sites around Kununurra; Martins Gap, Maxwell Plains and Nganalum and Jinumum in the Keep River N. P., which did have a direct influence on Thomas’s painting style.

3.4 The Bradshaw (Gwoin Gwoin) Rock Paintings

Bradshaw or Gwion Gwion (Plate 3.17) figures occur in rock galleries throughout the north, central and western Kimberley with particular sites from the Mitchell Plateau to King Edward River areas (Crawford 197: 358). The Bradshaw figures were named after explorer Joseph Bradshaw (1854-1916), who in 1891 was the first white man to describe them (Tacon 2000:6). They are of great age, estimated to be up to seventeen thousand years old and are regarded by Aboriginal people of the west Kimberley as an important part of their cultural heritage (Crawford 1968, Tacon 2003).

Gwion Gwion started up Stone Age. He made those paintings when he was a man. Before he was a bird. He made that gimbu [knife] - stone point, and tomahawk. Cracked open that rock, made spear and gimbu. Started up the Law from this time. Made knife. That's how they get 'im out of that string (vein), that blood, initiation. Use that gimbu to get out that blood. Those Djinarrgi Djinarrgi dancing together, in a row, a circle, ceremony. That's why ceremony keeps going today, from those images. The Gwion Gwion bird has a long nose. It's hard to find him because he walks around at night. We know how to find him. I'm Gwion Gwion Man (David Mowaljarlai (d.1997) in conversation with Paddy Neowarra, Paddy Wamma and Laurie Cowanulli (d. 2000) in Aboriginal Art Online (a) n.d.).
The Bradshaw figure paintings represent a distinct and enigmatic component in the pre-contact sequence of Kimberley rock art. Researchers such as David Welsh, Michael Barry and Darrell Lewis have shown there are definite links between historic and contemporary material culture and other northern Australian rock art traditions such as the dynamic figures called Mimi figures in Arnhem Land (Tacon 2000:8).

These remarkable rock art figures are reasonably abundant and are found throughout the north western and central Kimberley with other rock art often superimposed. They closely resemble the dynamic figures of Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory (Brandl 1982) but are more static in the poses displayed. Most of the Bradshaw figures are quite small, no more than thirty to fifty centimetres long, however there are instances where these figures are almost life size (Tacon 2000: 7) Some Aboriginal people in the Kimberley seem to have an understanding of what these figures mean, however many of the stories are lost.

The Bradshaw figures were mainly painted in red ochre, and were universally anthropomorphic, depicting humans or human-like beings of indeterminate age or gender. They appeared in groups and the panels of figures appeared to depict group action (Crawford 1977: 359). The figures sometimes wielded boomerangs, fish-spears and multi-pronged spears. Some archaeologists and anthropologists believed the depiction of the multiple-barbed spears suggested that they were painted before the development of modern pressure-flaking techniques, indicating that they are of considerable age. The similarity with the dynamic figures is enhanced not just by similarity to age but also by the similarity of the costumes worn by the Bradshaw figures; elongated headdresses, pubic aprons, armlets and tassels. There seems to be evidence that this attire closely resembled costumes still used ceremonially in West Papua and in the Tiwi Islands (Flood 1997: 292, Crawford 1968: 84, Godden 1982: 42, Kjellgren 1999:116). Most were painted in a shade of red, often a deep mulberry
colour, while at other sites they were painted in combinations of colours, most notably white or yellow with a predominating red (Tacon 2000:7).

While essential to an understanding of the pre-history of rock art traditions in the Kimberley, these Bradshaw figures had little if any apparent influence or significance to contemporary artists in the region. However, there were artists like Kevin Waina and members of his family, who probably, due to the interest generated in the Bradshaw paintings, have commenced using the iconography of the Bradshaws in their paintings (Plate 3.18). The figures were always represented as silhouettes, usually in black or dark red.

3.5 Wandjina Rock Paintings

Rock art shows that the Kimberley area was an area of changing culture before the influx of European settlers. Indonesian fishermen visited the areas from the eighteenth century and Europeans visited the area irregularly from the 17th century. The Wandjina cult mythology reflected the changing cultural environment (Crawford 1972: 304).

George Grey (1812-1898) was a young English officer, who as a member of an exploration party funded by the Royal Geographical Society, set out in 1837 to explore north-west Australia with the intention of finding evidence of an inland sea by exploring the rivers which drained to the sea. His descriptions of rock paintings were vivid:

...I was certainly rather surprised at the moment that I first saw this gigantic head and upper part of a body bending over and grimly staring at me...It would be impossible to convey in words an adequate idea of this uncouth and savage figure...Its head was encircled by bright red rays something like the rays which one sees proceeding from the sun, when depicted on the signboard of a public house (Grey cited in Walsh 1988: 31).

Grey’s description and sketch of a painting, from another rock art site near, which he described as a ‘robed figure’ (Plate 3.19, Plate 3.20), has led to much discussion and speculation. This speculation has ranged from individuals from academia
to extremists like Erich van Daniken, who believed that this painting is evidence of ‘alien’ visitors to our planet. However much of the speculation is based around Grey’s sketch and not the actual painting itself (Ryan and Akerman 1992:11, Walsh 1988:32).

The *Wandjina* figurative paintings (Plate 3.21) have a restricted distribution in the Kimberley, dominating the northern and western region and with an eastern border of distribution of the Drysdale River (Layton 1992:47). They are representations of anthropomorphic beings of great scale with the paintings sometimes over four to five metres in height. Archaeologist Josephine Flood suggested that the *Wandjina* cult was a classic example of a highly territorial system based on clan totemism, for each clan still had a totemic association with a particular *Wandjina* in a rock shelter on the clan country, where the paintings were retouched at annual ceremonies (Flood 1997:324). The *Wandjina* style of rock painting is not found in *Gija* country in the East Kimberley (Layton 1992:47). The limitation of its spread was probably due to the extremely rugged country in the central part of the Kimberley which halted the flow of the *Wandjina* cult eastward. Figures with rayed headdresses are depicted in cave paintings in *Miriwoong* ‘country’ (Plate 3.22) and in the Victoria River region which contrasts with *Wandjina* figures and are more like central desert figures (Berndt et al 1999: 156).

The stylised *Wandjina* figures are portrayed with a halo around the head, eyes and nose but no mouth. Aboriginals have explained that *Wandjina* have no mouth because they keep the rain contained, as well as the thunder and lightning and if they had mouths they would release all the water causing continuous flooding (Flood 1997, Ryan and Akerman 1992:12). The elaborate headdress that is worn by *Wandjina* represents both hair and clouds. The rays which emanate from the headdress are both the feathers used as decoration by *Wandjina* and the lightning which they control. The head is the dominant feature with less frequent representations of the shoulders, the torso and legs (Elkin 1958: 371). The predominance of white denotes the huge white
cumulo-nimbus clouds and the subsequent monsoonal rains which occur at the beginning of the monsoon season and are identified with Wandjina as are the monsoonal rains that fall throughout the Kimberley between December and March (Crawford 1968:32, Flood 1997). People in this area also believe that if the Wandjina are offended they will call up the lightning to take their revenge, or to bring the rains to flood the land and drown the people, or the Wandjina will make the cyclones to devastate the country (Crawford 1968:32). These beliefs are what sparked Thomas’s ‘finding’ the Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremony and ultimately his many paintings of Cyclone Tracy which devastated Darwin in 1975.

According to Crawford, and supported by Ngarinyin lawman, David Mowaljarlai, (Plate 3.23) the Wandjina painting is the ancestral being himself, not a replica or a representation, but real and fundamental and the focal point of a number of social activities (Crawford 1968).

Mowaljarlai gave an explanation of what Wandjina are after painting a Wandjina figure on a rock in the Australian Museum in Sydney in 1984:

The Wandjina are spirit ancestors controlling law and nature. If offended or shown disrespect by the breaking of laws, they may punish the people through flood, lightning and cyclone. The Wandjina came to the Kimberley from the north in the Dreamtime; wandering over the area, they created some of the physical features of the landscape. Each Wandjina wandered until he reached the place where he was to die. After painting his image there he entered a nearby deep waterhole, making that his permanent home. Today, living descendants of these ancient Wandjina must continually repaint the image to ensure that the Wandjina spirits remain (Flood 1997:298).

The Wandjina figures were painted in very specific colours; white (pipeclay or huntite), red (ochre), yellow (ochre) and black (charcoal) and in one small area, blue (obtained from powdered mineral) (Elkin 1958:370, Crawford 1968:22). Elkin also pointed out that on the same rock art galleries figures of animals and objects, all of totemic importance, were also depicted.
Artists such as Alec Mingelmanganu (1910-1981), Ingnatia Jangarra (c1930-1990), Lily Karedada (1937-) and her family from Kalumbaru represented and still paint *Wandjina* figures (Plate 3.24) on a range of materials; sheets of bark, canvas and paper.

### 3.6 *Gija* /*Miriwoong* Rock Art

In the southern and eastern regions of the Kimberley animal ancestral beings are a dominant feature in the rock paintings (Crawford 1972: 304). According to K. Mulvaney, Akerman and Kjellgren, East Kimberley rock art showed a strong affinity to the Victoria River area in the Northern Territory and stylistically these two regions appear to represent a single tradition (Mulvaney 1996:19, Kjellgren 1999:16, Kim Akerman (2007), pers. comm. November). Alongside the Bradshaw and *Wandjina* styles of rock art, which are the classical forms in this area, another simpler, more naturalistic style evolved.

These rock paintings were generally polychromatic with a white or off-white outline, and either a continuous, or dotted or broken line, using a red or yellow pigment (Mulvaney 1996: 19, Kjellgren 1999). The paintings depicted animal (Plate 3.25, Plate 3.26) and anthropomorphic (human) motifs with a striking use of colour and space. The contemporary art of the East Kimberley originated, or at least drew inspiration from the polychrome rock art traditions that are still practised today in areas such as Martins Gap and Maxwell Plains.

Examples of rock art in the area; the kangaroo figure from Ord River Valley and flying foxes painted in Layawon cave on Doon Doon station on Dunham River in the East Kimberley (Plate 3.25 and Plate 3.26), highlight the similarity of design with the Victoria River figures. For example, a kangaroo with two small anthropomorphs known as *gulirrida* (Peewee Dreaming ancestors) at the rock shelter Weliyn near Horse Spring at the Victoria River headwaters (Flood and David 1994:16) (Plate 3.27) illustrated that
paintings from both areas feature animals with ears shown side by side, and the eyes placed on one side of the head. A bean shaped motif which appears below the feet of the kangaroo (Plate 3.27) is a common desert feature from further south and represents a kidney a symbol of life. This demonstrates the movement and diffusion of ideas from the southern desert areas into the more northerly regions in the post-contact period. Both D.J and K. Mulvaney indicate that there was a shared mythology from east to west in the Kimberley and they linked the rock art sites to the adjacent Victoria River and Daly Waters areas in the Northern Territory (Mulvaney D.J. 1969:173; Mulvaney K. 1996:19; Walsh 1988: 194).

Totemism had quite a bearing on the rock art practices in the East Kimberley. Crawford was told that a bird moiety totem was responsible for marriageability, and stained the earth with its blood near Carlton Hill Station north of Kununurra, and that this was where the best red ochre was found to use for rock paintings (Crawford 1968:115). Many of the conception totems in the East Kimberley were associated with the snake. In the south the totem’s emphasis was on kangaroos, emus, and goannas and all these totems were commonly represented in rock art paintings in the East Kimberley. Another form of totem that was seen represented in rock paintings was a cult totem which Crawford and Elkin believed to have spread from the desert areas in the south, and involved specific Dreamtime animals who carried with them sacred objects, such as men’s sacred boards, and headdresses. These objects have been handed down through the generations and were still used, though infrequently, in initiation rites in the late 20th century in the East Kimberley (Crawford 1968:116).

Research shows that Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley maintained their cultural processes, including the production of rock art, despite the disruptions brought about by the pastoral expansion in the area. They continued to produce rock art, not just touching up and maintenance of existing figures but new rock art paintings. This
practice continued well into the 1950’s (K. Mulvaney 1996:19). Ken Mulvaney recounts that many people remained in the bush with little station contact up until the Second World War. When Aboriginal people were released from station commitments during the wet season they retained their attachment to ‘country’, they travelled back to their land to conduct ceremonial business, to renew links with sites and to fulfil cultural obligations (K. Mulvaney 1996: 6). Much of the art produced during this period, the early to mid-20th century, in the rock shelters may have been due to being confined by heavy rain. Yet the paintings produced were more than just images or teaching aids, they were memory triggers for whole stories, events and remembering people of the past (Mulvaney 1996:18). Kwambine and Aboriginal elder artist Ju Ju Burriwee Wilson in a conversation with me in October 2007 state:

> They used to get him [ochre], tie him up, take him tied up bag paperbark, red ochre their-self. And any day might be rain time, well they used to teaching by old people draw him, show children, people (Paddy Kwanbine, August 1992 in Mulvaney 1996:10).

> This is my grandfather’s place [Martin’ Gap] it is called wirum. This is a very old site. My grandfather he painted some of the art in the 1940s and early 1950s. Only me and my kids come here now. Many of the marks are to tell people who has been here and how many and what animals have been caught (Ju Ju Wilson (2007), pers. comm. October).

The inspiration and subject sources for the art derived from specific aspects of the culture, or even from more commonplace subjects; that of a faithful hunting dog, the collection of goanna images or a man frightened by a snake (Mulvaney 1996:10, Kjellgren 1999:134). As recounted above by Wilson the depiction of hand stencils of individuals were placed as markers of ownership or were just to remember an individual’s presence at the rock art site.

3.7 **Fieldwork: Case Study: River Eel Rock Painting at Martins Gap**

Evidence suggests that images and compositional forms used by artists in the East Kimberley were directly related to the rock art conventions of the region. The site chosen for this case study of a particular rock art site was the rock shelter at Martins
Gap. A particular rock painting was stylistically analysed in context with other paintings that were in other shelters I visited. This case study highlighted the typical rock art aesthetics in the East Kimberley and gave a better understanding of the pivotal role that the conventions of rock art played in the painting movement that emerged in the early 1980s in this region. All the images used in this case study were taken by me. Conversations about the site were with Miriwoong/Gadgerong woman Ju Ju Wilson on 25 October 2007.

3.7.1 Guide and Site Locations

I met Wilson at Our Land Gallery in Kununurra, agreed to show me some rock art sites in her ‘country’. She is a mother of six, an accomplished artist, and a tour guide with archaeologist and historian Lee Scott–Virtue throughout the Kimberley. She is a much sought after cultural advisor, an expert in bush tucker and bush medicines, as well as being a renowned didgeridoo maker. She carves and paints boomerangs and is an authority on rock art and sacred sites especially around the Kununurra area. Wilson took me to two rock art sites in the district, pointing out that there were lots more but due to access problems and time constraints she was unable to show them to me. Both sites are in Miriwoong ‘country’: the sites we visited on 25 October 2007 were known as Martins Gap (see Map 3.2) (Plate 3.28) and Maxwell Plains (see Map 3.2) (Plate 3.29). She also suggested that I visit the easily accessible sites of Nganalam (Plate 3.30) and Jinumum (Plate 3.31) in Miriwoong ‘country’ at the Keep River N. P. which I did on 26 October 2007.
At 7am on 25 October 2007 with the temperature already 30C, I picked up a 4WD car from the car rental dealer and went around to the local Tuckerbox supermarket and met Wilson as arranged several days before. We headed out along the Ivanhoe Plain, north-east from the township, for 20-25 twenty to twenty-five kilometres along the Weber Plain Road then onto an unmarked track beside an irrigation canal. Then, engaging the four wheel drive, we went off-road across an area of burnt vegetation (Plate 3.32) picking our way carefully uphill around termite mounds and trees towards a outcrop of large rocks which is known as Martins Gap or as Wilson called it Wirum. Martins Gap was part of the old Ivanhoe cattle station and part of Miriwoong ‘country’. This was Wilson’s grandfather’s ‘place’, who’s name was Friday (Aboriginal name Bugun), a name apparently given to him by the Duracks and she related how her

12 The Duracks were a pioneering family who established an empire of cattle stations totaling nearly 15,540 km² throughout the East Kimberley from 1886 till the sale of the majority of their holdings in 1950. They were made famous by Mary Durack’s Kings in Grass Castles and Sons in the Saddle.
grandfather had painted some of the paintings as late as the 1950’s. In conversation, as we drove along, about the ownership of the site, Wilson told how her grandfather had asked her to look after the site when he died but some people in her community were not happy that a woman was looking after this site. She said that she often brought her children out with her and related the stories and important details of the site to them so that the stories and significance of the site would carry on.

3.7.3 Site Details

The rock shelter was a complex series of large boulders, some over three metres in height, interspersed with small alcoves (Plate 3.33), too small for human habitation, which were formed from the large boulders leaning against each other. This shelter was in an isolated outcrop of rocks along a ridgeline. The ridgeline was composed of a combination of sandstone, siltstone and coral limestone and a remnant of a Devonian reef some three hundred and fifty million years old, (Young 1987, Watchman et al 2001). There was slight undercutting of many of the large boulders which enabled the formation of this shelter. Ju Ju said that her grandfather had told her that this shelter was used more as an emergency shelter, more a stopover place on a walking track between other rock shelters in the area.

The surface of the rocks, where the painting took place, was finely grained with an overall smoothness and was predominately reddish in colour with black sections due to water or smoke damage. The nature of the floor of the shelter varied throughout from fine sand and burnt leaf litter to small angular and largish boulders of sandstone scattered in several places along the length of the shelter. The sandy floor was interspersed with tree roots and was greyish in colour with areas of degraded charcoal (Plate 3.34). In several places on the floor there were abraded rocks (Plate 3.35) used to sharpen implements, grinding hollows (Plate 3.36) used for either grinding ochres for
painting on the rocks, or for ceremony, or more usually, for processing plant materials (Mulvaney 1996). Ju Ju said that sometimes ‘the old people mixed ochres in old tins instead of using grinding holes’. There was also an area of cupules on one section of vertical rock wall (Plate 3.37). I asked Ju Ju their significance however she did not know although she said that they could be marks to indicate the numbers of people who had visited the site in the past.

3.7.4 The Paintings

The painting galleries covered an area of approximately fifty to sixty metres. Many of the paintings were on narrow ceilings and I had to lie flat on my back to be able to see them. At one stage when squeezed into a narrow alcove in a prone position looking at some motifs of barramundi, Ju Ju jokingly said that ‘around here there were many deadly brown snakes and they like to curl up in the caves’. I was quickly out of that place!

There was a variety of types of rock art at this shelter: delineated paintings with white or off-white outlined red or yellow figurative forms (Plate 3.38) and mechanical hand stencils (Plate 3.39). These hand stencils were said by Wilson to be markers of identity and she pointed out where her grandfather’s and her stencilled hand marks were. There were areas of superimposed motifs (Plate 3.40) but there were also a proportion of single uncluttered motifs (Plate 3.41) in several sections. Wilson said that most of the paintings of animal figures; motifs of freshwater and saltwater crocodiles, barramundi, stingrays, river eel, kangaroo, emu, echidna (porcupine?) and sugar gliders, were to tell other people who used the shelter that this area was good for hunting certain species or to tell people of their own catches. She also related that some of the human or anthropomorphic figures on the rock walls were ‘warning’ figures (Plate 3.42) to tell others, not Miriwoong, to stay away. Several of the images of crocodiles were over
three metres long and were edged with a waxy, thick coat of pigment and binder with only remnants of infill pigment visible.

After spending several hours photographing and documenting this site and talking to Wilson about the paintings, we beat a hasty retreat for the air conditioned 4WD at 11am as the temperature nudged over 40C.

3.7.5 The River Eel Painting

The large delineated painting of a river eel, (Plate 3.43) of approximately two metres in length and forty centimetres in height, is a typical example of the rock paintings displayed at Martins Gap rock shelter. The information on the identification of this image was provided by Wilson when she corrected me when I had assumed that this motif was a snake or serpent. She said this was a ‘living place’ and not a sacred place about the Rainbow Serpent. The painting was on the vertical surface at the entrance of a small alcove at the northern end of the rock shelter. The surface of the rock where the motif was painted was medium to lightly textured, with a smooth, but grainy appearance. This surface had been used for many generations by painters and the surface was impregnated by many layers of red, yellow and white pigments. The left hand side of the surface was covered with white pigment over which part of this motif had been laid.

This painting has been superimposed over approximately ten mechanical hand stencils and other figurative paintings. In Plate 3.44 the underlying hand stencils are clearly seen in the central area of this detail of Plate 3.43. In the lower section of this detail (Plate 3.44) there was evidence of a previous ‘snake-like’ figure. The white outlining of this motif has faded and was barely apparent with the inner red pigment also almost worn away. There is also evidence of an overall fading of the red infill pigment in the overlying river eel motif as areas of a previous white pigment coat were
obvious. In Plate 3.45, a detail of Plate 3.43, the focus is on the ‘tail’ of the river eel motif and highlights the use of white outlining, which on close inspection was white dotting. This dotting was only apparent at very close range.

The Martins Gap rock painting is a typical example of rock art found in rock shelters throughout the East Kimberley, where areas of monochromatic colour, usually red or yellow, were outlined with predominately white pigments, and usually revealed by on close inspection done by a dotting method. The familiarity of such rock art clearly demonstrates the connection between the rock art painting techniques with the painting on canvas and board that occurred in the late 1970’s in the region and gives clear evidence of a continuation in the living tradition of painting. Rather than a complete disconnection of older traditions, artists shifted in interpreting the past with new materials.

The use of outlining figures or other compositional elements in dots persists today in the contemporary canvas painting traditions in the East Kimberley as seen in artist Tommy Carroll’s *Dunham Country* 2008 (Plate 3.46). Many of the contemporary Gija/Miriwoong artists still relate to the tradition of schematic depictions of Dreaming beings and other subject matter.

### 3.8 Rover Thomas and Rock Art Traditions

Born in the Great Sandy Desert far to the south Thomas travelled extensively throughout the Kimberley, so he was immersed in diverse cultural influences. Nevertheless he spent most of his time in the company of people from the East Kimberley and as my research demonstrated his influences came from this region. He was involved in seeing and being part of the production of ceremonial rituals. During the wet season he was a part of the everyday life of the traditional Aboriginal camps in the 1940’s to the 1970’s which would have involved viewing or being involved in the
production of rock paintings. Thomas heard and was told the stories of Malngnin, Gija and Mirwoong people and conversely he would have passed on some of his father’s and mother’s stories. In other words he did not live in isolation. Almost by osmotic means he absorbed what was around him and then re-translated this into his distinct painting style when he commenced to paint in 1982.

Thomas occasionally depicted human and animal Dreaming figures which were depicted frequently in rock art galleries throughout the region. A favourite animal/bird subject matter topic was the depiction of the owl (Plate 3.47). These stories of different owls; Dumbi, Grugrugi, Mook Mook, which Thomas depicted were related to the two most powerful totemic being in central Kimberley; Wodoi the Spotted Nightjar and Junggun the Owlet Nightjar, who in human form created the rules of marriage and other cultural practices. They were associated with the Wandjina beings known as Wanalirri and through the wunan or trade routes these stories were re-interpreted and spread into the East Kimberley (Akerman 1999:17). Altogether he painted more than twenty paintings depicting animal motifs.

It is vital to realise that Thomas was greatly influenced by these East Kimberley traditions but he still had an affinity with the traditions of the desert people immediately to the south of Gija country, in his mostly non-figurative paintings. This affinity to desert approaches is marked by the ‘topographical’ or ‘sketch map’ style of his paintings which linked topography with mythic beings. This affinity will be discussed fully in Chapter 8 which focuses on Thomas’s individual style.

The next Chapter, however, focuses on Thomas himself; his early life in the desert, his subsequent move to the East Kimberley, and his life as a stockman and artist. This examination of his life helps dispel some of the inaccuracies and disinformation that surrounds his life.
Plates – Chapter 3: Overview of Rock Art in the Kimberley Region


(Plate 3.3). Non-figurative and figurative motifs at rock art gallery in the Selby Hills south east of Bili luna in the west Tanami Desert. The Desert influence starts to pervade the art on the southern borders of the arid zone margin (Image: Kim Akerman).


(Plate 3.5). White anthropomorphic figures with rayed headdress, dark red sorcery and blue tongue skink figures at Wilitijartu Hill near Christmas Creek in the Poole Range in the northern Great Sandy Desert (Image: Kim Akerman).

(Plate 3.6). Two dancing sorcery figures, one on left has tall rayed headdress in rock gallery on Doon Doon Station on the Dunham River south-west of Kununurra in the Ord River Basin (Image: Kim Akerman).

(Plate 3.7). Ganji-ngarnany, the first Miriwoong men on the ceiling at Nganalam site, Keep River National Park. They are associated with rain making ceremonies. Technique: Painting; Form: white outlined, red ochre; Motif: Ganji-ngarnany, the first Miriwoong men; Size: approximately 2m tall; paintings; Characteristics: none (Image: Catherine Carr October 2007).
(Plate 3.8). White outlined billabong tortoise motif at rock shelter at Martins Gap, Kununurra. Technique: painting; Form: white outlined; Motif: figurative; turtle; Size: approximately 25cm; Characteristic: none (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

(Plate 3.9). Delineated polychromatic inverted female ulu sorcery figure with enlarged genitalia from unnamed site in East Kimberley (Image: Kim Akerman).

(Plate 3.10). The large Rainbow Snake, Galeroong, at Nganalam rock art site in Keep River National Park in the Northern Territory, is a creation figure. It is 6m long. Technique: painting; Form: white outlined, red ochre; Motif: Galeroong, The Rainbow Serpent; Size: approximately 6 metres long; Character: none (Image: Catherine Carr 26 October 2007).

(Plate 3.11). Delineated snake rock painting at Jinumum in Keep River National Park. Technique: painted; Form: white outlined, yellow ochre; Motif: rainbow serpent; Size: approximately 1.5m; Character: 3 protuberances on head. The protuberances on the head of the snake are thought by Aboriginal people in the area to be evidence of snake babies (Image: Catherine Carr October 2007).

(Plate 3.12). Delineated Ungurr or Wungurr the rainbow serpent figure at Layawon cave on Don Doon station west of Kununurra. Technique: painting; Form White outlined, black; Motif: snake; Size: approximately 1.5 metre; Character: none. A typical example of the style of serpent/snake figure in rock painting in the area. (Image: Kim Akerman).

(Plate 3.14). Delineated rock art painting at Martins Gap Kununurra. Technique: painting; Form: white outlined; Motif: freshwater crocodile; Size approximately 60cm; Character: none. An example of the simple figurative form in rock painting (Image: Catherine Carr October 2007).

(Plate 3.15). Mechanical hand stencils at Nganalam Site Keep River National Park (Image: Catherine Carr October 2007).

(Plate 3.16). Images of Wandjina with plum tree leaves, in lower section of image, at Wanalirri rock gallery on Gibb River Station in the central Kimberley, which indicated firstly the journey of Wojin an important ancestral being and evidence of food sources nearby. (Image: Godden and Jutta (1982), Rock Paintings of Aboriginal Australia, p.61).


(Plate 3.18). Kevin Waina Bradshaw Art (date unknown), ochre on canvas, 40 x 58 cm, Private Collection (Image: Aboriginal Art Shop: www.aboriginal-art-australia.com).

(Plate 3.19). Grey’s sketch of the principal figure in the rock art gallery discovered on 29 March 1838 at King Edward River Gorge in the west Kimberley (Image: Grahame L. Walsh (1988), Australia’s Greatest Rock Art, p.33).
(Plate 3.20). In comparison, a photograph of the actual rock art figure at King Edward River Gorge in the west Kimberley (Image: Grahame L. Walsh (1988), *Australia’s Greatest Rock Art*, p.33).

(Plate 3.21). *Wandjina* figures on cave wall in the Prince Regent Watershed area (West Kimberley Region). Man in image is Frank Lacy. (Image: West Australian Newspapers Ltd in Ross Haig (Ed) (1990), *Panorama of the North: Journeys in the Pilbara, Kimberley and Northern Territory’s Top End*, p.20).

(Plate 3.22) Delineated painting of ray headed Ganji-ngarnany, the first Mirriwoong men on the ceiling at Nganalam site, Keep River National Park (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).


(Plate 3.25). Delineated kangaroo figure from Ord River Valley. Technique: Painting; Form: white outlined, yellow ochre infill; Motif: Figurative; Kangaroo; Size: unknown; Characteristics: long eared (Image: Kim Akerman).
(Plate 26). Delineated Flying Foxes painted in Layawon Cave on Doon Doon station, Dunham River, East Kimberley. Technique: painting; Form white outlined, black infill; Motif: figurative; flying fox; Size: unknown; Characteristics: heads in profile, two left facing, two right facing (Image: Kim Akerman).


(Plate 28). Nganalang rock art site in the Keep River National Park in Northern Territory. This place is named from the gooning or totemic name of the Sulphur Crested Cockatoo which is Nganalang (Image: Catherine Carr 26 October 2007).

(Plate 29). Jinumum rock shelter and art site in the Keep River National Part in Northern Territory. This is a series of rock overhangs along the edge of the lower edge of the Keep River Gorge (Image: Catherine Carr 26 October 2007).

(Plate 30). A series of large sandstone boulders in an isolated rock outcrop designate the rock shelter at Martins Gap near Kununurra. The area surrounding the site had only recently experienced a bush fire. Ju Ju Wilson is in the foreground at the site (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

(Plate 31). Rock art shelter at Maxwell Plains to the east of Kununurra is composed of a large sandstone overhang with a gallery of delineated and mechanical paintings as well as etching and cupules. Ju Ju Wilson is in the foreground (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).
(Plate 3.32). Burnt area around the rock shelter and rock art gallery at Martins Plains near Kununurra (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

(Plate 3.33). One of the small alcoves in the rock shelter at Martins Gap near Kununurra. Highlights the river eel motif at the entrance to this cave. (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

(Plate 3.34). Roots of a boab and the burnt ground highlighting the surface of the floor around the rock shelter at Martins Gap (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

(Plate 3.35). Rock on floor of rock shelter showing abrasions made when sharpening implements. There was also evidence of pecking (small round holes) on the top surface of this rock. Martins Gap near Kununurra (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

(Plate 3.37). Cupules on wall in one area of the rock shelter site at Martins Gap near Kununurra (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

(Plate 3.38). Old delineated painting of sugar glider on rock shelter wall at Martin’s Gap. Technique: painting; Form white outlined, red; Motif: sugar glider; Size: approximately 20cm wide; Characteristics: none (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).


(Plate 3.42). Warning figure, approximately 40 cm high, on wall of rock shelter at Martins Gap near Kununurra (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).

(Plate 3.43). Delineated motif of river eel on face of wall at Martins Gap near Kununurra. Technique: painting; Form white outlined, red; Motif: river eel; Size: approximately 2m length; Characteristics: none (Image: Catherine Carr 25 October 2007).
(Plate 3.44). Detail of Plate 3.43. Highlighting the over-painted hand stencils. This is seen in the central area of this detail. Also in this detail there is, in the lower section of this plate, evidence of a previous painting, probably a similar image.

(Plate 3.45). Detail of Plate 3.43. Focussing on the dotting that is apparent around the ‘tail’ of the river eel motif.

(Plate 3.46). Tommy Carroll with Dunham Country 2008, ochre on canvas, 50 x 60cm, Private Collection (Image: Our Land Gallery Kununurra).

(Plate 3.47). Rover Thomas Grugrugi 1989, earth pigments and natural binder, 100 x 90.5cm on canvas, Holmes a Court Collection (Image: Belinda Carrigan (Ed) (2003), Rover Thomas: I want to paint).
PART TWO: BEGINNINGS TO THE CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICE
IN THE EAST KIMBERLEY
CHAPTER 4 BIOGRAPHY: ROVER THOMAS – STOCKMAN AND ARTIST.
Previous Page: (Plate 4.1). Rover Thomas, Warmun (Turkey Creek) in the 1990s (Image: Martin Van Der Wal, AIATSIS Image No. N6455.09)
4.1 Introduction:

This chapter explores Thomas’s life in order to understand the original power of his paintings. I identify the details of Thomas’s biography: where he was born, who were his parents and his brothers and sisters. When I first looked at the mass of information, contained in catalogue essays, journals and other publications regarding Thomas and his life, what struck me was the accumulation of inconsistencies in the information. Many contradictory facts were put forward in the texts and led to a great deal of confusion about who Rover Thomas was. When talking to Akerman, Kelly and particularly Macha, people who had known Thomas, they said that in the early days of Thomas’s painting career it was the paintings that were of importance. Biographical information inaccuracies occurred but did not seem so significant (Mary Macha (2008), pers. comm. February, Kevin Kelly (2007), pers. comm. October, Kim Akerman (2006), pers. comm. November). In the mid-1990’s more accurate information was being collected by art dealers and art centres yet the misinformation continued to circulate in the art world. This chapter is an attempt to as accurately as possible document the details of Thomas’s life, a life which was characterised by dispossession, dislocation and deprivation. Yet through all these hardships Thomas emerged to be one of Australia’s pre-eminent artists.

4.2 Who was Rover Thomas?

It is important to understand the man behind his paintings to be able to answer the question – What is a Rover Thomas painting? These are some personal views of Thomas (Plate 4.2) by people who knew him well:

Rover was probably about 5'5" or 5' 6". He was built like a horseman, with slightly bowed legs and a hint of a horseman's rolling gait. He was not heavy - but had acquired a paunch (as do many on bread, tea and beer diets). He had a fine wry smile - people clamoured not only for his work but for erudite statements from him about it all. He could bring a cheeky glint to his eyes when he thought he was playing with a person. Unlike a number of artists I know Rover stayed modest and did not acquire the arrogance that some have acquired about the 'mystery' of their works. He was extremely personable and consequently when he was flattened by illness there was a marked change - he just was not interested in discussing art - his or anyone else’s (Kim Akerman (2006), pers. comm. 10 March 2006).
He was lovable. He had a wonderful smile and a laugh, and he always had this attitude of ‘life is pretty good’. Thomas was a fit, upright man with a forthright gaze and a wicked sense of humour. His warmth and charm persisted despite pain and increasing frailty over the last several years (Mary Macha in McCulloch 1998).

He was always smart and well presented: very careful with his clothes particularly his hat. He was also a good Aboriginal, in the sense that he followed the dictates of aboriginal law; he was never violent and always trustworthy…His attitude to me was ‘you’ve got my sister [Parry his cousin], so you must look after me (Don McLeod in Carrigan 2003:49).

Rover Thomas was ‘quite a wag’. In kriol dialect he was a ‘benjamin’: that is a fancy man (Daniel Thomas 2003:25).

He was very proud of [himself] ‘Rover Thomas’s. He’d introduce himself to people on planes, to taxi drivers. He’d stick out his hand: ‘Rover Thomas!’ he would say. (Mary Macha in Carrigan 2003:49).

Rover, he came to Texas Downs when young man. I call him Cowboy. He nice boy, good worker. Good rider and a nice boy and a lucky one (Queenie McKenzie in Lancaster 1998).

### 4.3 Early Times – Rover Thomas: Birth

Rover Thomas lived a life full of transitions…he was nurtured in the bosom of one of Australia’s harshest environments. In the desert he played the games with other children that were the basis for the skills necessary for a successful life. Learning to read the tracks of insects and animals prepared him for his days as a hunter, as did games of speed and accuracy with rocks, ticks and small spears (Akerman 2005a).

In his late teens Rover Thomas moved from the Great Sandy Desert into this transitional conflicted world which was described in Chapter 1. Thomas was born (though this date was not officially recorded) in 1926 (Akerman 2004, Christensen 2003) on his mother’s and father’s ‘country’ at Yalda Soak (Akerman 2004, Thomas et al 1994, Hodges 2001). This was eight kilometres north west of Kunawarrijiti (Well 33) near Lake Auld on the Canning Stock Route (Map 4.1).

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13 Well 33 is known by the Aboriginals of this area as Kunawarrijiti. Kunawarrijiti is the name ascribed by Kim Akerman and author Pat Lowe, wife of Aboriginal artist Jummy Pike; other spellings include: Kunawarratji (Wilby 1989), Kukubanja (Ryan 1992), Gunawaggi (McCulloch 1999). Albert Canning blazed a post (which can be still seen) there on the 1906-7 surveying expedition and sank a well in the 1908-10 expedition. Surveyor Hubert Trotman mentions in Eleanor Smith’s book _Beckoning West: The History of H.S. Trotman_ (1966) that they were led to the site by an Aboriginal who called himself Tommy Walden (Gard 2004).
In his early years Thomas and his family were amongst the last people in the area who followed a traditional lifestyle and Thomas fondly remembered camping at Yalda Soak as a child and a young man. His father, mother and brother were buried there. This made it a site of extreme importance to Thomas. In September 1995 Thomas revisited his traditional country for the first time in over forty years. It was Yalda Soak, his birthplace that he particularly wanted to visit. The country is harsh, and the only sources of water are rock holes high on the ridges and in soaks found between the sand dunes in low lying areas (info. bio. details: Waringarri Art Centre October 2006). Akerman commented that Thomas was born very much out of ‘country’. He was born not in Kukatja ‘country,’ his mother’s traditional ‘country’ nor in Wangkajunga/Walmajarri ‘country,’ his father’s traditional country but in probably Martu ‘country’ (K. Akerman (2006, pers. comm. November 2006). Thomas’s father’s
birth or conception ‘country’, *Ngaranyjartu (Ngarinjaroo)*, was a lake with a swampy area with reeds and situated further north of Well 33 in *Walmajarri ‘country’* (P. Lowe\(^\text{14}\) (2007), pers. comm. 12 March). It would appear that his parents had moved further away from their traditional areas to avoid contact with white settlers and were therefore ‘out of ‘country’” when Thomas was born.

Thomas was born at a time when the pastoral industry was already permanently entrenched throughout the Kimberley region. In a conversation Kelly said Thomas was ‘a wild’ *Wangkajunka/Kukatja* man until the early 1940’s with little or no contact with station or town life (K. Kelly (2006), pers. comm. 8 October). During the 1940’s many *Wangkajunga* people arrived at the southern boundaries of Christmas Creek station which was some two hundred kilometres west of the salt pan desert homelands on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert. This group formed the core of the community now called Wangkatjungka which is located one hundred and twenty kilometres south east of Fitzroy Crossing (Japingka n.d.).

Even though Thomas was born in *Martu* country at Yalda Soak near Well 33 (Plate 4.3, Plate 4.4) he was brought up a traditional *Kukatja/Wangkajunga* boy. His mother’s name was Marrbi. Her skin name was *Nabaljari* (K. Akerman (2006) pers. comm. 31 October). His father, Bull Camel, was a *Wangkajunga/Walmajarri* man (Christensen 2003: 55) and his skin name was *Jararu* (K. Akerman (2006) pers. comm. 31 October). In this regard, Thomas was more closely related to the rules of *Pintupi* life.

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\(^{14}\) Pat Lowe was born in England and migrated to Australia in 1972. By then she had accumulated qualifications in English, and psychology.. She worked in community services and then Fremantle prison Pat was transferred to Broome in 1979, where she met Aboriginal artist Jimmy Pike. In 1986 the couple eloped to the Great Sandy Desert. Since then Pat and Jimmy have written and illustrated several books, three of which have been published by Magabala Books.
in Kintore, across in Western Desert country, than he was to the *Gija* or *Miriwoong* of the East Kimberley (Eccles 1997). During childhood his beliefs and values were relatively unchanged and the networks of kinship ties amongst his people were established and absorbed (Christensen 2003: 57). Attachment to ‘country’ was emphasised and fostered by his relatives.

Watson writes that many of the *Kukatja* people experienced their first encounters with Europeans in the 1940’s. Their early memories are of internecine conflict over the right to kill and eat cattle on their land. These people remember many of the men being taken by police to Halls Creek and even to Alice Springs (Watson 1999.165). People from *Kukatja*, *Walmajarri* and *Wangkajunka* language groups were some of the first to move permanently north to settlements at Balgo (Wirrimanu) and Bililuna (Kururrungku) and further west to Fitzroy Crossing (Watson 1999: 165).

Over time many Aboriginal people from the desert regions, including Thomas, were drawn towards the cattle stations that bordered their countries. For all its satisfactions the hunting and gathering lifestyle was often very harsh and the promise of reliable and plentiful supplies of food for little effort was irresistible. When first arriving at a cattle station Aboriginal people lived in camps on the fringes: hunting, poaching and often secretly receiving rations from others working on the station. Later they chose or were forced into working on these stations. News of this different life spread to the more remote areas and relations gradually followed their countrymen to these stations. In a generation the Aboriginal people from the desert regions to the south of the Kimberley all moved from their traditional areas. These stations could be said to have been both a magnet and a trap (Richards et al 2002: 2).

When Thomas first commenced painting for Waringarri Art Centre in Kununurra in 1986 (Waringarri Art Centre Files October 2006) his language group was noted down on documents as *Walmajarri* which was one of his father’s traditional
language groups. However Thomas was not a Walmajarri man (P. Lowe (2007) pers. comm. 12 March). Siobhan Casson, Language Development Officer, of the Kimberley Language Resource Centre at Halls Creek observes that often language identification by art centres was incorrect in the choice of language group and that that context has been based on the ‘country’ that is being painted rather than actual family heritage. This, she says, is not representative of the socio-cultural situation in the Kimberley region that occurs now (S. Casson (2007) pers. comm. March).

4.4 Name

He was very proud of ‘Rover Thomas’. He’d introduce himself to people on planes, to taxi drivers. He’d stick out his hand: “Rover Thomas! (Carrigan 2003: 49).

There is anecdotal evidence from Cann15 that Thomas received the name Rover when he first came to Texas Downs Station. According to Cann, Thomas ‘talk-talk’ (discussed at length) his Dreaming story which was the wild dog (Churchill Cann (2006) pers. comm. October). He was called ‘rover’, ‘roba’ or ‘ropa’16 in reference to the non-Aboriginal name for a dog (Kevin Kelly (2006) pers. comm. October and Kim Akerman (2006) pers. comm. 8 November). The name Rover for a dog was common in the Kimberley in the early 20th century (Shaw 1983: 42).

According to Kelly, Thomas’s traditional bush name was never spoken. He was always called Rover/Roba/Ropa which referred to his Dreaming site or birth site. His traditional name was Tjarntu [Kukatja] or Jaandoo which relates to the Wild Dog Dreaming and so could also have influenced his being named Rover (Kevin Kelly (2007) pers. comm. 7 February, Kim Akerman (2006) pers. comm. November). His

15 Churchill Cann is a Gija man who lives at Warmun. He was born at Texas Downs and remembers Thomas from the 1940s. He mustered cattle with Thomas. Churchill is a senior painter in the Warmun community. I was introduced and spoke to him in October 2006 and 2007 in Kununurra at Our Land Gallery.

16 Rover – European enunciation: Roper, Ropa or Roba all Kriol (Aboriginal Australian) enunciations.
conception or initiation totem was *Marlu* – the red kangaroo (Kevin Kelly (2007) pers. comm. 7 February).

Thomas’s initiation or circumcision ceremony, in the mid to late 1940’s at Bililuna, had its origins well to the south in the Western Desert. This ceremony spread into the Kimberley from the Western Desert as did most of the ceremonial cults (Crawford 1968: 116). Akerman pointed out the Thomas received the Two Man Dreaming ancestral story from his father (Kim Akerman (2006), pers. comm. 31 October) which is an important Dreaming story throughout the Western Desert and Great Sandy Desert regions.

Identification with particular cattle stations was the way of life in the East Kimberley for many Aboriginal people until the 1960’s as I described in Chapter 1. This was often reflected in many of the surnames adopted by or given to station workers. (Ryan V 2001: 192). However it was not until the 1960’s that policy was put into place by the Welfare Department that Aboriginal tribal names not be used in records and that Aboriginal surnames be anglicised; for example, Nyunma to Newman. This policy left future Aboriginal generations with a confusing trail when trying to trace relatives (Jebb 2002: 235). In an email from Linklater, she recounted a conversation with Maggie Lilly, whose husband had been the owner of Bow River Station from 1945 till 1975 (O’Kenny 2005). Maggie said that when the vote was granted to the Aboriginal people in the mid 1960’s she had to write down their names on the electoral rolls for the State and Federal Governments. At that time using only one name and usually an Aboriginal-sounding name was unacceptable to government policy and so Aboriginal people either had to anglicise their names or they made one up (Pam Linklater (2008), pers. comm. 2 February). According to Kelly Thomas chose the name Thomas because other Aboriginal people in the area who already had this surname were seen as important in the community at Texas Downs Station (Kevin Kelly (2006), pers. comm. October
2006). On the other hand, artist and friend of Thomas, Patrick Mung Mung said that when ‘he came up to this ‘country’” the name Thomas was already being used as it was ‘from down there’ (Pam Linklater (2008), pers. comm. 11 January). As he had been ‘brought up by’ by his father’s relatives, Sundowner and Lanikan Thomas, one would assume that he took the surname Thomas from Lanikan Thomas. This practice of taking the surname of the person who ‘brings one up’ is still carried on today. Jane Yalunga, Thomas’s daughter was brought up from the age of twelve by her mother Rita Tinmarie’s sister Ruby. Jane adopted the surname Yalunga which was Ruby’s husband’s surname. (Pam Linklater (2007), pers. comm. 19 December).

In my conversations with Aboriginal artists, Thomas was referred to, throughout the Warmun/Kununurra area, as ‘uncle’ as if he were somehow related, or just as ‘that old man Rover’ or just ‘Ropa’ for people who knew of him. There was a great deal of confusion as to how Thomas came by the names that he was known by.

4.5 Biographical Details - Conflict and Contention

He was always smart and well presented: very careful with his clothes, particularly with his hat. He was also a good Aboriginal, in the sense that he followed the dictates of Aboriginal law; he was never violent and was always trustworthy. He was also very charming (Don McLeod in Belinda Carrigan (2003), Rover Thomas: I want to paint exhibition catalogue, p.47).

There is a great deal of contention and misinformation about the biographical details of Thomas’s early life and the period of his working as a stockman in cattle stations before his artistic career evolved. It has been an important part of the research process to sift through the literature and contact people who were able to confirm or deny contentious or conflicting information. In Thomas’s case, this biographical information was only called on when his paintings began to appear in the art market in the mid to late 1980’s. However much of the early information was hastily gathered and often not checked. This misinformation has been used over the years rather than being corrected by research and so called ‘facts’ have become assumed. Some of the more incorrect accounts or conflicting ‘facts’ are:
• That Thomas was born in the Kintore Ranges in *Pintupi* Country (Caruana 1989, Cochrane 1998).

• That Thomas was born in c1935 (Brody 1990:102).

• That he was born in the ‘outback’ during the late 1920’s (O’Ferrall 1990).

• That he was born and died at Gunawaggi (Hossack 1998).

• That he was born at Well 33 on the Canning Stock Route in the Great Sandy Desert of Western Australia (NGV, McCulloch 1998, Akerman 2004, AIATSIS/Akerman 2005, Newstead 1999).

• Born at Kukabanja (Well 33) on the edge of the Gibson Desert (Ryan 1992)

• His mother’s name was Ngakuyipa or Nita (Caruana n.d.)

• At about 10 years old according to anthropologist Will Christensen (Christensen 2003: 57) probably after the death of his parents in the mid-1930s (Japingka Gallery n.d.), he was taken by Aboriginal stockmen, his relatives, returning from Wiluna in the south after a cattle drive, to Billiluna to learn the trade of a stockman (Akerman n.d.). Head Stockman, his uncle Sam (Jam) Lee17 (Jungkura), took him under his wing (Caruana 1989, n.d., Kleinert et al 2005).

• When he was ten years old Thomas, with his family, left the Gibson Desert and walked to Billiluna (Ryan 1992).

• He was taken from Balgo Hills as a twelve year old boy to work as a stockman in the Kimberley (Newstead 1999).

• Worked as a teenage drover before becoming a stockman on Texas Downs Station (Cochrane 1998)

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17 Sam Lee was Thomas’s full uncle. He was ‘head boy’ at Billiluna Station. He is also known and referered to in literature as Sammy Lee, Chumlee, Chumley, Jamlee
• Worked for several years as an assistant fencing contractor with Dowling in Wyndham and then in the Northern Territory (Thomas et al 1994: 4, Brody 1997: 63, Caruana 1989: n.d.). This is at odds with what Thomas says later of his time in Wyndham.

• Nyuju Stumpy Brown (b1924) (Plate 4.5), Thomas’s full sister states ‘that Chumley [an Aboriginal stockman] - took her mother, her brother [presumably Rover] and herself out of the desert…to Bililuna cattle station, one hundred and seventy kilometres south of Halls Creek, where they were given work for which they received a few clothes and food’ (Wilby 1989: 98). Was this where her mother died or was the ‘mother’ really a classificatory mother when she went with to Bililuna? Nyuju also said that severe drought forced her family to retreat north.

• Married a second time at Mabel Downs Station (McCulloch 1998).

These statements are at odds with much of what I uncovered in informal conversations with Akerman (November 2006), Kelly (October 2006 and 2007), Linklater (2006, 2007 and 2009), Macha (February 2008), Thomas’s daughter Jane Yalunga (October 2007), and Aboriginal artists Churchill Cann, Tommy Carroll, Phyllis Thomas, Nancy Nodea and June Peters in field work at Kununurra during October 2006, 2007 and 2009). These are people who knew Thomas over many years. Examination of Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Akerman and Macha’s documents and files of biographical details on Thomas was also carried out. Much of the verbal information from Kelly was recorded by Kelly in talks with Thomas. However I was not able to listen to this

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18 Kevin Kelly (Red Rock Gallery Kununurra) states that there was a lot of misinformation about Thomas’s life. However he also says that many people have approached him concerning details and that he has often been misquoted. He states that he has an interview on tape with Thomas where all these questions have been put to Thomas. He also says that he is in the process (or genesis) of writing a biography of Thomas (Kevin Kelly (2006) pers. comm. October).
recording. From my research I have been able to ascertain some authoritative biographical details:

His Birthplace:

- His birthplace was Yalda Soak, eight kilometres northwest of Kunawarrijiti (Well 33) on the Canning Stock Route. He was born ‘out of ‘country’’ in Martu country (Akerman 2006, Kelly 2006).

- In Community Health records at Kununurra his birth year is given as 1926. It is not known when this information was documented. (Kirkby 1985). Most dates of birth were not registered till after the Federal Referendum 1967 granted Aboriginal people citizenship and inclusion in the national census. In some areas the method used to establish age was to examine people’s teeth (Brody 1990:102).

- He was born in 1926 (roughly). This was ascertained by asking the question - Where were you when Broome was bombed (1944)? This was the question often asked by Government Welfare officials to ascertain the ages of older Aboriginal people in the 1950s and 1960s (Leon Stainer (2007), pers. comm. 17 October 19).

Thomas commented about his leaving Kunawarritji that he had just got ‘fluff’ on his chin, which puts his age at about twelve to thirteen years old (Kevin Kelly (2006) pers. comm. October).

Family:

- His Mothers’ name was Marbbi. She was a Kukatja woman (Hodges 2001, Kelly n.d.) however nothing further can be found about Thomas’s maternal relatives at this time.

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19 Leon Stainer Lecturer/Printmaker at Charles Darwin University went with Thomas on the trip back to Yalda Soak in 1995. He says that much of the information for Thomas’s early life comes via Roley Gibbs an Aboriginal man who accompanied them also on the trip. He says that due to Thomas’s alcohol consumption his memory was not very good especially about his early life and that Rolly knew a lot about Thomas’s early life.
• His father’s name was only known as Bull Camel. He was a *Wangkajunga* man. There was no knowledge of his Aboriginal name or how or by whom this name was given. (Hodges 2001, Kelly n.d., Stainer 2007). Aboriginal people were often given names by white people and his name possibly indicates his association with a Canning Stock Route team. Camels were used to take provisions to outlying stations from Wiluna to Wyndham.

• Both his parents died around 1938-40 as a consequence of a severe drought. They are both buried at Yalda Soak in low sand dunes (Kevin Kelly (2006), pers. comm. October, Leon Stainer (2007), pers. comm. 17 October).

• Thomas first lived with the family of his mother’s brother, Marrawarkanja Japaljarri after the death of his parents (Hodges 2001, Kelly n.d.).

• Thomas was left at Kunawarritji (Well 33) by his older brother, Charlie Brooks, (Plate 4.6) who went south to Wiluna with a droving team in the late 1930’s after the death of his parents (Mark 2007, Leon Stainer (2007), pers. comm. 17 October, Jane Yalunga (2007), pers. comm. October). Thomas had been told to wait there till his brother came back. In Thomas’s own words, according to Stainer, he was at the time ‘walking round…naked blackfella…bone buggered (extremely thin)’ (Leon Stainer (2007), pers. comm. 17 October). His brother came back to find Thomas gone. He searched up as far as Well 41 but could not find him and presumed he had died (Jane Yalunga (2007), pers. comm. October, Leon Stainer (2007), pers. comm. 17 October, Mark 2007).

• In the early 1940’s he was ‘picked up’ by drover Wally Dowling who at the time was living with Thomas’s aunty (name unknown). Dowling had specifically come south to find Thomas and take him back to Bililuna (Kururrungku) (Jane Yalunga (2007), pers. comm. October, Leon Stainer (2007), pers. comm. 17 October)
• He was ‘brought up’ or educated at Bililuna by Lanikan Thomas and Sundown, both Wankajunka men (Thomas et al 1994:4) and his father’s relatives.

• He was initiated in the mid 1940’s (McCulloch 1999) when he lived at Bililuna by a Sturt Creek man. By the age of fifteen to sixteen Thomas would have been considered a ‘full’ man and therefore this initiation probably would have been an initiation into higher cult activity (Kim Akerman (2007), pers. comm. 16 March). Thomas was to say that he was ‘born behind shed at Bililuna’ but Stainer feels that this meant that this was where he had been initiated as a man (Leon Stainer (2007), pers. comm. 17 October).

• He married his first wife, Clara, at Bow River Station (Thomas et al 1994:4, McCulloch 1998, Kelly n.d.). According to an unpublished account by Will Christensen, Clara was committed to an institution for the mentally ill in Perth in the 1960’s (Christensen 1983). She is still living in Perth. It was suggested that she was the older sister of Aboriginal artist Peggy Patrick. Peggy (b.1928) and her sister Clara spent most of their time at Bow River Station. Apparently Clara was actually Henry Wambini’s20 wife (Pam Linklater (2007), pers. comm. 19 December).

• Thomas had a son with Clara: Larry Henry. He was brought up by Henry Wambini. He was schooled at Beagle Bay (Pam Linklater (2007), pers. comm. 19 December 2007). Apparently he was killed in a car accident in the 1980’s (Christensen 1985).

20 Henry Wambini (1934-2003), Kija, skin name Jawalyi, bush name Nilmayirrinyi, born at Tickelara (45 kilometres south of Warmun). Apparently was found to have leprosy (date unknown) and was sent to the Leprosarium at Derby. He was there for 4 years. When he came back his wife Clara had been unfaithful to him and gone with his friend Rover Thomas. One reference states that he and his wife had had 3 children while another reference states that he had 2 daughters. One daughter Susan Henry lives at Crocodile Hole (Rugan Community) (Pers. Con. Pam Linklater December 2007). He was a close friend of fellow artist Jack Britten. He helped establish the community at Frog Hollow. He died February 2003 at the pensioner hostel at Warmun Community (Pam Linklater (2007), pers. comm. October).
• Thomas returned to Texas Downs in the 1960’s, from another cattle station where he had been working, and married a second time. This time to Gija woman Rita Tinmarie\textsuperscript{21} who was born at Texas Downs. They had a daughter in 1972: Jane Yalunga Nangari (Thomas et al 1994: 4). According to Aboriginal artist June Peters, Thomas’s niece, Thomas brought up Jane until she was about twelve years old. Rita became ‘sick’ with \textit{wangalu/wungalu} (mental health problems - severe depression) in June Peter’s words “in Aboriginal way someone sung her and she went mad” (Jun Peters (2007), pers. comm. October). Thomas looked after Rita until her death in 1993. He never married again (Pam Linklater (2007), pers. comm. 19 December, Pam Linklater (2008), pers. comm. 11 January).

• He had a sister Nyuju Stumpy Brown (Plate 4.5) who resides at Wangkatjungka which is south of Fitzroy Crossing. She is also a highly regarded artist.\textsuperscript{22}

• Thomas’s brother, Charlie Brooks (Plate 4.6) lived at Wiluna until his death in about 2004. He had three sons: Clifford, Trevor and Lenny and two daughters: May and Sarah. Clifford is a well-known Aboriginal artist. (Pam Linklater (2008), pers. comm. 23 January).

• Thomas’s nephew, Clifford Brooks, in an interview on ABC Radio in 2007 with David Mark about Thomas stated that:

Mr Brooks saw a photo in the paper. ‘A bloke who travelled up north saw a photo in a newspaper. He came back and he said, “Did you know that bloke with the face of that old man down the front of the paper? That’s your uncle. In about a couple of days to about a week after, I got him on the bus. Paid for his ticket’. It was the first time Mr Brook’s father and uncle had met since their youth (Mark 2007).

\textsuperscript{21} Thomas separated from his wife Rita in 1986 (Pam Linklater (2007), pers. comm. October). One of the traditional owners of the country around Texas Downs Station was Rita Tinmarie’s brother in law. He passed away in 1992. He used to be chairman of Warmun (Turkey Creek) community. Rita lived at Lolly Creek, near Texas Downs homestead, when she was young (Kelly n.d.).

\textsuperscript{22} Nyuju when asked whether Thomas was her biological brother said that he was (Linklater (2006), pers. comm. October, www.japinka.com.au)
There is no mention of when this event occurred, however one presumes that it predates Thomas’s trip back to his birthplace in 1995. Conversely in conversation, Jane Yalunga was asked if her father had ever met his brother and she said that he had not (Jane Yalunga (2007), pers. comm. October 2007). So even between family members there is conflicting information.

Work – Cattle Stations:

- In the late 1930’s or early 1940’s Thomas, who was about twelve or thirteen years old, was ‘picked up’ by drover Wally Dowling to be one of his ‘Aboriginal boys’ in his droving team. This meeting with Wally Dowling marked the beginning of Thomas’s contact with the non-Aboriginal (kartiya) world (Kevin Kelly (2006), pers. comm. Oct 2006). Eubena Nanpitjin, a Kukatja/Purtitjarra/Mantjiytyjarra/Wangkajungka, whose ‘country’ is around Well 35 on the Canning Stock Route in an interview on ABC radio said:

  The bushmen didn't like Wally Dowling because he used to take away their wives. Do that, or whip them with a whipping rope. I had another two girls with Wally Dowling. One passed away and another is still alive somewhere (Mark 2007).

Many who knew Thomas said he liked Wally Dowling very much and was quite saddened when he died in 1959. Thomas worked with other Aboriginal men such as George Wallaby (1930-2006) and Billy Thomas (1920-) who were in Dowling’s team (Kevin Kelly (2006), pers. comm. October). Billy Thomas met up with Thomas who was then a young boy filling water buckets at Kunawarritji (Well 33). The two worked together on and off during their time on the Canning Stock Route (National Gallery of Victoria n.d.).
Thomas’s subsequent move to Bililuna\textsuperscript{23} in the early 1940’s as a drover’s boy for Wally Dowling came after the death of his father, Bull Camel and his mother, Marrbi and also an unnamed brother. This work would not have been a full time occupation and he probably lived for some of this time at Bililuna under the auspices of Lanikan Thomas and Sundown, both \textit{Wangkajunga} men. (Thomas et al1994:4).

He worked at different cattle stations during this period mustering and droving cattle. One of the first stations he worked at was Bow River under manager Sam Lilly. Bow River was an important meeting place for stockmen in the early days and Aboriginal stockmen from Bow River, Texas Downs, and Lissadell stations all used to meet there (Kelly n.d.)

During his time with Wally Dowling in the 1940’s and 1950’s, Thomas also worked at Texas Downs under station manager Jim Kline. Texas Downs Station was where Thomas was given his name ‘Rover’. Thomas worked at Texas Downs on several occasions for a total of nine years (Thomas et al 1994: 4). Here he met Cann whose father was head stockman. He did mustering and droving jobs. Cann says he remembered Thomas well. He says that Thomas was a “little bit lazy sometimes” (Churchill Cann (2006), pers. comm. October) and that Thomas had helped drive one thousand five hundred head of cattle to Manbulloo (Akerman 2005).

After the death of Wally Dowling in the late 1950’s Thomas was employed by Harry Parker loading trucks at the Port in Wyndham. He accompanied Parker on trips to Queensland to get supplies (Kelly n.d.). Unfortunately there are no dates

\textsuperscript{23}Bililuna (Kururrungku) in the 1940s was then a cattle station and was a cross roads where many Aboriginal people from different backgrounds congregated or passed through. Many ‘meetings’ of importance occurred: ceremonies and initiations.
for this information which Kelly told me had come directly from Thomas (Kevin Kelly (2006), pers. comm. October).

• Thomas went back and did stock work at Bow River Station, after his time with Parker. Six years later when manager Sam Lilly retired, Thomas moved to Argyle Station and worked for Manager Peter Ogden for four years (Kelly n.d.).

• Thomas worked at Old Lissadell Station which was owned by the Durack family (Thomas et al 1994.4). He also moved to Mabel Downs cattle station for about a year (Akerman 2005).

• He finally worked at Texas Downs till equal wages were introduced and like many Aboriginal workers was forced to leave his job.

• After leaving Texas Downs he went to Wyndham to Nine Mile Creek (Guda Guda) Aboriginal camp in the early 1970’s (Pam Linklater (2008), per. comm. 31 January). According to Henry Wambini and Jack Britten who spoke to Pam Linklater about this time, they went there because they were given ‘sit down money’ (welfare money: unemployment benefits). There were lots of problems there: ‘grog’ (alcohol), fights and little work. They said ‘it was a ‘bad’ place’.

• Jane, his daughter was born at Wyndham Hospital in 1972 whilst the family was living at Nine Mile Creek camp (Jane Yalunga (2007), pers. comm. October).

• The Thomas family returned to Texas Downs Station sometime late in 1972 because conditions at Nine Mile Creek camp were so bad (Jane Yalunga (2007), pers. comm. October).

• When the station manager Jim Kline at Texas Downs became ill and left in 1973, the Aboriginal camp closed down and that was when Thomas and his family moved to Turkey Creek (Warmun). The family helped establish Bottom Camp at Turkey Creek. Unlike many he did not go back to his traditional
country and communities, but chose to stay in *Gija/Mirirwoong* ‘country’ (Kelly n.d.).

### 4.6 Move to Warmun (Turkey Creek)

There was a core of mainly older people who had decided to settle there. It was on an old stock route, and wasn’t part of a pastoral lease…There was a roadhouse and an old post office, which was closed, there were people living all around, in tin huts and car bodies, and in houses made from bush materials, Spinifex. Fairly rough conditions! [mid 1970s](Don McLeod cited in Carrigan 2003: 47)

The social dislocation that occurred was severe as different language communities were forced together after leaving the cattle station life. Coombs points out that with traditional lands a long way away Aboriginal men and women began to lose language and culture. This had a tremendous psychological impact as it left people without continuous access to their traditional lands, without jobs, and at first without incomes (Coombs et al 1989). Aboriginal July Oakes (1918-1982), in an interview with Shaw in 1973, talks about the interaction of people in Kununurra after Aboriginal people from the stations came into town:

> People don’t like other people who drink and go silly. That’s in every town. In Wyndham and Derby the native people can’t talk to the white people. Here they can. People of Kununurra like the native people and they behave well…The old people have been frightened by the white man and kept down so long. They have to wait for white people to tell them what to do. On the other hand the half-caste people go forward (Shaw 1992: 293).

As a consequence of the unemployment, diaspora and social changes resulting from the equal pay ruling of the 1968 Thomas in the early to mid-1970’s settled at Warmun (Turkey Creek). This was a Government-assisted Aboriginal settlement some two hundred and eighty kilometers south of Kununurra on the main road between Kununurra and Broome (Plate 4.7). Turkey Creek had been established in 1887 as a half-way place for the changing and watering of horses and camels on the long trek between Wyndham and the Halls Creek goldfield (V.Ryan 2001: 47). It then became a ration station in 1901.
When the Texas Downs camps closed down in 1973 the Thomas family made their way to the Turkey Creek Reserve (Akerman 2005a). Thomas was about fifty years old at this time (Brody 1997: 63). Warmun was set up as a result of Gija people from Violet Valley Station securing Government assistance to establish a community. During the wet season Turkey Creek (Warmun) was a culturally significant place where people met for ceremonial purposes. The name ‘Warmun’ (or Warrman) is the name Aboriginal people used for a sacred site that exists at this place (MacLeod 1997). The area set aside for the settlement was an excision from Mabel Downs Station. The people in the area acknowledge that Bob Nyalcas, a Gija elder, was the one who founded the settlement. He was the traditional owner of the land (MacLeod 1997).

Initially the settlement was a series of camps strung out along the creek with a core of older Aboriginal people. There was a roadhouse and an old post office which was closed. At Warmun Aboriginal people were housed in localities that roughly corresponded with the directions of the ‘country’ with which they had traditional associations (Map 4.2). People who lived at Top Camp to the south of Warmun came from the Bungle Bungle (Purnululu) area. Texas Downs people were housed to the east while Bow River people were housed at Bottom Camp to the north and Mabel Downs people in Middle Camp (Kim Akerman (2006) pers. comm. 7-8 November).
At Warmun, *Gija, Worla, Miriwoong, Jaru* and other Aboriginal people were forced into an uneasy co-existence (Storer 2006: 19). In July 1977 Warmun (Plate 4.8), then still called Turkey Creek, was officially designated as an Aboriginal community (Lacey 2007: 50). It was established as a permanent living area and received its first fulltime non-Aboriginal community advisor.

As an official Aboriginal reserve Warmun was controlled by the residents. This gave the people the right to limit and restrict access by non-residents. They also designated Warmun an alcohol free community (Kjellgren 1999: 99). It was and still is administered by Warmun Community Council.

During the early 1980’s according to Kirkby, Thomas was separated from his wife Rita and spent half his time at Emu Creek outstation, ten kilometres east of Kununurra. He then moved back to Warmun but was to live for periods at Frog Hollow.
in 1987 and 1988 (Map 4.3). However, his principal place of living was still at Warmun (Ian Kirkby (2007), pers. comm. 9 October). After the death of his wife in 1993 Thomas had a house near the old Top or Garden Camp to the south of the town.

Akerman points out that Thomas had little opportunity to go back to the desert region where he was born as it was too difficult a journey unless transported by white people with cars. It was only in the 1980’s when site surveys, land claims and outstation development provided some Aboriginal people, who by this stage often had cars, the opportunity to visit their old homelands. Akerman says that for Thomas ‘the bright lights were the right lights’. He was cosmopolitan and saw no need to return. Akerman believes that it was a case of ‘how we think Aboriginal people should behave in terms of their ‘country’ and how they do behave’ (Kim Akerman (2007), pers. comm. 7 March 2007). Western perceptions of attachment to ‘country’ are in stark contrast with Aboriginal views of ownership.

In September 1995 Thomas revisited his ‘country’ and birthplace at Yalda Soak with a group of Aboriginal and white people (Plate 4.9). It was a very difficult trip for him as his health had begun to fail. He had suffered a series of minor strokes in 1994 (Monger 1996: 8). Also in the previous years his eyesight was deteriorating due to the serious eye condition: trachoma. When approached about an operation on his eyes he had refused. However, just prior to the visit back to his birth place, he agreed, saying that he wanted to “see his ‘country’, one time properly” (Kevin Kelly (2006), pers, comm. October 2006).

Thomas painted images of Turkey Creek (Warmun) many times throughout his painting career which highlighted his deep attachment to the town and surrounding area. The painting, *Turkey Creek* 1985, is an example of this (Plate 4.10). The painting showed the Great Northern Highway as the black dotted edged line on the left of the painting and the two roads that come off it to get to the settlement. The black area on
the right referenced the hill country to the east of Turkey Creek and Texas Downs Station where he spent much of the last thirty years (O’Ferrall 1989: 13). Thomas’s intimate knowledge of the roadways and landscape using a mindscape understanding of country is clearly demonstrated in this painting, rather than a Western notion of topography. This work represents changes which occurred in the concept of what was a ‘traditional’ Aboriginal painting. Aboriginal art was seen at this time to be about representations of ancestral stories and traditional iconography of ‘country’. This painting’s content, using current white settler’s roads (Plate 4.11) to represent one’s ‘country’, was truly innovative.

It was at Warmun that Thomas ‘found’ the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* in the mid-1970s an event that profoundly changed his life story. This will be explored more fully in Chapter 5.

### 4.7 Final days

I am very proud of my father [Rover Thomas], of his paintings and all the stories he has left behind for me and my grandchildren (Jane Yalunga in Rover Thomas: I want to paint: 2004).

Thomas died mute and emaciated in the early morning hours of Easter Sunday 12th April, 1998 in Walumba Aged Care Hostel at Warmun after a series of strokes less than twenty years after making his first painting (Eccles 1998). He had been at the hostel for about a year (Ron Barton (2008), pers. comm. 10 January 2008). Macha paid for his headstone and Akerman wrote his epitaph (Kim Akerman (2006), pers. comm. 14 March 2006). His brother Charlie Brooks and his daughter Jane Yalunga helped with the story on his headstone and Jane travelled to Perth to pick up the headstone (Jane Yalunga (2007) pers. comm. October 2007).

Prior to his death Thomas often would motion to his carers that he wanted to sleep outside so his bed would be taken to the verandah (Ron Barton (2008), pers. comm. 10 January 2008). McKenzie said in 1997:
(Now) I sit on veranda and talk to Cowboy, tell 'im things... that Rover quiet boy now. We just push 'im round in wheelchair now. No more riding buckjumpers (Lancashire 1998).

He had been painting until the year before but only managed to half complete three paintings. These were picked up by his family when his belongings were given away (Ron Barton (2008), pers. comm. 10 January 2008).

Kinship ties and their related obligations are very highly valued in Aboriginal society. It is a way for members of a group to know ‘who is straight’ for them as a possible spouse. Of his ‘sickness’ Thomas was to say that he had come to believe that he had been ‘sung’ because of his marrying a Gija woman who was the ‘wrong skin’ (Eccles 1997a). According to Aboriginal people at Warmun Thomas’s skin name Julama (wild dog) which is a Miriwoonga skin name, was the wrong skin name to marry his wife Rita whose skin name was Nangala (Mark Nodea (2006), pers. comm. October). In some traditional Aboriginal societies it is still a serious offence to marry outside the intermarrying moiety which in Gija society is referred to as Jalinyparu (Ryan, V 2001: 95). However as Akerman points out there are many wrong-way marriages. However there were mechanisms to accommodate them with varying levels of sanctions applied for varying lengths of time (Kim Akerman (2006), pers. comm. November 2006).

Of his funeral his daughter said that a ‘big mob came up for his funeral from all over’ (Jane Yalunga (2007), pers. comm. October). His family came up from Jigalong, Wiluna and Fitzroy Crossing (Plate 4.12); ‘they were strong dignified people’ (Ron Barton (2008), pers. comm. 11 January 2008).

His daughter, Jane Yalunga, said of him after his death:

He was one of the first artists with old uncle Paddy Jaminji to paint that way with ochre and bush paint. We are proud of what he has done and how he has become an important Australian artist. All Australians will remember him through his painting (Jane Yalunga in Rover Thomas: I want to Paint 2004).

The translated inscription on Thomas’s grave (Plate 4.13) reads:

Remembrance in the desert.
Our place Yalda Well 33 Kunawarrji. This was the place where we lived and walked about Punmu, Parnngurr, Windilli, Rockhole, Walla Walla, Junda Junda and Wadjaka Wadjaka is the place where we met up with our parents. I was a young fella and my brother was a young child. My brother never went to Jigalong, he was in the desert. I went on a walkabout to the west of these places. I went to Jigalong because the mission opened. When in the 1930s around that time when I came back to get my families I found out that my parents had passed away and I couldn’t find my young brother anywhere but in my heart I knew I would find him someday. It was in 1995 my three sons went to Kunawarrji, Well 33. They saw my young brother there. When they told me that I cried my dreams has come true (Translation: Mary Macha files February 2008).

These are the words and the life story of Thomas’s brother, Charlie Brooks. It reflects the fractured life of people from the desert regions as this inscription corroborates the timeframe of Thomas’s leaving the desert region and travelling north into the East Kimberley. It expresses the sadness and heartache that families felt when separated and the long years before families were reunited. In this case Thomas and his brother Charlie never met.

In the next chapter, discussion will centre on Thomas’s ‘finding’ the Kurri Kurri ceremony which had its genesis in different areas of the Kimberley and the desert regions. This ceremony underpins the story of his life and can be seen as a product of Thomas’s hybridity. The formation of the distinctive Warmun painting style is a direct consequence of this ceremony and its ceremonial paraphernalia. The chapter explores the origins of Thomas’s painting.
(Plate 4.2). Rover Thomas signature on document (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts; Rover Thomas file, 2006).


(Plate 4.6). Charlie Brooks – Thomas’s older brother who left him at Well 33 in the late 1930s (Image: photographer unknown; date unknown: Jane Yalunga Collection).

(Plate 4.7). Settlement at Turkey Creek (Warmun) 25 April 1979 (Image: Kim Akerman)

(Plate 4.9). Rover Thomas (blue shirt) and other (possibly Rolly Gibbs) at Yalda Soak in 1995 (Image: Kevin Kelly, Waringarri Aboriginal Arts files, October 2007).

(Plate 4.10). Rover Thomas *Turkey Creek (Corroboree Painting)* 1985, 24” x 34”, ochres and natural binders on plywood, Private Collection (Image: Mary Macha files Perth, February 2008).

(Plate 4.11). Great Northern Hwy approaching Warmun (Turkey Creek) (Image: Catherine Carr June 2005).

(Plate 4.12). Rover Thomas’ s family at funeral wake in Warmun. They came up from Jigalong and Well 33 to attend his funeral in 1998 (Image: photographer unknown: Jane Yalunga Collection).

CHAPTER 5: ROVER THOMAS AND THE KURIRR KURIRR CEREMONY
Previous Page: (Plate 5.1). Performance of Kurrr Kurrr ceremony at Turkey Creek in November 1979. Rover Thomas is standing on the far left with hat and red kerchief (Image: Kim Akerman)
5.1 Introduction: Genesis of Painting

…the Kurrirr Kurrirr corroboree, it is important to remember, was open [public]: it was essentially entertainment. And it was a very popular entertainment, like a musical would be for whitefellas. The boards were needed for the corroboree (Mary Macha (2006), pers. comm. 26 March).

These ceremonial paintings are now key historical works that document a local art history at the moment just prior to its recognition by the wider world (Taylor 1999: 4).

In this chapter I will be examining the importance of ceremonial practice and especially the role of the Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremony (Plate 5.2) in the development of Thomas’s painting practice. Emphasis will be on the emergence, depiction and pivotal role this ceremony played in the translation of ceremonial paraphernalia into contemporary painting. This individual ‘Dreaming’ introduced by Thomas, while not unusual in the Kimberley, was not a common style of ceremonial practice in the desert regions where Thomas was born and spent his early years (Akerman 1999: 22). His paintings in the early 1980’s were produced by an interlinking of the traditional knowledge of Dreaming stories to a contemporary and innovative view of the role colonisation and how the historical events played out in the lives of the Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley. Thomas’s innovative ochre paintings arose from a fusion of elements of ceremonial practice with local rock art styles. They also reflect a great personal change over the course of his life.

According to Kjellgren none of the languages of the East Kimberley had (or has) a word for ‘art’. He claimed that there was no real distinction between ‘art’ and ‘material culture’. However Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley today define utilitarian as items such as coolamon, spears, boomerangs as ‘material culture’. Rock images, sculpture and paintings associated with individual ‘countries’ and Dreaming stories have a greater spirituality and can be related to the western notion of ‘art’ (Kjellgren 1999:104, Berndt 1963: 256). When looking at Aboriginal ‘artefacts’ much of the constructs of what constitutes ‘art’ were solely related to perceptions of non-
Aboriginal researchers (like myself) and the Western art world. However, these art objects, sculpture, paintings and rock art were products of a diverse social context within Aboriginal cultures.

Initial responses to Aboriginal ‘art’ by European settlers in the 19th century were to class this work as ‘primitive’, with little or no material value (Godden and Malnic 1982:6). Later ethnographers and anthropologists recorded information about how Aboriginal societies worked. In the late 19th century ethnographers such as Gillen and Spencer collected and collated artefacts, and explored beliefs and relationships within individual Aboriginal societies. Initially ‘settler’ artists in the 19th century stayed within their Western art traditions and it has only been since the 1950’s that artists in Australia and worldwide have concerned themselves with the visual aesthetic of Aboriginal art forms (Morphy 2008:4). Much of what has been presented in the media and on the television concerning Aboriginal art has been written from anthropologists’ viewpoints where meaning was seen as a part of the whole expression of the particular Aboriginal society. However many contemporary Aboriginal artists expressed individual ideas and values developed from impact with non-Aboriginal societies. Albert Namatjira’s work was an example of this. These paintings did form a somewhat tenuous link with older expressions of ‘art’ such as rock painting and body-painting as well as being related to current societal influences.

In Aboriginal art for an object to be ritually ‘effective’ it must be recognised by its audience, that is, a stylised representation of a specific aspect of religious and spiritual knowledge. In pre-contact times, according to Stanton, it was assumed that any Aboriginal art had a primary religious relevance (Stanton 1989: 5). He pointed out that there was always a degree of innovation as part of the artistic interpretation of Dreaming stories but that innovation was constrained by the need for group acceptance of any changes to form. Since European contact Aboriginal people’s lives have been
characterised by deprivation and dislocation, however through painting a continuation of beliefs has been sustained. This has been especially true for Thomas and his fellow artists in the East Kimberley where painting has allowed for the maintenance of a relationship with their own ‘countries’.

5.2 Ceremonial Paraphernalia: East Kimberley

An important aspect to understanding the development of the painting movement that occurred in and around Warmun in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s is the type and use of ceremonial paraphernalia used in corroborees in the region. McCarthy observed the use of complex circular patterns of twine on stick frames in the Kimberley. These were worn on the heads of performers in ceremonies throughout the area (Plate 5.3). Also he had seen the use of engraved boards placed in rows on the ceremonial grounds. By contrast he noted the use of wide engraved boards (up to six metres in length) being featured in ceremonies in the desert regions to the south in Western Australia. And in the north at Groote Eylandt he had witnessed the use of painted boards (McCarthy 1978:27, 1976:258).

The use of thread crosses (Plate 5.4) as reported by Akerman spread into the Kimberley from the Pilbara region in the south around the turn of the 20th century. These thread crosses were never restricted to the secret-sacred as in other areas of Australia because they were not restrained by religious conventions (Akerman 1999: 23). There was much experimentation and as a consequence complex thread cross dancing forms led to one form of art known as ilma in the northwest Kimberley. Aboriginal artist Roy Wiggan’s ilma are sought now by collectors and art museums worldwide (Plate 5.5).

The development and hybridization of ceremonial artifacts, chiefly the large thread edged boards which were used throughout the Kimberley region, lie at the heart
of the development of the painting school and in particular the ceremony that Thomas ‘dreamt’: the Kurirr Kurirr.

5.3 The Kurirr Kurirr Ceremony: Background

...I bin find ‘im that corroboree now me, him [oldwoman] bin give it to me. From there, where I go anywhere, he [she] always be there, all with me, for old woman (Thomas et al 1994: 23).

The early paintings of Thomas and many other Gija/Miriwoong painters owed much of their genesis to the Kurirr Kurirr ceremony. The Kurirr Kurirr has been described as a balga/palga or ‘everyday’ dance by social anthropologist Erich Kolig in 1981 (Stanton 2007: 240) and also by Akerman as ‘a narrative dance cycle’ (Akerman 1989: 164) or a ‘public camp ceremony’ (Taylor 1999:4). An early example of a balga was noted by ethnographer Professor Helmet Petri who was a member of the 1937-8 Frobenius Expedition. This ceremony (Plate 5.6) centered on the emergence of the pastoral industry in the region and featured dancers dressed as bullocks with ‘horns’ attached to their heads (Stanton 2007: 241).

The balga were a feature of Aboriginal ritual life in the Kimberley: such as the 1920’s Pelican Song Cycle by Butcher Joe Nangan a Nyigina man from Broome

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24 Gija/Miriwoong: refer to Glossary: Gija (Gidja, Kitja, Kija, Lungga): Dominant language group traditionally found in the Warmun/ Halls Creek area. Miriwoong (Miriwong, Miriwung): The main language group which traditionally held territory centring on the Ord River Valley, Argyle Downs Station and Newry and Ivanhoe Stations. The spelling, Miriwoong, is preferred by Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre, Kununurra W.A. (Tindale preferred spelling-Miriwung). I have joined these groups as Thomas a Kukatja/Wangkajunka man who lived in Gija country but he was given a Miriwoong skin name therefore these two language group areas are interlinked in his life.

25 There are many spellings of Kurirr Kurirr ceremony: early versions include Krill Krill, Gril Gril, Kuril Kuril (Wally Caruana), Goorirr Goorirr (Eric Kjellgren), Krilkiril (Will Christensen) or Kurirkiril (Ian Kirby). I will be using Kurirr Kurirr. Both Kim Akerman and Kevin Kelly stated that non-Aboriginal people have great difficulty in saying the word Kurirr Kurirr as the first set of ‘r’s are rolled by the tongue and sound like K’reel K’reel. As to spelling they agreed that Kurirr Kurirr was as close as one could get.

26 Nyigina: language group related to the Bardi language group North-west Kimberley – Derby, Long Arm Point.
(Plate 5.7); the 1970 *Wanalirri* by Wattie Ngerdu, a *Worora*\(^{27}\) man from Mowanjum (Plate 5.8); the 1975 *Cyclone Tracy* by Geoffrey Mangalamara, a *Wunambal*\(^{28}\) man from Kalumbaru (Plate 5.9); and the 1975 *Kurrirr Kurrirr* by Thomas a *Kukatja/Wangkajunka* (Akerman 1999:22). Akerman says that these types of balga were often created by people from ‘countries’ other than the one that is the topic of the song; for example, *Cyclone Tracy* was about Darwin but composed by a *Wunambul* man, or the *Wanalirri (Wandjina)* which was composed by a *Worora* man about events in *Ngarinyin*\(^{29}\) country.

The props and paraphernalia used in these balga were quite varied. Depending on the subject of the balga, objects such as weapons and everyday items such as digging sticks were used. Often the gender of a person was denoted by what object was used: a scarf over the head denoted a woman, a spear or a spear thrower indicated a man.

A standard feature of ceremonial performances in the east and central Kimberley was the semicircular painted board with edged threadwork (Plate 5.8 Plate 5.9, Plate 5.10). The likeness of the beings associated with the theme of the corroboree were painted on the wooden central section of thread cross emblems. This is graphically seen in the *Wanalirri* board (Plate 5.8). Initially these central horizontal sections were rather narrow (Plate 5.11). The threadwork detail on the edges of both boards in Plate 5.10 and Plate 5.11 symbolized the clouds preceding the cyclone. Both these ceremonial boards were used in the *Cyclone Tracy* ceremony. The snake painted on the Plate 5.11 board depicts a Rainbow Serpent swimming in the sea and pushing the cyclone towards the coast (Akerman 1999:22). In this performance on the dance ground a central

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\(^{27}\) *Worora*: language group: Worora, Wororra, Unggumi - Collier Bay area of North West Kimberley closely related to *Ngarinyin* language.

\(^{28}\) *Wunambul*: traditional owners of the land in the Mitchell Plateau and Kalumbaru regions in the central northern area of the Kimberley

\(^{29}\) *Ngarinyin*: language group: *Ngarinyin, Ungarinyin, Ungarinjin* – related to *Worora* language – Derby to King River in the western Kimberley.
construction covered with branches and leaves, or a painted sheet was provided as a screen behind which the performers waited for their cue (Akerman 1999:23).

The style of public song and dance cycles of a particular rhythm and melodic line are called joonba(djunba) or palga/balga by most Kimberley people, including the Gija/Miriwoong people (Storer 2006: 137). Balga/joonba songs are distinguished by their distinctive intertwining of male and female vocal harmonies, always underpinned by the rhythm of the clap sticks. The songs all have a story to tell; some light-hearted, some serious, some of contemporary contents, others passed down through the generations (www.manikay.com).

The Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremony was to play an important role in the formation of the East Kimberley art movement. Similar types of public ceremony have been rather transitory. However the Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremony remained a major focus for several decades in the Warmun community (Christenson 2003: 59). It is now only performed intermittently. A performance was held at Warmun in October 2006 at the funeral of artist Hector Jandany.

A widespread observance amongst Aboriginal people was that a person’s name was not mentioned after death. However the memory of that person often featured in ceremonial contexts at a later time. Spirits of the dead were known to visit and communicate information mostly to relatives, in the form of stories, songs and ritual information (Voigt and Drury 1997:181). This individual form of ‘Dreamed’ or ‘found’ ceremony was a feature of the Northern and Eastern Kimberley but not a regular feature of ritual ceremony in the areas south of Warmun in the Great Sandy Desert, where Thomas was born and initiated. There is a form of individual Dreaming which is confined to men and described in the Walpiri and Pintupi desert societies which is used in camp ceremonies (bulaba). This type of ceremony appears to share some similarities with the Kimberley form of individual dreaming. The song and dances performed are
for public entertainment similar to the Kurrr Kurrir ceremony (Plate 5.12). The designs used in the bulaba were believed to have no specific aims beyond general entertainment. This ceremony was attended by women and children but the ceremony was prepared and performed by men (Munn 1986:53).

These ritual models prevailed and remained constant; ngarrangkani/tjukurrpa (Dreaming) traditions (Ryan 1993:42). Ngarrangkarni became the basis of Gija law and religious activity. It described the actions of the ancestors, who had emerged from the land and who created its features and origins of the events that were preserved in the law and the landscape to this day (Watson et al 2003). Myers writes that with respect to the landscape:

‘History…is incorporated into the unchanging ever present features of the physical landscape’.

He refers to this process as:

... transforming the landscape into narrative...For each individual the landscape becomes a history of significant social events. Geography serves, it would seem, as a signifier of experiences; previous events become attached to places and are recited as one moves across the country’ (Myers1986: 68).

So, in the case of the Kurrr Kurrir balga Thomas fused song, dance and image (boards) with the ancestral stories, the recent post-colonial history of the East Kimberley and his personal stories. Morphy stated that paintings used in rituals appeared to have the same kinds of performative significance as insignia in our own society:

Many implicit sociological meanings can be inferred from the use of paintings in ritual. These are connected with the ownership of painting and land and ways in which clans are allied. The use of painting may also, in certain circumstances, signify an affiliation of individuals to a particular clan or set of clans (Morphy 1991:136)

Taylor commented that although Thomas’s life was characterised by disruption and deprivation he maintained an active and cohesive ceremonial and religious life in his ‘adopted’ ‘country’. He was initiated into the major ceremonies of the region and learnt the stories of specific sites in the region (Taylor 1999:5). Akerman said Thomas’s
art allowed him to maintain a relationship with both his own ‘country’ and ‘adopted’ ‘country’ (Kim Akerman (2006), pers. comm. 16 March 2006).

5.4 Finding the Kurrirr Kurrirr

Kunnyang ningumara anjaku nyinkula Tawurrkurima


After the devastation of Darwin by cyclone Tracy on Christmas Eve in 1974 Thomas had a series of revelatory ‘visitations’ which culminated in the ‘finding’ of the Kurrirr Kurrirr. Thomas had his Dreaming visitation in early 1975 from the spirit of Yawayimiyaka Nakarra, a Gija/Worla woman, his classificatory mother. She had recently died after sustaining injuries in a motor vehicle accident at a creek crossing south of Warmun (Akerman 1989:165). This woman is not named in the Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremony but her identity is well known to the people of Warmun and related communities (Christensen 1992: 3). The woman was a classificatory sister to Jaminji and he was Thomas’s classificatory uncle. She was returning home to Doon Doon (Dunham River Station), to the north of Warmun, from Halls Creek (Kirkby 1985 unpublished notes). The car skidded on a road flooded by wet season rains intensified by cyclone Tracy. Initially the woman was taken to Wyndham Regional Hospital in a critical condition. She was then transferred to Royal Perth Hospital (Christensen 1983). However the old woman died while being transported to Perth by the Royal Flying Doctor Service (Stanton 1989:11). Thomas was to say of the event:

The car. They bin went to Mabel Downs. That kartiya [white man] bin tell him “Big rain run in front. Big in the front, front of you mob. And now you got to go through,” old John Davis where him bin in Mabel Downs Station. Him bin say “Big rain on front”’ John bin say. [They said] “Ah, we’ll be all right. We’ll manage. We’ll be all right. We’ll manage. No trouble. No worries.” Well, they went there where accident bin goin’ because they never believe that old kartiya. Manager in Mabel Downs. (Kjellgren 1999:169).

At the time of her death, the plane was apparently almost over a dreaming site, associated with the Rainbow Serpent Tawurrkurima/Tjintiripul, in the Indian Ocean
near Derby. Christensen says that the story that she had died immediately above the whirlpool was only ever stated once when he was first told the story. It was never repeated nor was it refuted (Christensen 1992:5). Christensen pointed out that the agency of the Rainbow Serpent was made quite explicit by Aboriginal informants, that it had caused the road accident fatally injuring the old woman (Christensen 1983). The Rainbow Serpent was seen as a powerful but unpredictable factor not just in the past but in everyday life.

The old woman’s spirit, on a number of occasions, came to Thomas as he slept, each time giving him more songs relating to her travels. Thomas, in an interview with Christensen in the early 1980’s, said that when the woman’s spirit came to him it said:

I’ve been come back. I’ve been fall down. I’ve been in accident in Warmun. I’ll give you this name” She then asked him “what sort of corroboree you want – balga, wangka [corroboree]? I’ll give you one. I’ll give you name That’s why I give you this darralgu [?story]. Got to call this one – junction – Wungkur [ancestral snake]. That’s where that snake tangled up the motor car. We never knew that blackfella name (Christensen 1983: 1).

In the 1994 exhibition catalogue, Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas there was an account recorded in 1990 prior to Thomas travelling to the Venice Biennale. He describes the circumstances in which he received the Kurrirr Kurrirr (Thomas et al 1994:22). This is reproduced in Appendix III.

The songs given to or ‘found’ by Thomas follow the journey of the woman from the Dreaming site near Derby, the place of her death, back to her own country. She is accompanied on the journey by other spirits (juwarri/juari) or Devil Devil; Jimpi an old woman, long deceased from Dunham River (Plate 5.13) and Manginta an elderly woman spirit from Mt Cockburn (Manginta) near Wyndham (Caruana 2003: 176). The Devil Devil instructs the newly deceased woman on the names and songs of the ‘countries’ and sites they view along the journey. This journey encompasses most of the Kimberley area. Many of the song verses make a topographic reference to Thomas’s
personal work history and journeying along droving tracks throughout the East Kimberley (Rumsey 1994).

The songs (see Appendix IV) given to Thomas about the sites seen by the old woman and the Devil Devil are said to be in the relevant language for those places: Ngaringin, Gija, Worla, and Miriwoong. Thus any accusations by Aboriginals from these different language areas of ‘misappropriations’ of cultural and ritual stories were negated (Akerman 1999:24). Most Kimberley people were multilingual and the use of language shifts in ceremonial songs was used to acknowledge other territorial sites outside one’s own ‘country’ (Akerman 1999:23). The fact that Thomas and Jaminji could never offer exact translations for most of the songs underscores their belief that the knowledge relating to the sites was pre-existing and not the product of human discovery or invention. Previously unknown site names were not seen as ‘new’ but as ‘blackfella names’ which had been there all along waiting to be ‘found’ (Akerman 1999: 23, Christensen 1983: 2, Christensen 1993:33).

Jandany, who died in 2006, was a senior Gija man and described the ‘visitations’ Thomas had:

Yeah, he bin come for Rover (Thomas) now. He bin come tellim that Rover, “Well, my boy, I gotta give song about Warmun.” He bin saying like that, that dead woman. “I’ll show you my corroboree make when I was have accident in Warmun station. I make up for you. You can makim to sing, Sing a song of me for the Warmun. I couldn’t go anywhere (except to?) you. He had to come to Rover. Tellim make song of him. Shadow for him. Spirit for him I think. That’s why him bin make that Kurrirr Kurrirr (Kjellgren 2001: 355).

In discussions with Akerman concerning the process by which he acquired the details of the woman’s journey Thomas said that:

… he experienced it, and the events that occurred as it progressed, in ‘re-run’ form as the spirit recounted her tale. That is he too saw the places and characters involved in the saga, as she described them (Akerman 1999: 24).

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30 The Kriol term ‘he’ is gender neutral, and is used to refer to individuals of either sex. Kriol is a distinct language with its own grammar and conventions.
Aboriginal people in the Kimberley saw Darwin as the seat of power of non-Aboriginals. The agency of the Rainbow Serpent in the old woman’s death was made quite explicit in explanations of the Kurirr Kurirr, as was its role in the destruction of Darwin. Each reference or allusion to the Rainbow Serpent underlined its continuing direct significance to the people of north east Kimberley. Its existence and power were known to all, although not necessarily all its ritual and mythological details. The potency of the Rainbow Serpent was seen as relevant and not confined to the past. It was also seen as a not entirely predictable factor in everyday life (Christensen 1983:6).

The Rainbow Serpent’s (Wungurr) assault on Darwin, in the guise of cyclone Tracy (Plate 5.14), was seen by Aboriginal people in the region as retribution and the culmination of a century of European encroachment on their land and culture. It was also judged by local people that Darwin was a place where language, culture and social mores had been diluted and even disregarded (Sansom 2001:19). Cyclone Tracy, as the manifestation of Wungurr, was therefore seen as a potent sign that Aboriginal culture and law was still powerful and relevant and that the Aboriginal people had a strong connection and rights to the land (www.nga.gov.au). They believed that because Wungurr was disturbed by the decline in traditional spiritual and cultural life he exacted retribution from those who had caused this to occur (Caruana 1989:164). The resulting effects of the introduction of this ceremony saw a rebirth in traditional ceremonial life in the Kimberley.

Stanton reported that this type of ceremony was made possible because of transmitted cultural devices through customary exchange routes which allowed the emergence of innovation in ceremony to be permitted (Stanton 1989: 11). MacLeod said that the Gija people had been isolated from the missionary influence during ‘the killing years’ so they had a more traditional attitude towards ceremonial ritual. Their land comprised a landscape of rugged hills and gorges which was unsuitable for horses and
therefore restricted movement by Europeans through the area and which prevented the annihilation of their law custodians. This important fact was to enable the transmission of ritual knowledge to the next generation relatively unhindered (Macleod 1997).

Thomas’s *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony which highlighted several spirit journeys broke with the traditional pathways of traditional spirit tracks. The spirit journey of the old woman travelled from west to east. Crawford points out that the spirits of the dead in the Kimberley, on the eastern side usually take a different track than those on the western side by travelling east towards Port Keats (Wadeye) before journeying back to the site of burial. Thus the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony breaks with this usual traditional spirit journey by reversing its track. In the Kimberley traditionally burial practices consisted of the bones of the dead being wrapped in a bundle with paperbark and string. The body was then placed in, or near, the cave from which the spirit of the person was said to have originated. Thus when the ghost of that person returned to its bones, it usually returned to that place (Crawford 1968: 94). There was also the belief that the spirits of the dead may be reincarnated. Nowadays this practice is not carried out and burial practice is more or less in line with western traditions (Crawford 1968: 94).

### 5.5 Performing the Kurrirr Kurrirr

That’s why we got that [ceremony] now, biggest culture. I can go anywhere, take this [ceremony], *Kurrirr Kurrirr*, I can go to Perth, from there to Melbourne, anywhere, Darwin… (Thomas et al 1994: 59).

In performances of the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* the dancers are usually all men. For some parts they dressed as women (Plate 5.15). They played the old woman’s and Devil Devil women’s parts. Although the men do all the major singing they are strongly supported by women and children in the chorus. Woman and children support the dancers from the sides (Plate 5.16) (Akerman 1999:21). Songs included in the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* are short and repetitive. (Songs were recorded prior to 1994 for solo exhibition
at NGA and are reproduced in Appendix IV.) Usually a single sentence is repeated several times with slight variations of wordage and pitch. The verses of the song cycle recorded the return of the woman’s spirit from the west, where she died, near Derby, to the place where the accident occurred near Warmun. Then north to Kununurra where the destruction of Darwin was witnessed (Akerman 1999:24, Christensen 1993). The songs, as with the paintings accompanying them were enigmatic and suggestive rather than accurate and didactic. An example of this was a Paddy Jaminji ceremonial board called *Tawurr the Kangaroo at Kanmanturr* c.1978 (Plate 5.17). This board from the *Kurrrirr Kurrrirr* described the two travelling spirits seeing the bodies of Aboriginal people who were burned long ago by the white manager at Bedford Downs Station. At this place the spirits composed a song about the people who were massacred. Here two verses encapsulate the message which was contained in the painted board:

**Kularrta-ura kawurra kampani.**

Now at Elgee Cliff [Kanmanturr], the old woman ‘finds’ the half kangaroo, the legendary inhabitant of this place. She sees the metamorphosed remains and blood inside the cave.

**Numpi-rrina kunya nyarima munga lurrpungu.**

The shade from the hill comes over and talks in language: ‘mung lurrpngu’. The Devil Devil and old woman look around and see the shadow [spirits] of people killed by Kartiya [white people]. They see where the bodies had been burned. They make a song about those people (Thomas et al 1994: 26).

The image of the kangaroo was described as the ‘half kangaroo’ because the bottom half of the rock painting which was on a cave wall at Kanmanturr (Elgee Cliffs) has eroded away. As seen on this board, the figure is simple; the message cryptic. One would have to know the story of the place to read the image on the board or to understand the reference of the ‘half kangaroo’ in the song line. The songs in the ceremony included mythological, historical and personal information about sites mentioned and personalities encountered. An example of this is recalled by Christensen:
...a massacre of local Aboriginal people at Kanagantja (Mt King) is recalled by mention of the ‘shadow’ or spirits near that place. The details of that event are not recounted, but mere mention of the shadows triggers a host of memories and associations (Christensen 1983).

There were differences of opinion as to how many song cycles there were in the *Kurirr Kurirr* ceremony. John Stanton states that there are eleven songs (Stanton 1989:11) However Thomas has a differing opinion and had acknowledged over thirty songs (Thomas et al 1994: 23, Christensen 1983) (Appendix IV). These songs told of the difficulties the old woman’s spirit had in returning to her conception Dreaming site near Warmun and of the mythological beings she met along this journey. They also described selected aspects of the natural features of the landscape in which this journey took place (Stanton 1989:11) culminating in witnessing the destruction of Darwin by cyclone Tracy (Akerman 1999:24). The last section of the ceremony mentioned Darwin. In a catalogue entry (Plate 5.18, Plate 5.19) in Macha’s files a notation was made by McLeod about Thomas going to Darwin after cyclone Tracy. This notation was told to McLeod by Jaminji at Warmun in 1984. Apparently the last verse was added after Thomas had gone to Darwin sometime in the late 1970’s and witnessed the destruction to the buildings. However it is not known exactly when this visit occurred.

No two performances were ever exactly the same. Many factors contributed to how performances were held: the number of songs sung, which songs were sung, the ‘country’ affiliations of the singers and performers (and audience) and the availability of ‘boards’. There was however a consistency in the general overall ordering of the songs which followed the travels of the old woman with the geographical ordering maintained even if some songs were omitted or created (Thomas et al 1994:25).

At first Thomas was unable to get anyone to sing or perform the *Kurirr Kurirr*. Several years passed before it was fully performed. It was first performed in 1978 after considerable effort by a group of singers and dancers at Windmill Camp at Warmun (Kim Akerman (2006), pers. comm. November 2006). In late 1980 Kenneth Coutts
Smith\textsuperscript{31}, a Canadian art critic arrived in Warmun on a ‘tour’ of Aboriginal communities. Here he witnessed and reported on the genesis of the painting movement. He says;

I had the unique experience of being shown some ritual paintings of an open and non-sacred nature that were structured in the form of [such] maps. This Dreaming, located at a reserve called Turkey Creek [Warmun], was particularly interesting in that it demonstrated how a still living ritual tradition was responding to contemporary events, for the ceremonial and the pictorial maps painted on medium sized scraps of board, detail how the archetypal Rainbow Snake ravaged through the country causing floods and destruction because of some violation of ritual and taboo...I was shown these artefacts, stored in a tin trunk, including the Rainbow Snake itself, some twelve feet long and made of stuffed and knitted cloth by both the Dreamer [Thomas]and the ‘artist’ [Jaminji] that he had commissioned to make the paintings (Coutts Smith 1982: 55).

The \textit{Kurrirr Kurrirr} initially failed to attract the interest of the whole community in the late 1970’s. It was not until further performances in the community that interest in the \textit{Kurrirr Kurrirr} ceremony grew. The ceremony was subsequently taken to Maningrida, Victoria River Downs and as far as Yirrkala in north east Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. In 1983 it was performed at The Aboriginal Arts Festival in Perth (Christensen 1983: 3). In 1998, as a tribute to Thomas after his death, the \textit{Kurrirr Kurrirr} was performed at the opening of NATSIAA (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award) in Darwin (Plate 5.20) (Bowdler 2006: 4). It was performed at Jandany’s funeral in October 2006 at Warmun as a tribute to Jandany’s role in the Warmun art movement.

Kjellgren stated that Thomas later ‘sold’ the \textit{Kurrirr Kurrirr} to Tiger Moore\textsuperscript{32}, a \textit{Worla} man from Doon Doon Station, who was the biological son of the old woman featured in the \textit{Kurrirr Kurrirr} (Kjellgren 1999: 174). In an interview by PhD student Dom Sweeney, Moore says that he and Morton Moore paid Thomas one thousand dollars for the \textit{Kurrirr Kurrirr} (Sweeney 2008). Kelly in conversation said that Thomas

\textsuperscript{31} Kenneth Coutts Smith was an Canadian art critic who was particularly concerned with the complex relationships and cult connections between racial minorities and dominant majorities through cultural connections. He came to Australia in late 1980 to give a series of lectures and also traveled throughout northern Australia to Aboriginal communities to explore the nature of ‘Cultural Colonialism’ in relation to Aboriginal Australians. Coutts Smith died in 1981. The article in \textit{Art Network} Vol. 1, No. 5 is the only article that remains of his research during his visit (Coutts Smith 1982: 53).

\textsuperscript{32} Tiger Moore died in 2005 and the ‘ownership’ of the \textit{Kurrirr Kurrirr} has subsequently been passed on.
sold the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* for ‘two hundred dollars and a side of beef’ in 1992 at Doon Doon Station and that he was there at the time of the ‘sale’ (Kevin Kelly (2007), pers. comm. October). Somewhere between the two statements lies the truth. To add to the uncertainty of who actually ‘owns’ the ceremony now according to the Warmun Art Centre website, Jane Yalunga, Thomas’s daughter, is now the custodian of the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* (www.warmunart.com).

The version of the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* in Plate 5.21, owned by Moore, was performed in November 1996 by artists from Warmun and Doon Doon at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. It is evident from this image that there was a reversion to the use of the semicircular shaped boards with new ‘owner’ of ceremony.

### 5.6 Transition of ‘Boards’ to Paintings

I’m not talking like Turkey Creek, I’m talking like Canberra, long way. I’m talking like Canberra, long way for all over the world. Me, Rover. And I’ve got to follow the track for that old woman, y’know (Caruana and Akerman 1994: 23).

The *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony combined traditional knowledge but responded to colonisation and displacement with a contemporary view which reinforced the rich cultural heritage of the Kimberley region (Watson et al 2003). The ceremony combined single narrative elements from the distant past (spirits and ancestral beings which inhabit the country), with historical events of the recent past (sites of massacres of Aboriginal people in the Kimberley) and the very recent past (cyclone Tracy). Some of the early ‘boards’ used in this ceremony are held in the collections of the NGA, the National Museum of Australia (NMA), the Holmes a Court Collection and also in the Berndt Anthropological Museum at University of Western Australia (UWA) (Plate 5.22).

Vinnicombe (1932-2003) said that although Thomas ‘Dreamed’ the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* and was therefore the ‘song master’, he was not the right person to do the paintings because he was born in the desert and therefore did not have acceptable ties to
the ‘country’ being represented. Jaminji who was a local Giya man and related to Thomas by marriage, was charged with the responsibility of representing the ‘country’ (Vinnicombe 1997:107). Macha says that Jaminji was the ‘boss painter’ at Warmun and Thomas would have approached him first to paint the boards for the Kurrrr Kurrrr (Carrigan 2003: 48). Jaminji was already an established artist painting and carving owls and boomerangs for the tourist market (Rover Thomas: I want to paint Education Kit 2004). During Vinnicombe’s visit to Warmun in 1982 she observed that Jaminji was the painter of the Kurrrr Kurrrr boards under the direction of Thomas and respected Giya elder George Mung Mung (c1920-1991). Lengthy discussions between the men would take place before Jaminji would take up a paint brush and paint. However from photographic evidence (Plate 5.23) it would appear that Thomas did help with the painting of these boards.

The first boards for ceremony were originally made from the debris of the houses being built at Warmun at the time; wall panelling, plywood, packing case material, even formica (Carrigan 2003: 48). The boards associated with the Kurrrr Kurrrr became more numerous and permanent as time has passed. However at a performance at Victoria River Downs in the 1980’s there was only one painted board. This was of cardboard and held aloft. Masonite and plywood replaced cardboard in later performances (Akerman 1999: 24). From the early 1980’s with external encouragement and support, as well as genuine interest from within the community, quite a number of the Kurrrr Kurrrr boards were produced for the commercial art market.

Akerman relates how the early boards of the Kurrrr Kurrrr ceremony were collected avidly by art dealers and collectors from the time of their emergence in the late 1970’s, as they were seen to show a dramatic difference to the perceived view of what was Aboriginal painting at the time. Berndt said in a 1979 article that:

Traditional Aboriginal art from Western Australia is not as well-known as that from other parts of the continent. Even less well known are its non-traditional innovative forms…In traditional
Aboriginal art, of course State boundaries are irrelevant. ..Distinctive characteristics define it [art] as Aboriginal in a general sense, even though within the range there were, and still are, some unique styles peculiar to Western Australia (Berndt 1979: 372).

In the same article he went on to say that the idea that:

Aboriginal art as ‘primitive’ was finally laid to rest with the increasing appearance of, from the 1950s onward, of clearly sophisticated bark paintings …paintings in oils, on board or canvas, use of an entirely new medium in an imaginative and innovative way to depict basically traditional patterns and themes…[however] the ‘dead hand’ of commercialism has been felt almost everywhere. Potential purchasers still have preconceived views of what ‘Aboriginal art should be like; and, despite all the literature available today on Aboriginal art, most of them have few pretensions to aesthetic knowledge and appreciation…While there is always (one supposes) a place for tourist items, it should be our primary concern to nurture standards in Aboriginal art, whether it be traditionally inspired or innovative (Berndt 1979: 372 - 276).

Because of a fresh interest in Aboriginal art as a vital element in a burgeoning art market the painted boards which were held aloft throughout the Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremony were transformed into saleable commodities and were thus used for economic exchange. These boards were also subsequently used as a political explanation of evidence of ‘connectedness’ and ‘ownership’ of land.

In May 1973 the Federal Government, at the initiative of the Australia Council, created and developed the Aboriginal Arts Board to fund and support galleries which promoted and sold Aboriginal art in capital cities throughout Australia (Roughsey 1978: 58). Macha became a government field officer in the mid 1970’s for Aboriginal Traditional Art, the Perth marketing outlet of Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Pty Ltd. This organisation supplied artists throughout the state with materials for their artistic practice. It developed a market for artists to earn an income. In Macha’s words: 'We accepted everything’ (Carrigan 2003: 47). In conversation with Macha in 2006 she said that:

...in the 1970s she ran basically the whole state by herself. She was responsible for marketing Aboriginal Art. She was funded by the Native Welfare Act and this funding was due to the Whitlam government. Her job was to “flog off” [sic] Aboriginal art to galleries. Started off with bark paintings in Arnhem Land and then in 1972 it was Papunya. In Western Australia she was in the field 2 times a year. It was to help make money for Aboriginal artists and she mainly collected material culture – shields, boabs, pearl-shell etc (Mary Macha (2006), pers. comm. June)
Macha left the Aboriginal Traditional Art in 1983 and became curator for the English aristocrat Lord McAlpine’s art collection in Broome while setting up as an independent dealer. She initially marketed Jaminji’s work and in the 1980’s she was marketing and selling Thomas’s and Jaminji’s paintings, principally to Janet Holmes a Court in Perth and Lord McAlpine in Broome. As she says “I couldn’t just turn my back on them, they were my friends” (Plate 5.24) (Laurie 2005). Jaminji’s painting career was curtailed by blindness from trachoma in 1987. He died in 1996.

The first boards to be translated into paintings came from Jaminji when he sold a set of *Kurrirr Kurrirr* boards to Macha in 1982 (Storer, 2006:19, Vinnicombe 1997) on the condition that Macha sent him replacement boards. Macha says:

…around 1981, Don [McLeod] drove me down to Warmun…Everyone came out to meet us, and the next thing Paddy [Jaminji] brought out these painted boards from a tin shed. He propped them up against our car, the side of the shed on 44 gallon drums. These were the boards from the corroboree [Kurrirr Kurrirr]. I couldn’t believe what I saw! They were magnificent works. At one point a dog cocked its leg on one of the boards. Imagine my horror! I raced over and everyone just laughed and laughed. I said to Paddy “Do you want to sell them?” “Naa” was his answer. He then packed them all away in the tin shed. When they finished touring the corroboree he agreed to sell them to me as long as I sent him back some boards to paint in case they needed them. If there is a founder of the school of art at Warmun it was Jaminji (Mary Macha (2006), pers. comm. November).

According to curator Russell Storer these boards were exhibited in Perth in the early 1980’s (Storer 2006: 19). This was probably at the Perth Aboriginal Arts Festival held in 1983 (Plate 5.25) when members of the Warmun community attended and performed the *Kurrirr Kurrirr*.

Aboriginal artist Beerbee Mungari in 2007 said that…‘Jack Britten, Paddy Jaminji, George Mung Mung and he all were painting well before Rover picked up the brush’ (Pam Linklater (2007), pers. comm. 24 Nov 2007). Macha believes Jaminji was neglected. She says…‘I think he was great, if not greater than Rover as an artist’ (Laurie 2005).

When others including Thomas saw that there was an interest in their artworks and people were prepared to pay for these works they also wanted to paint (Macha
Thomas was to say to Tony Elwood, Waringarri Aboriginal Arts Co-ordinator at Kununurra in the early 1990s:

Before, no nothing. When that house bin put up at Turkey Creek, me and Jaminji bin start off. We drawing all the way. We bin known something now. I’m all over now. We bin sending little bit by little bit. And so gadiya he like ‘em me. I don’t know what for (Elwood sighted in Ryan 1992: 42).

Macha is often credited with ‘discovering’ Thomas. However she says of the situation that it was he who ‘discovered’ her:

One of my richest memories is of Rover coming out of the crowd and saying to me with unquestionable confidence: ‘Rover Thomas. I want to paint (Carrigan 2003: 48).

Initial use of the boards for ceremonial purposes had become less important to people at Warmun as the economic value had increased (Christensen 1983:7). Macha said:

I would send boards to the artists and with the help of Don MacLeod33, some great works, mainly from Jaminji and Rover Thomas, would be sent down to the Aboriginal Traditional Arts Gallery in Perth for sale. Many of these paintings are now housed at the National Gallery of Australia (Macha 1997).

Caruana commented that the ceremonial boards used in the Kurrirr Kurrirr translated more easily to the western notion of what constituted a painting (Caruana 2003:176). While a limited number of paintings were (and still are) produced for use in the Warmun community the majority of the paintings produced would not exist if it were not for non-Aboriginal demand. Bell put it more succinctly: ‘Aboriginal Art: it’s a white thing’ (Bell 2003).

McLeod in an interview said that Thomas:

…was delighted that people liked what he was doing, and were responding to the Kimberley. Everyone liked the Kurrirr Kurrirr, both the aborigines who enjoyed the corroboree, and the whitefellas who bought the paintings. He probably wanted to do other things in that line,

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33Field officer Don MacLeod worked for the Department of Employment, Education and Training, in the 1970s and 80s. He was responsible for liaising with, and purchasing paintings from the artists living in various areas from Wyndham in the north Kimberley to Balgo in the Great Sandy Desert. Don was also Thomas’s brother-in-law, his wife Parry was Thomas’s cousin. He lives at Alligator Camp near Kalumbaru in Western Australia. He worked regularly with Mary Macha and they are still friends.
delighted that white society responded to that. My impression was that he got his satisfaction out of doing something that was seen as being valuable (Carrigan 2003: 51).

When Aboriginal people at Warmun saw how successful Thomas was becoming and saw the money he was making quite a few turned to painting to make money for themselves. McKenzie was to say:

I bin painting now. I bin all there looking at this Rover [Thomas]. This Rover makin’ money la this paint alright. I bin over to see that Smoker [Joel Smoker Waringarri Aboriginal Arts Centre Co-ordinator in late 1980s]. My head bin workin’ now. [I thought] ‘I’ll try this painting” (Kjellgren 2001: 361).

Thomas’s paintings, which emerged from the rock art aesthetics and ceremonial painted boards, strongly reinforced and highlighted the changes from painting being used exclusively for ritual purposes, to art. This was based around his use of narratives and references to sites drawn from the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony in his first paintings (Plate 4.26). However, subsequently his subject matter diversified. A more detailed look at Thomas’s art practice and individual style is discussed in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8. Macha commented:

…he’d paint what he wanted to paint: his country, the East Kimberley, Perth, Katherine, Broome country, all over the place. Once, when he was painting down here [Perth] someone asked him, “is that your country?” And he just laughed and said “no, I steal anybody’s country” (Carrigan 2003: 51).

By the late 1980’s Thomas’s paintings were in high demand. At this stage he was working and marketing his paintings through Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, established in 1985 at Kununurra, and Macha in Perth. Thomas’s paintings all incorporated aspects of culture and Dreaming stories that were of central importance to most Aboriginal artists in the East Kimberley. In the mid 1990’s Thomas was participating in print workshops held at Northern Editions at Charles Darwin University (Plate 5.27). He did commission work for various art dealers, notably Kimberley Art in Melbourne, Ochre Art in Kununurra and Neil McLeod Fine Art Studio in the Dandenongs in Victoria. Aboriginal art expert Adrian Newstead suggested that during a
three week period in 1995 Thomas produced approximately sixty-five to seventy-five works in varying sizes for Neil McLeod Fine Art (Adrian Newstead (2007), pers. comm. 9 November). However this was an exaggeration as Thomas’s yearly output did not reach these figures.

Thomas’s paintings were included in several major exhibitions of Kimberley art: *Art from the Kimberley* in 1988 at the Aboriginal Artists Gallery in Sydney and *Turkey Creek: Recent Work* exhibited in Melbourne in 1989. He was included in the 1989 Art Gallery of Western Australia’s exhibition *On the Edge: Five Contemporary Aboriginal Artists*. In 1990 Thomas and Trevor Nickolls were the first Aboriginal artists selected to represent Australia at the Venice Biennale. In the same year he was awarded the John McCaughey Prize for best painting hung in the Art Gallery of New South Wales for that year. The 1992 survey exhibition of the Kimberley at the National Gallery of Victoria; *Images of Power: Aboriginal Art of the Kimberley* included several Thomas paintings. He was the second Aboriginal to have a retrospective of his work with the exhibition *Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas* at the National Gallery of Australia in 1994. This cemented Thomas’s position as a pre-eminent Australian artist. His paintings were held in all the collections of major Australian art galleries as well as galleries in USA, Scotland and Germany (Ryan 1992, Monds 2006). (There is a more extensive exhibition list in Appendix V and a chronological catalogue of his paintings in Appendix VI.)

In 1996 Thomas was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Western Australia but this was conferred *in absentia* due to his fragile health.

The following chapter investigates the painting methods, materials and techniques used by painters in the East Kimberley with an emphasis on Thomas’s own art practice. The chapter will emphasise the interface between the use of materials and the strong cultural beliefs of ‘country’ which are intrinsic to East Kimberley artists.
Plates – Chapter 5: 


(Plate 5.4). Corroboree dancers decorated with bird down with large thread cross dance emblems on their shoulders (Image: Douglass Baglin and Barbara Mullins (1970), Aboriginal Art of Australia, p.19).

(Plate 5.5) Roy Wiggan Wanjadju (Watersnake) 2003, acrylic on plywood, cotton wool, 150 x 75cm, Private Collection (Image: www.moragalleries.com.au/rwiggan/roy_1334.jpg)

(Plate 5.6). Ethnographer Helmut Petri noted that participants in certain balga or everyday ceremony dressed and acted out roles of bullocks. Photo from Frobenius Expedition 1937-1938 (Image: Crossman and Barou (1997), Peitres Aborigenes d’Australie, p.15).


(Plate 5.13). Paddy Jaminji *Jimpi the devil-devil* c 1978 natural pigments on plywood, 115.5 x 115.5cm National MMuseum of Australia. According to Akerman Jimpi is said to be the ‘boss’ or owner of the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony and is strongly associated with the Rainbow Serpent (Image: Luke Taylor (Ed) (1999), *Painting the Land Story*, p.25).


(Plate 5.16). *Kurrirr Kurrirr* Ceremony at Warmun (Turkey Creek) Dancers carrying *juari* (dead spirits) icon painted boards of Jimpi, on left, Manginta, on right, with women holding long sticks on both sides of these boards and a group of children behind (Image: Kim Akerman November, 1979).


(Plate 5.19). Paddy Jaminji *Cyclone Tracy* c1980 Mary Macha catalogue card: back.

Inscription reads;

1. This is the story about Cyclone Tracy
2. Rover Thomas visited Darwin after the cyclone and he told Paddy Tjupanji [Jaminji] the song about the buildings where they all fell down. This is a Kril Kril [Kurrirr Kurrirr] painting.
3. The black part is the saltwater place and the brown part is the city area.
4. Told by Paddy to Don MacLeod on 4/10/84 (Catalogue Card: Mary Macha Perth February 2008).
(Plate 5.20). The Kurirr Kurirr ceremony performed at the opening of the NATSIAA (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Art Award) in the gardens of the Museum and Art Gallery of Northern Territory (Darwin) in 1998 as a tribute to Rover Thomas (Image: Red Rock Art in Australia Art Monthly No. 194 October 2006, p.3). Note: The size and shape of the boards used.


(Plate 5.22). Detail of photograph taken at Turkey Creek of Kurirr Kurirr performance November 1979 - from left 'Monkey’ (deceased), Jacko Texas (deceased), masked dancer unknown, George Mung Mung (deceased). Information on participants from Jock Mosquito and Churchill Cann (Image: Kim Akerman November 1979).


(Plate 5.25). Performance of Kurirr Kurirr at Festival of Perth 1983. Only one board was used in this performance (Image: John Stanton in Sylvie Crossman and Jean-Pierre Barou (Eds) (1997), Peintres Aborigines d’Australia, p. 113).

(Plate 5.27). Rover Thomas and Queenie McKenzie at Darwin airport in 1996-7 coming from printmaking workshop (Northern Editions) at Charles Darwin University, Darwin (Image: unknown photographer; given by Jack Britten to Pam Linklater (Our Land Gallery, Kununurra), date unknown; copy made November 2007).
CHAPTER 6: MATERIAL CULTURE PRACTICES, PAINTING PRACTICE AND TECHNIQUES IN THE EAST KIMBERLEY
6.1 Introduction

Some fella kartiya came over, He said: ‘This is your culture. We got our culture. We pay you for that’ Well there, they pay you. Drawing the *country*. Kartiya (white people) love-am that painting what blackfellas do. Kartiya take board. Blackfella take-em half. He send-em or he sell-em. ‘Nother rich kartiya come from that way he buy-em all that for another, might be, gallery. And that poor old blackfella bin make-em that good place and that boy can’t get em right price (Jack Britten 2000 in Kleinert & Neale 2000: 491).

For the outsider the language of art is easier to understand than the spoken language. What the artist expresses in line and colour can be understood and appreciated by someone who possibly knows little about the way of life of the artist, does not understand fully the context in which he, as an artist is working…our art was traditionally a function of our social and ritual life. The economic motive isolates it from its context. While we recognise the importance both for ourselves and for the wider community of developing an appreciation of our art, at the same time we are conscious of the need to preserve the traditional life-source of our art – the songs, and dances, ceremonies and rituals, and the association of our land and our dreamtime ancestors (Wandjuk Marika 1978 in Edwards 1978: 8).

After examining the historical background to the production of ceremonial boards of the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony and the process of evolution from boards into Thomas’s painting, this chapter investigates the material culture practices, painting methods, materials and techniques used by painters in the East Kimberley with an emphasis on Thomas’s own art practice.

6.2 Influences on Rover Thomas’s Process Within the Material Culture Practices in the Kimberley

Before I bin start painting I bin cut some stick, you know. We bin always go cut him. Make boomerangs. Coolamon, clapstick. All those things we bin always makin’. And pot [deep coolamon]. Pot like that one there little cup. Find him and paint around it. Good one. [Made from] hump, from the tree (Lorna Thomas in Kjellgren 1999:165).

Throughout Aboriginal culture there is a fluid layering of meaning of designs and in one area a meaning or function may have a totally different meaning or function to another. So the images on shields, coolamon (Plate 6.2), and boomerang, for example, functioned as a system of communication that concentrated on the context and allowed for a wealth of meaning between groups (Eagle 1999: 244).
The material culture of a people consists of tools and the artefacts made by them, and it is therefore an expression of traditions, ingenuity and aesthetic values. In the Kimberley region McCarthy in the 1950’s said that:

The decorative art of Western Australia is confined to incising on the weapons, ceremonial boards and bull roarrers, pearl-shell phallocrypts and baobab [boab]…On the Kimberley boomerangs however, some interesting naturalistic motifs appear. These included human figures and hands, birds and their tracks, crocodiles, turtles, snakes and fern-like leaves combined with spirals, hour-glass, concentric squares, diamonds, circles and U-shaped figures and meandering lines…on the surface of baobab nuts naturalistic figures, among which kangaroos, emu, snakes, crocodiles, human figures and legendary ancestors are the commonest (McCarthy 1958).

Containers and tools had to be carried for hunting and food collecting and great care went in the production and ornamentation of these objects. Decoration of these artefacts was principally an aesthetic practice (Kjellgren 1999:151). The anthropologist Leon Satterthwait suggested that one reason for painting many of the implements was a form of preservation as the ochres were often mixed with animal fats and this contributed to the longevity of the item (Satterthwait 1981:72). According to Kjellgren this division between ‘art’ and ‘material culture’ was largely arbitrary although in the East Kimberley the locals describe rock art images, sculpture, masks and contemporary paintings as ‘associated with individual countries and Dreamings, and are thus more supernaturally and spiritually significant’ (Kjellgren 1999:104).

Gija artist Madigan Thomas (1935-) described how and what artefacts were decorated:

Well, olden days they used to only…they used to paint him that coolamon and boomerang and spear, that’s all. And them clapstick, you know. That’s all they used to paint….They make him look nice…coolaman they bin only paint him gotta red ochre, white paint, any kind charcoal (Madigan Thomas in Kjellgran 1999:150).

Many of the simple figurative designs on artefacts and implements were mostly ignored by collectors due to their fragile nature. The connection of the minimalism of style seen in the rock galleries in the district with their use of one or two colours, and blocks of uncluttered space in these motifs, was overlooked by many researchers until
the 1980’s (Akerman 2000:229). McCarthy had made the connection, in a generalist way, in the 1950’s when he wrote:

Both naturalistic and geometric forms of art occur in rock carvings and paintings, on weapons and sacred objects, and as personal adornment on the bodies of performers in ceremonies. In some instances extreme stylization of naturalistic motifs has resulted in almost geometrical figures, perhaps as a result of the desire to conceal the ritual significance of the design from the uninitiated...The evidence indicates that the two forms [naturalistic and geometric] of art have has distinct origins; both are integral parts of totemism (McCarthy 1958).

6.3 Trade Routes: Winan and Wunun

Akerman, who writes widely on this subject, states that throughout the Kimberley there was, and still is, an extensive system of trade routes known in the east as winan and in the west as wunan (Akerman 1990:41) (Map 6.1). He comments that ‘cultural diffusion’ or interaction between neighbouring groups involved the spread of objects of exchange. As an example, incised pendants and pubic coverings (phallocrypt) made from pearl-shell with traditional geometric patterns (Plate 6.3) found their way by means of trade and gift-exchanges from one group to another across thousands of kilometres. They were eagerly sought by both men and women (Stubbs 1978:63, Akerman and Stanton 1994). The same was, and is also still the case with secret-sacred boards and other objects. Coombs pointed out that this ideology of reciprocal obligation in trade still remains prominent in social and economic relationships (Coombs et al 1989:33). Goods traded varied from everyday utensils to ceremonial objects or religious songs.

Often these trade goods were passed on after use or incorporated into ceremonial practice and then passed on. So, as an example pearl-shell from Dampier Land has been located near Adelaide (see Map 6.1) and boomerangs from desert areas have been found being used as clapsticks in north-west Kimberley. McCarthy wrote in 1976 in Art and Australia that:

Pearl shells from the Kimberleys and the Baler-shell ornaments from Cape York were traded far into the interior of the continent to become objects of supreme magical value to the inland tribesmen (McCarthy 1976: 258).
Thus the trade routes served as conduits for new ideas and new practices (Akerman 1990: 41). This movement of goods and ideas then enabled a diversity of artworks to be produced throughout the region.

6.4 Popular Designs: Snakes

Some of the most popular designs on spear-throwers, throughout the region and in the desert regions, were the stylised representations of land snakes. Almost all had mythic connotations. The traditional grooved design were efficiently outlined or enhanced by inlaid red and white ochre.

The designs incised on spear-throwers made in the region represented the secularisation of essentially secret-sacred, mythological based patterning, symbolically
significant and often topographic (Berndt et al 1999: 114). The designs resemble those seen on secret-sacred boards (Plate 6.4 and Plate 6.5). For example the similarity between No. 1 in Plate 6.5 the ceremonial board from Pine Creek, an area adjacent to the East Kimberley, and the spear-thrower No. 2 from the Forrest River area in the northern area of the East Kimberley. These traditional grooved designs were outlined or enhanced by inlaid red and white ochre.

The subject matter and designs on some objects; spear-throwers, coolamon, ceremonial boards and seed containers formed an obvious link to the early designs painted onto boards by Thomas and other East Kimberley artists in the early years of the painting movement at Warmun. This is clearly seen in the Thomas painting *Juntarkal* 1985 (Plate 6.6) where the snake motif is of similar design to the snake motif on the spear-thrower from Forrest River area in Plate 6.5.

### 6.5 Boab Nuts

Akerman remarked that another object, and probably the most important art form which was used as a trade item and also for the early tourist trade, prior to the 1980’s, was the boab nut (Plate 6.7) (Akerman 1994:106). This art form is unique to the Kimberley region. Akerman believed the practice of decorating boab nuts was an early introduced craft industry with references tracing back to the 1870’s of nuts occasionally used as maraca-like rattles to accompany secular ceremonies (Akerman 1994:106). Today most boab nuts are carved or painted for the tourist and art markets. Traditionally boab nuts were used as a food source, and the inner seed was ground up to bake a type of bread, or it was eaten raw and dipped in water and honey. The boab would be harvested and sanded with shark skin or rock, to remove the felt like covering. This left only the hard shell which was then carved with intricate geometric body designs and then used as a shaker during ceremony and dance (Akerman 2000:229).
The oldest specimens in the Western Australian Museum collected prior to the 1940’s differ significantly from the more recently carved boab nuts. The old nuts were carved with designs showing naturalistic or figurative elements and depicted images of animals, human figures, dancers, or boats. This was in contrast to the nuts produced after 1940 where the subjects were rendered with both geometric and non-figurative designs with circles and meandering lines and naturalistic designs. This difference was emphasised in Plate 6.7. Since the 1960’s the boab nuts were carved with a modern steel blade whereas the older nuts were incised by a more traditional gouge, possibly an animal tooth which would have been mounted on a stick (Crawford 1968:132). A common subject matter depicted on boab nuts throughout the region after the 1970’s was the Tumbi (the barn owl) (Plate 6.8) which was related to a Wandjina myth known as Wanalirri. This myth gained great popularity after Wattie Ngerdu, a Worora man, composed a song cycle. The Wanalirri ceremony was performed in the early 1970’s (Akerman 1994:107). The subject matter of the owl, which was an important totemic species throughout the area, was often painted by Thomas (Plate 6.9) throughout his career and underscores the communication of stories along the ‘trade routes’ throughout the region.

6.6 Post 1970’s

One underpinning contention of my study is that the creation of art throughout the Kimberley region since the 1970’s can be seen as a response to the dramatic social changes that occurred since colonization which caused massive dislocation and dispossession. Artworks in this context were made and sold as commodities for basic economic reasons (Ryan 1992: 2, Kjellgen 1999:162). Ackerman points out that artworks, such as figurative style boab nuts and paintings on board produced in the Kimberley in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s were viewed as ‘untraditional’ by the
Aboriginal Traditional Arts Agency, the buying arm of the Aboriginal Arts board (Akerman 1999:16). Akerman commented that:

Fortunately, however, there were people who had long term commitment both to the region and to the Aboriginal people, who were also deeply involved with the arts. More importantly these people were not confined by the very restricted and generally prevailing view concerning the character and content of arts and material craft in the Kimberley...[Mary] Macha was one of the few individuals who recognised the potential of artists such as Butcher Joe Nangan, Alex Minjilmanganu, Manila Kutwit, Paddy Jaminji and Rover Thomas (Akerman 1999: 16).

The survival of the material culture of the Kimberley has been through a process of adaptation, fusion and hybridisation which has created a highly innovative style grounded in the traditional styles of painting (Kjellgren 1999:162). The art of the East Kimberley has not ‘died out’ it has become stronger despite predictions to the contrary in the 1960’s.

6.7 Painting Materials and Techniques

East Kimberley artists used a wide range of materials and techniques in the production of paintings from the 1980’s onwards without turning to acrylic paints used by the western desert artists. Thomas and other East Kimberley artists held strictly to the belief of ‘painting ‘country’ with ‘country’’ and only ever used naturally occurring pigments. It is my assertion that this gives credence to notions of his hybridity. This was despite members of his family, who were painters, such as his sister, Nyuju Stumpy Brown, who had stayed in the communities around Fitzroy Crossing, Balgo and further south at Kunawarrijiti and Jigalong and who all painted with acrylic paints. East Kimberley artists continued using ochres and pigments, and naturally occurring gums and resins, sourced locally, as they had used in paintings on rock galleries and in the ornamentation of objects such as coolamon, spear-throwers, boomerang prior to the intrusion of European settlers. The preparation and painting techniques used were from knowledge handed down through the generations. This survey of materials included the description and use of ochres; the type and preparation of binders; the painting
techniques and the painting supports (canvas, board) used in the production of paintings.

East Kimberley artists who I spoke to in 2007, 2008, and 2009 (Jane Yalunga, Tommy Carroll, Churchill Cann, Nancy Nodea, Peggy and Alan Griffiths, Mark Nodea, Phyllis Thomas, Lena Nyadbi) strongly adhere to the belief of ‘painting ‘country’ with ‘country’”; Warmun artist Peggy Patrick stated this belief succinctly:

Painting means to us country. That’s why people paint. We are born with it, we got it in our body, on our bones – we are born with it – it is on our skin. Painting comes from underground. You got to dig to get it out. Red, black, white, yellow (Peggy Patrick 2002 in Rover Thomas (2004) www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/ed/kits/rover_thomas.kit.pdf).

6.8 Ochres and Pigments

Ochre is known by Aboriginal artists in the East Kimberley as ‘bush paint’ and the use of it in paintings made the paintings ‘strong’ (Kranenbarg 2004: 35) (Plate 6.10). Kranenbarg observed in 2004 that painters in Warmun were especially fond of white as its shininess ‘resembles the vitality of the Dreaming’ and that the application of ochres to canvas was perceived as a transformative act much like the rubbing of ochres on the body prior to participation in ceremonial ritual. The canvas was literally saturated with the ‘country’s essence (Kranenberg 2004: 43).

Strictly speaking the term ‘ochre’ should be used only to describe iron-oxide based pigments and ‘natural earth pigments, and ‘clay based’ or ‘charcoal’ should be used to describe other pigment types. Red came from red ochre by burning yellow ochre or haematite. Yellow was usually from limonite (Mosby 1992: 121, Mulvaney 1996: 17). White was obtained from kaolin clays, gypsum, calcite, burnt selenite or huntite (Mg3Ca (CO3)4) (Plate 6.11). White clay was called mowuntum by Gija artists. Huntite was used extensively in rock art paintings in the Kimberley to produce the brilliant white background to the Wandjina paintings. Black was usually derived from charcoal or manganese dioxide mixed with water (Flood 1997: 17).
Pigments of high quality or an unusual shade were avidly sought and often considerable importance was placed on the site where the pigments were obtained. The significance of these sites (Plate 6.12) often extended to their ownership by a particular group. The mythological accounts of the origins of the pigment led to religious sanctions being placed on pigment extraction. These ochres like other items of special significance were traded from tribe to tribe over great distances (Satterthwait 1978:69).

Most of the red ochre obtained during the 1980’s and 1990’s at Waringarri Art Centre where Thomas was painting were obtained from near Marralum over the border in the Northern Territory via Aboriginal artist Paddy Carlton (1926–2006) who was the traditional owner at Marralum (Kevin Kelly (2007), pers. comm. October). Since the 1990’s ochres have been sourced from other parts of the world and were generally machine ground and much finer. Black was sourced from either charcoal derived from the bark of the local White Gum or a commercial black oxide. Often these two were mixed together.

Traditionally, mined ochre was transported in various ways including skin containers and very finely woven bags. Another method was to mix water or urine with the ochre and form it into large cakes sometimes weighing upwards of twenty kilograms which men carried on a special pad on the head (Walsh 1988: 45).

From the inception of painting at Warmun and Kununurra the use of earth pigments and ochres dominated either with natural gum binders or commercial adhesives. Artists still locally quarry their own ochres, in conjunction with ochres supplied from the respective art centres at Warmun and Kununurra (Plate 6.13). Macha remarked on Thomas’s painting practice when he selected ochres.

When given pigments in their varied colours, either powdered or traditionally made into cake form, or even the natural rock itself, Rover would carefully and slowly handle each sample, comparing their textures and tonal differences…Rover would repeat in his deep slow voice; “Ooooh – that proper good one – that one! (Macha and Carrigan: 2000).
In February 2008 Macha gave me a couple of blocks of ochre (Plate 6.14) that Thomas had used when he went to Perth to paint. These blocks date from Thomas’s last painting trip in 1992.

Encouraged to paint by Thomas, Madigan Thomas, a Warmun artist said about the use of ochres:

I seen them kartiya paint (white fella acrylic) la shop, blue one, green one, pink one. I was thinking, ok we can make something like that using our bush paint (ochre). One time we bin try em, me and old fella (Rover Thomas). Old man and and me bin work together and mix em up. Old woman (Queenie McKenzie) yell out to me, “How you bin do that!” Ah well, after that old girl (Queenie) bin startem’ up and never stopped mixem paint (Hamdorf 2003).

Once obtained pigments were either used dry, like chalk, or ground to a fine powder on stone or even on the concrete floor. The grinding of the ochre was specifically a men’s job (Phyllis Thomas (2007), pers. comm. October). The resultant fine ground particles of pigment were stored for future use until being processed further into use on a painting (Plate 6.13, Plate 6.15) (Kjellgren 1999:124-126).

_Gadgerong/Miriwoong_ artist Paddy Carlton explained the process:

We get him[ochre] and grind him. Grind him la rock there. On the ground la flat rock. Big flat rock. And run him round that rock. That one he get grind him like this [powdered]...And when you grind him like this well he’s piece falling down. Fill him into that paperbark (Paddy Carlton in Kjellgren 1999:125).

6.9 Binders

Once powdered the pigment was mixed with water, fat or the blood of animals such as goannas, emus or fish. Other substances were often used to aid fixing the pigment to the surface to be painted. These fixatives included bees wax and honey, tree resins and even the yolk of certain eggs which were either mixed with the paint or coated on the surface to be painted (Kjellgren 1999, Satterthwait 1981:71).

Linklater observed that both Thomas and Jack Britten, another senior Warmun painter, often mixed their ochre with kangaroo blood and tree resin and even sometimes "chewed" grass to colour the ochre if it was of poor quality when they first commenced painting in the early 1980’s (Pam Linklater (2007), pers. comm. October). Artist Phyllis
Thomas confirmed that the ‘old men’ Thomas and Britten mixed blood with ochre as a binder. Apparently this technique is still used today by some painters (Phyllis Thomas (2007), pers. comm. October). This method of using ochre mixed with gum resins and blood to produce a fixative quality, has proved over time to be unstable, causing many of Thomas’s early paintings to have areas of cracked or missing dotting, patches of worn or missing pigment on parts of his paintings.

According to Macha, Thomas never used PVA synthetic binders as he did not like the slightly glossy surface of the painting that resulted. He preferred the natural matt finish of the pigments and wanted to preserve it (Macha and Carrigan: 2000). As often as possible he also used naturally occurring pigments and binders based on gums and resins obtained from local Eucalyptus and Xanthorrea (Grass Tree) species. At certain times of the year a natural resin runs from the Bloodwood tree (Eucalyptus) (Plate 6.16) and was collected. This sap dried as a crystal but can be crushed down and melted in a can over a fire and ‘cooked’ into a shiny ‘paint’ into which pigments or charcoal were mixed. Phyllis Thomas used the word garliwun or kaliwan (Red Gum/Bloodwood) for the resin used in painting and said that it was boiled up and thinned with a little ‘metho’ (methylated spirits) in the old days. The sap was also used as a red glaze by some artists. She said that the old men sometimes used charcoal or even ash from the fire to put in the ochre/binder mix to make the paint more ‘dark’[opaque] (Phyllis Thomas (2007), pers. comm. October).

There were several types of Eucalyptus used as binders. One was the sap of the River Red Gum and the other the Bloodwood gum. The Bloodwood gum had a dark red sap. After preparation it was used mainly with yellow and red ochres and not with white as it imparted a reddish colour to the ‘paint’. The River Red gum, which was harder to crush, was quite a clear mixture after preparation although it was often contaminated with bark fibres, grit and dirt. The surface finish of the painting using either binder often
produced a slightly glossy finish but the Bloodwood sap resulted in a distinctive textured crystalline finish. (Mosby 1992:120, Macha and Carrigan: 2000). This textured finish was a feature of many of Thomas’s early works.

Judith Ryan comments on Thomas’s art practice and says that he:

…had a special affinity with ochres …Thomas developed methods of preparing and mixing ochres with natural fixatives which he kept refining until he was able to achieve the desired painting quality and surface texture (Ryan 2003: 16).

By contrast both Macha and Kelly (Kevin Kelly (2006), pers. comm. October) say Thomas’s attention to preparation of binders and mixing of ochres was ‘quite lazy’.

Macha said:

Rover was always unprepared for trips to Perth. He’d turn up with an empty satchel, having forgotten to bring anything…I remember him arriving once and triumphantly showing me the gum that he had remembered. The next day he came over to paint, got out the gum…and it had set like a rock overnight, with all his brushes in it…He was lazy! He’d not collect his own ochres and gums if could help it….I’d get the ochres and the gum, which I collected from around the state. We even went over to King’s Park [Perth] trying to get charcoal out of the barbeques to make black for his paintings (Carrigan 2003: 50).

Some of Thomas’s works have had conservation problems due to the improper preparation of the binder, non-adhesion of subsequent layers or the white dotting cracking and falling off (David Wise (2007), pers. comm. July)(Plate 6.17).

This conservation problem in Thomas’s paintings was partially rectified by switching to water soluble gum from the Kurrajong tree (*Brachychiton australis*) in the mid 1980’s (Plate 6.18). This was sourced from Kalumbaru by geologist John Clarke for Macha to give to Thomas when he went to Perth to do commission work for her. The change allowed for better adhesive qualities and made possible not only the use of a greater range of pigments but also encouraged the white dotting to stay attached to the painting surface. Another quality of the water soluble gum was that it was virtually colourless and did not dominate the pigments as did the Bloodwood gum which imparted a dark colouration to the pigment (Mary Macha (2006), pers. comm. November).
Around the dotting on many of Thomas’s paintings there appeared to be signs of leaching or ‘bleeding’ of pigments (Plate 6.19) which caused a dark staining around the white dotting. This was probably as a result of using dirty water. Often the artist used whatever water was available, even tea. Brushes were often not cleaned out before changing colours. Sometimes, the ochres or binders had impurities that came out when the paint dried (Kevin Kelly (2007) per. comm. October). Another reason could also be due to the methylated spirits used in the preparation of the natural gum resins used with the ochre pigments. The impurities in paint were common in Thomas’s paintings and also highlight his poor materials preparation.

Since the mid 1990’s most East Kimberley artists mix ochres either with an acrylic medium or more usually with a PVC (Polyvinyl Chloride) glue mixed with water which gives a more stable binder for the ochres. At Waringarri Aboriginal Arts in 2009 some of the artists experimented by using a range of known binders to ascertain which binders were ‘the best’ in terms of ease of use, stability of colour, and which were archivally the best. Cathy Cummins the art co-ordinator told me that the artists thought naturally sourced binders gathered in the bush gave the best results for the overall finish and ease of use (Cathy Cummin (2009), per. comm. April).

6.10 Painting Techniques

An observation of rock art painting by Crawford in early 1960 on an expedition to the East Kimberley gave insight into painting techniques which link directly to Warmun and Kununurra artists. He noted that a figure (Plate 6.20) painted on a rock shelter wall near Wyndham by the traditional site owner was bordered by a series of white dots. The dots and fine lines were applied with either a twig which was chewed at one end to make a fibrous brush, or a piece of cane grass or, even more commonly in the 1960’s, a match stick (Crawford 1968: 23).
Crawford commented that there were several different painting techniques for rock paintings to achieve different effects. The simplest rock paintings he examined were monochromatic where a lump of red or yellow ochre and a stick of charcoal served as a crayon. He observed that this form of painting or drawing was merely for fun. More complicated figures were painted with several colours and for those paintings the pigments were mixed with water, or more rarely with resin which were applied as paint. The paint was put on by fingers or brushes, and dry pigments such as a stick of charcoal was used for drawing (Crawford 1968: 23).

During my fieldwork in 2007 I observed rock paintings which had been painted in the last fifty years at several sites around Kununurra. In each case I saw many animal figures with yellow, black or red in-filled areas surrounded by white edging (Plate 6.21). When looked at closely the edging on these figures had been over-painted several times and there was clear evidence that the edging, whilst looking like a solid line, was actually dotted (Plate 6.22).

Like earlier rock art (Plate 6.21 and Plate 6.22) in the surrounding areas, the images painted on canvas since the late 1970’s consists of a design incorporating solid colour with a dotted or solid outline, usually in white. This stylistic device of areas of flat colour surrounded by a dotted edge was clearly seen in Thomas’s paintings. All East Kimberley painting in the early to mid-1980’s followed this tenet in various forms. This will be explored more fully in Chapter 8.

6.11 Brushes

Thomas used several different types of flat commercial bristle brushes of approximately four centimetres in width in the underpainting and large areas of pigment application. For small areas and for the application of dotting he used small round tipped brushes (Plate 6.24) of varying sizes with the bristles often cut down to mere
stumps. The images (Plate 6.23, Plate 6.24, Plate 6.25 taken at various times; 1989, 1992 and 1996/7) illustrate the way Thomas held his paint brush throughout his painting life. He always put his index and middle finger along one side of the wooden shaft of the brush with the thumb directly opposite the index finger. He also used his left arm to support his right arm when he dotted as seen in Plate 6.23. Kjellgren commented that it was usual for artists who had originally come from the desert regions to use twigs or substitute cotton buds or ‘satay sticks’ for dotting however Thomas always used a small brush. Kjellgren said that the majority of East Kimberley artists used small brushes (Kjellgren 1999:128) but my observations in 2006, 2007 and 2009 dispute this as I witnessed many of the artists at Waringarrrri Aboriginal Arts using cotton buds to apply dotting (Plate 6.26).

6.12 Painting Supports

Initially the supports used for paintings at Warmun and in the East Kimberley were whatever was available: hardwood panels, composition board (Masonite), cardboard, plywood and so forth, as documented by curator and conservator Tom Mixie Mosby in the 1992 *Images of Power: Aboriginal Art of the Kimberley* exhibition catalogue. These were recycled from packing cases and used construction materials. The problem with composition board (Masonite) was that it was subject to chipping on at the edges and would swell with any absorption of moisture. Plywood was used extensively in the early years of painting at Warmun because it was freely obtained and solid. It was easily recognisable by the surface wavy grain structure. Nevertheless it was susceptible to chipping on the edges too, so it is no longer used as a painting support today (Mosby 1992: 119). David Wise, senior conservator at the NGA, pointed out to me that the dark reddish background colour on most of the early plywood boards was due to the acidic content of the plywood. He said that with age, the surface colour of the plywood deepens to a reddish colour (David Wise (2007), pers. comm. September).
This, however, is at odds with what older Aboriginal artists have told me about their art practice. Aboriginal artist Phyllis Thomas and Tommy Carroll remembered that Thomas and many of the old men painted their ‘boards’ with an overall colour, a couple at a time. They then rubbed back the surface of the board after it had dried as they didn’t like the rough surface. They used a flat rock, sometimes a tomahawk or a boomerang to rub off the excess ochre. This rubbing off of the ochre undercoat was common in the desert region south of the Kimberley on material culture objects. I was unable to find anecdotal evidence showing that this practice was widespread in the East Kimberley.

After the application of the background they would then paint in the different blocks of colour, rub back and leave overnight to dry properly. Then in the morning they painted in the ‘dot-dots’ as this was the hardest part and needed concentration. It was also cooler in the mornings (Phyllis Thomas and Tommy Carroll (2007), pers. comm. October).

In conversation about the early days of painting at Warmun, artist Lena Nyadbi said that she helped prepare boards for Thomas and Jandany. She said that they would put on the background ochre, leave it to dry in the sun and then she would rub it back, and then the old men would ‘do the pattern’ (Lena Nyadgi (2007), pers. comm. October).

The evidence of the reddish undercoat can be seen in the detail of *Untitled 1984* (Plate 6.27) where on the right side there is reddish pigment showing through the dark [black] section. According to Wise this is actually the natural weathered surface of the plywood board. However it is my belief that this shows the original rubbed back ochre surface of the board. The initial covering of the board with an ochre surface, then rubbing it back was the usual practice during this period as has been suggested by artists

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34 The word *board* is used by East Kimberley artists to mean any type of surface – canvas, plywood, composition board.
Phyllis Thomas and Tommy Carroll (Phyllis Thomas (2007), pers. comm. October, Tommy Carroll (2007), per. comm. October). This reddish undercoat to Thomas’s early paintings therefore can be attributed to this method of applying a red ochre undercoat over the board prior to painting the design. This preparation of painting boards can be seen in an early Jaminji ceremonial board, *Kanmanturr (Elgee Cliffs)* c.1978 (Plate 6.28). One can clearly see the rubbed-back red ochre background with the redness of the ochre showing through in the black painted area.

In the East Kimberley canvas was introduced in the mid to late 1980’s. It appears from Macha’s files that Thomas commenced painting on canvas in late 1986. The common painting canvas is made from cotton duck or linen. Thomas favoured cotton duck for most of his works.

Priming canvas with gesso prior to paintings is of great importance so as to ensure proper adhesion of ochre to the surface of the support. The use of ochre on canvas meant that the canvas had to be stretched and then primed as ochre tends to be quite brittle and susceptible to cracking and chipping if not applied properly (Mosby 1993: 118). Initially, when canvas replaced plywood boards, raw canvas was supplied which was glued to plywood or Masonite boards, however this proved to be unsuitable as the glues used to adhere canvas to boards were incompatible (Pam Linklater (2007), pers. comm. October).

The majority of the works by Warmun and East Kimberley artists used cotton duck canvases which were primed, stretched and (and still are) supplied firstly by Waringarri Aboriginal Arts and since 1998, Warmun Art Centre. Thomas was also supplied with canvases from Perth by Macha during the 1980’s and early 1990’s. Once stretched, primed and painted on the paintings remained on the stretchers. Removal from the stretcher would have meant the surface of the work would be damaged (Mosby 1993: 118).
6.13 Construction of a Painting: Rover Thomas

Rover paint sittin on the ground. When he make a big painting, he sit right in middle of canvas to do it (Queenie McKenzie in Lanchaster 1998).

The process of painting in Warmun in 1982 was written about by Vinnicombe when a television crew from the BBC came to film the Kururr Kururr ceremony for a documentary entitled *A Plain and Sacred Rite*. This personal insight of the process of painting detailed a session of painting ceremonial boards:

The sites selected for portrayal in the film were duly completed on the new boards, with Paddy [Jaminji] often painting under the direction of Rover Thomas and respected elder George Mung Mung. Lengthy discussion would ensue. At the end of which Paddy would pick up his brush and get into action while the others looked on. The boards were usually propped up outside against a corrugated iron of his lean-to shack, the earth pigments that had been quarried from nearby sources mixed to make the paint in old food tins. There were always dogs galore around, which Jaminji would push out of the way, occasionally swearing at one as it lifted its leg on a board (Vinnicombe 1997).

When Waringarri Aboriginal Arts was set up in Kununurra in 1986, Thomas sought out and requested boards to be painted on from the staff. The arts co-ordinator at the time, Joel Smoker was to say of Thomas:

I knew already that he’d made a name for himself and began by giving him art boards, then large plywood boards and finally stretched canvases. He generally calls as soon as he has finished a painting requesting both a sale and more canvas. Kununurra is over 200 kilometres from Turkey Creek and I have artists in other communities to service, so I can never supply him as fast as he would like. I don’t consider this a problem though, as part of my job is to ensure that paintings aren’t produced at such a rate as to affect their quality (Smoker 1989).

Following is a visual example of how Thomas constructed his paintings. The painting *When the Sun Goes Down. Another Hill, He (the hill) Comes Shadow* was painted in July 1984 at Macha’s house in Perth (Plate 6.29). The painting was on a small plywood board (45.7 x 61 cm) and was painted over two days. It is now held in the Art Gallery of South Australia’s (AGSA) collection. It was purchased from Macha who had commissioned this painting.

In Plate 6.30 Thomas was photographed with bricks as grinding stones for ochre and charcoal, with different bricks for different ochres. On his left was a glass jar of
water. On the plywood board a translucent ochre coat had been applied on the yellow section and the red section of the circle in the centre of the painting.

A second coat had been applied in Plate 6.31 to the yellow section and centre circle. Another circle had been applied in black pigment to the painting board. Note the way in which Thomas held the board; on his knees and supported by a bag of potting mix whilst he applied the ochre. Note the very upright position of his paintbrush when painting.

Plate 6.32 shows Thomas on the following day. The painting was being finished with the application of white dotting. Notice the design change on the completed painting; the central red element that diagonally intersects the painting. When applying the white dotted edging Thomas laid the board flat on the ground and sat cross legged. Note also the blocks of yellow ochre on the brick, the rubbing stone near his right foot, used to rub back any roughness in the texture of the applied ochre, on the left side of the image. In the centre of the image there was a tin which contains the white pigment used for the dotting.

The final image (Plate 6.33) showed Macha with artefacts from the Lord McAlpine collection in her garage at Perth. In the background of the photograph was the finished *When the Sun Goes Down Another Hill, He (the hill) Comes Shadow* and *Untitled 1984* which were awaiting sale.

This chapter has documented the material culture of Kimberley art and the techniques used for every aspect of Warmun and Kununurra painting, which included the use and preparation of ochres and pigments, natural binders, types of brushes and supports used in painting with a special emphasis on Thomas’s painting practice. In the next chapter I will carry out a careful analysis of ten of Thomas’s paintings, in chronological order, from the collections of the NGA and the AGNSW. A full description and data sheet will be produced for each painting giving precise details on
all aspects of each painting. This scrutiny will enable me to fully comprehend what constitutes and what characteristics are pertinent to Rover Thomas’s unique style of painting.
Plates – Chapter 6: Material Culture Practices, Painting Practice and Techniques in the East Kimberley

(Plate 6.2). Two Coolamons, 84 x 18 cm (top), 57 x 18 cm (bottom) Kimberley, Western Australia, Provenance: collected prior to 1940 (Image: Moss Green Fine Art Auction, Fine Early Aboriginal and Oceanic Art, 2008, Lot 72).

(Plate 6.3). Three Western Australian Pearl Shell pendants, Riji and Jakoli, pearl shell, natural pigments, human hair, various sizes (Image: Sotheby’s Aboriginal and Oceanic Art, 25 November, 2007, Lot 122).

(Plate 6.4). Ceremonial tablets of the Mudburra tribe, Victoria River, Northern Territory, bearing totemic designs of snakes, lizards and circles - note the dotting used as infill around the designs (Image: Frederick D. McCarthy (1958), Australian Aboriginal Culture, p.50). Note the infill dotting around all iconography.

(Plate 6.5). From left to right are seen (1) a ceremonial board from Pine Creek; (2) a spear-thrower from the Forrest River; (3) a seed container from the Victoria River bearing snake and lizard figures, north Kimberley, showing snake patterns; and (4) a spear-thrower from the Admiralty Gulf runs a line of emu tracks. Black, red and white are the colours used. (Image: Frederick D. McCarthy (1958), Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art, p.51).
(Plate 6.6). Rover Thomas *Juntarkal* 1985, natural earth pigments and natural binders on composition board, 60 x 122cm, Private Collection (Image: Mary Macha files February 2008).

(Plate 6.7). A selection of carved boab nuts. Carved Boab Nuts: *Top Row:* left from Derby; centre: location unknown; right: Wyndham, 1962 – the vertical line represents the road from Wyndham to Kununurra and the adjoining loops are significant places on that road. *Bottom Row:* left; from Kunmunya Mission, 1948; centre from Derby but probably done by Sunday Islanders; right, from Kunmunya Mission, 1948. (Image: I.M. Crawford (1968), *The Art of the Wandjina: Aboriginal Cave Paintings in Kimberley*, p. 32).


(Plate 6.9). Rover Thomas *Untitled (Owl)* c.1988, natural pigments and natural binders on canvas, 76 x 51cm Private Collection Victoria (Image: Sotheby’s auction catalogue, Melbourne, 9 July 2001, Lot 4).
(Plate 6.10). Ochre dig south of Warmun at Roses Garden. This ochre quarry produced a coarse yellow pigment (Image: Warmun Art Centre).

(Plate 6.11). Obtaining *mowuntum* (white clay) from Tickelara Station south of Warmun and west of Purnululu in January 1982. Left: standing Jock Mosquito with spade, middle: sitting is George Tingmarie (Thomas’s father-in-law), right on haunches: Paddy Jaminji (Image: Mary Macha files 2008).

(Plate 6.12). Ochre pits have been mined for tens of thousands of years. Ochre was a valued trade commodity and Aboriginal people travelled long distances to obtain the ochre used. This is an example of a typical ochre quarry in northern Australia (Image: John Skarratt in S. Coupe (Ed) 1993, *Frontier Country*, p.23).


(Plate 6.14). Blocks of ochre which were used by Rover Thomas in paintings in 1992 at art dealer Mary Macha’s Perth house in 2008 (Image: Catherine Carr February 2008).

(Plate 6.15). Jars of ground ochres and pigments used by Rover Thomas in Perth during the 1980s. Note the open jar on the lower left marked ‘Turkey Creek’ (Image: Mary Macha files February 2008).


(Plate 6.18) Rover Thomas The burning site 1990, NGA Collection. Detail. Upper left corner. Note more stable dotting even on edge, also painting on canvas (Image: Rover Thomas et al (1994), Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas, p.56).

(Plate 6.19). Rover Thomas Undubhill (Kennedy’s Hill) 1991, natural pigments and bush gum on canvas, 100 x 60cm, AGNSW. Detail highlighting the leaching of pigments around dotting (Image: AGNSW).

(Plate 6.20). Djuari, the ghost of a dead person, painted for I. M. Crawford at Wyndham in 1962 (Image: Ray Penrose in I. M. Crawford, (1968), The Art of the Wandjina: Aboriginal Cave Paintings in Kimberley, Western Australia). Highlighting the practice of dotting the edge of the figure.

(Plate 6.21). Red ochre white outlined Barramundi (30cm) and yellow ochre white outlined stingray (25cm) rock paintings at Martin’s Gap Kununurra (Image: Catherine Carr October 2007).
(Plate 6.22). Detail of tail area of Barramundi rock painting at Martin’s Gap Kununurra. Highlighting the application of the white dotted edge. It is very coarsely applied. (Image: Catherine Carr October 2007).

(Plate 6.23). Close up of Rover Thomas and his dotting technique. Note he is supporting his right forearm with his left arm and sitting side ways cross-legged. The painting is Ord River with Tributaries 1989 (Image: Mary Macha files February 2008).


(Plate 6.25). Rover Thomas painting unknown painting at Warmun 1996/7. Still sitting cross legged on the ground, supporting his board with his knees and holding his paint brush in an upright position. He is using a 1cm round tipped artist paintbrush (Image: Pat Vinnicombe: Mary Macha Files February 2008).

(Plate 6.26). Artist Minnie Lumai at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts Kununurra using a ‘cotton bud’ for application of dots in her painting (Image: Catherine Carr October 2006).


(Plate 6.29). Rover Thomas *When the Sun goes down. Another Hill, he (the hill) comes shadow* 1984 – Original Catalogue Sheet (Image: Mary Macha files February 2008)

(Plate 6.30). Thomas at Mary Macha’s in Perth July 1984 commencing painting *When the Sun goes down. Another hill, he (the hill) comes shadow* 1984 (Image: Mary Macha files February 2008).

(Plate 6.32). Thomas at Mary Macha’s in Perth July 1984 completing his painting *When the Sun goes down. Another hill, he (the hill) comes shadow* 1984 with still to be completed *Untitled* 1984 (Image: Mary Macha files 2008).

PART THREE: DEFINING A ROVER THOMAS PAINTING
CHAPTER 7: ANALYSIS OF TEN ROVER THOMAS PAINTINGS: DATA SHEETS
Previous Page: (Plate 7.1.1) Detail of hand drawn map 7.2.2.3 (Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1983) (Image: Catherine Carr 2007).
7.1 Part One: Introduction

As a practicing artist my interest has always been in the processes and production of paintings as a means of understanding how an artist literally constructs his or her paintings. An analysis of small visual details was a means of finding out the characteristics and ultimately the style which identified a particular artist. When I wanted to explore Thomas’s paintings in depth I have chosen the Morellian method of analysis. Checking minute details, such as the grittiness of the surface, the opacity or translucence of pigments, the colour choices, rather than the general scope of identities of composition or other broad treatments were of paramount interest and resulted in an intimate survey of Thomas’s painting production methods.

This chapter is set out in the form of data sheets investigating ten Rover Thomas paintings. This method of presenting paintings chronologically assists in their close examination, analysis and comparison. These paintings have been drawn from two public institutions; The Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) and The National Gallery of Australia (NGA). They were chosen as representative of Thomas’s overall style between 1983 and 1995. Through a close analysis of these selected paintings and production of data sheets on the materials and techniques of each painting I was able to uncover the key characteristics Thomas’s personal style.

Difficulties arose at the NGA when trying to view some of the paintings I wanted to examine. I first made contact with curator Tina Baum on 18th January 2007; however I was unable to view my first paintings until 26th September 2007. These were Yilirnpirn 1983 and Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1983. Numerous phone calls, letters, emails, and approaches via ex-senior curator Wally Caruana and senior

35 I acknowledge that there are Rover Thomas paintings in the collections of Art Gallery of South Australia, Queensland Art Gallery, Museum and Art Gallery of Northern Territory and National Gallery of Victoria and a large collection of his paintings in the Art Gallery of Western Australia however time and distance constraints controlled where I drew the paintings studied.
conservator David Wise were needed to gain access to view Thomas’s paintings. It is with much thanks to Rose Montebello of the Collection Study Room at the NGA that I was able to view the other works at the NGA’s Storage Facility at Hume. I studied *Cyclone Tracy* 1991, *Night Sky* 1995 and *Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek)* 1984 on 21 December, 2007, *Lake Argyle* 1986 on 7th February 2008, and *The Burning Site* 1990 and *Frog Hollow* 1987 on 8th May 2008 at the NGA storage facility. All the paintings were photographed by me on 8th May 2008 however no flash was allowed and the lighting was very poor so the quality of some of the close up details are not as sharp as I would have preferred.

Examining the paintings of Thomas’s which were held in the AGNSW collection was comparatively easy. I met with curators Jonathon Jones and Cara Pinchbeck on 16th January, 2007 to discuss the viewing of his works. I closely examined *Ngarin Janu* 1988 and *Untitled* 1984 on 26th April 2007. I was unable to photograph the works and the study of these paintings was carried out in the storage facility. The lighting was very poor and the concrete floor very hard. Follow-up viewing of Thomas’s paintings at AGNSW has not been possible due to staff problems.

The list of painting I studied in chronological order:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title of Painting</th>
<th>Where Painted</th>
<th>Dimensions (HxW) cms</th>
<th>Materials Used</th>
<th>Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>1. Yilirnprin</td>
<td>Turkey Creek (Warmun)</td>
<td>46 x 62</td>
<td>natural pigments on hardboard</td>
<td>NGA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Lake Gregory, Western Australia</td>
<td>Turkey Creek</td>
<td>46 x 61.5</td>
<td>natural pigments on hardboard</td>
<td>NGA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>3. Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek)</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>90 x 180</td>
<td>natural ochres on hardboard (plywood)</td>
<td>NGA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Untitled</td>
<td>Warmun Community, Turkey Creek</td>
<td>90.7 x180.7</td>
<td>natural pigments and bush gum on plywood</td>
<td>AGNSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>5. Lake Argyle</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>90 x 180</td>
<td>natural pigments on canvas</td>
<td>NGA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Dimensions</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>6. <em>Frog Hollow Country</em></td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>90 x 180</td>
<td>natural pigments on canvas</td>
<td>NGA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>7. <em>Ngarin Juma Country</em></td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>100 x 140</td>
<td>earth pigments in synthetic polymer resin on canvas</td>
<td>AGNSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>8. <em>The burning site</em></td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>90 x 180</td>
<td>natural pigments on canvas</td>
<td>NGA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>9. <em>Cyclone Tracy</em></td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>168 x 183</td>
<td>natural pigments on canvas</td>
<td>NGA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The set-up of the data sheets comprised:

1. Image with title, date painted, media used, dimensions and in which institution painting were held with catalogue number. Beneath the image caption I have provided a brief background of the artist; name, skin name, domicile; when painted, expanded information of dimensions, the provenance of the painting, the exhibition history and references of the painting. This information is principally been drawn from records given by either the NGA or AGNSW. I have, however, formulated my own catalogue layout using an abridged form of the University of Wollongong Art Collection cataloguing system.

2. The analysis of the painting included the provision of images of any original documentation and the story attached to the painting. Diagrams have been made of the painting itself: mapping and noting information on surface appearance and condition, brushstroke directions, size of dotting, and any attachments to the reverse of paintings.

3. Finally the painting has been closely described by dividing the painting into fifteen small sections; three columns by five columns, in all fifteen sections, summarising all information about the surface of the painting.

Thomas’s paintings can be broken into three main periods:

|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
I have selected these three categories despite there being crossover paintings in each period. The early period (1983 -1986) is marked by paintings whose subject matter was often very closely related to the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony and the country around Turkey Creek. Thomas’s paintings in this period closely resembled paintings by artists such as Paddy Jaminji, and Jacko Dolmo. The paintings were on boards: plywood, Masonite or composition board and occasionally canvas covered plywood.

The Middle period (1987-1990) was characterised by his almost exclusive use of the ‘sketch map’ iconography and a very limited colour palette. His subject matter was more varied and included figurative representations of snakes and owls. All paintings were on canvas or cotton duck.

The late period (1991-1997) of Thomas’s paintings contained some of his most accomplished work but this period also included some very poorly executed works. His subject matter was varied and contained a large number of works that were executed after his trip down the Canning Stock Route to Yalda Soak in late 1995, relating to his mother’s and father’s country. All paintings were on canvas, linen or cotton duck. Some paintings attributed to Thomas in 1995 may not have been painted by him. The paintings came from trips he made to the Dandenongs and Melbourne in Victoria in June 1995 (Adrian Newstead (2007), pers. comm. 9 November

A principal of the data analysis was to investigate whether there were any painting techniques Thomas used consistently or not, throughout his body of work. This
close examination and analysis of each of the paintings led to a fuller understanding of his painting methods and techniques enabling a more informed judgement on his style.
7.2 Part 2: Data Sheets

7.2.1 Yilirnpirn


Information from National Gallery of Australia:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Yilirnpirn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>natural pigments on hardboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement Description</td>
<td>46 x 62 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection</td>
<td>National Gallery of Australia (NGA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGA Catalogue No:</td>
<td>Acquisition No. 87.1036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate Name(s):</td>
<td>Pompey’s Pillar (Pangkalji) (see ref: Roads Cross: the Paintings of Rover Thomas Exhibition Catalogue 1994)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Name of Artist: Rover Thomas
Also Known as: (Ropa, Roba)
Alternate Spelling(s):
Born: 1926
Place of Birth: Yalda Soak, north east of Well 33 on Canning Stock Route, Western Australia
Died: 12 April 1998
Place of Death: Walumba Aged Care Hostel, Warmun (Turkey Creek), Western Australia
Region: East Kimberley W.A.
Domicile: Warmun (Turkey Creek) W.A.
Language Group: Kukutja/Wankgajunga
Social Affiliation (Skin Group): Joolama (Julama) - Miriwoong
Art Centre: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra
Date: 1983
Medium detail: natural pigments on hardboard (plywood)
Dimensions: Image size: 46 (H) x 61.5 (W) cm
Frame Size: 48 x 64 x 4.5 x .5 cm
Inscriptions:
Front: none
In Verso:
On Upper Left side: on frame Handwritten inscription in Blue felt pen: Rover Thomas Yilirnpirn Acc: 87.1036
On Upper centre: White label, Black printing:
Inscription: Artist: Rover Thomas (Joolama)
Title: Yilirpirin 1983
Medium: natural pigments on hardboard
Credit Line: Purchased 1987
Acc: 87.1036.
Lower Right Side: Handwritten, blue:
Inscription: 87-1036
Attached to Left D-Ring: Cream Label with string: handwritten black pen:
Inscription: 87.1036 Thomas, Rover (HR),
on reverse side, handwritten pencil: HS11A.
Lower Right side: upside down, yellow painted text, 5cm in height:
Inscription: Rover Thomas, Yilirnpirn, then unclear text.
Frame: Frame Type: Wood; painting attached by Velcro tabs to wooden frame at back
Framer: NGA
Hanging Method: 2 hole D- ring
Historical/Original Frame Details:
Acquisition Details:
Method: not known
Date: 1987
Value: unknown
Original Price: Confidential
Date Record Created: 1987
Provenance:
Person: Mary Macha, Perth
Date: 1983
Place: Turkey Creek (Warmun) W.A.
Details: sent to M.Macha in Perth after buying trip.
Location History:
Where located: National Gallery of Australia: storage facility off site at Hume ACT
Other locations: dates: not known
Value: Original Price - not known
Bibliography/References:
Exhibition History:

**Bibliography:**

**Exhibition Catalogue:**


**Remarks:** Notes: Confusion over name of painting: appears in 1994 Exhibition catalogue: *Cross Roads: Paintings of Rover Thomas as Pompeys Pillar (Pangkaliji) 1983* on page 11, 58 and 63. It has the same NGA catalogue code: 87.1036 however when viewed on 27.9.07 at NGA Collection Study Room, this painting bears the name *Yilirnpirin* 1983.
(Plate 7.2.1.2). *Yilirnpirn* 1983 - Original Catalogue Sheet from Mary Macha Files, Perth February 2008.

(Plate 7.2.1.3). *Yilirnpirn* 1983. Detail (lower right corner). Close up of quality of white dotting on outer edge and white dotting surrounding centre area of painting: Note the chipped, cracked and rubbed off dotting.
From original documentation in Mary Macha files, this painting references:

‘A hill on Texas Downs’.

From Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas exhibition catalogue: p58 the painting references:

‘This one Pompey’s Pillar [Pangkalji] (1), that’s Camel Creek in Texas Downs, and the creek goes round hill. No corroboree. Only bush, all around Texas Country.’

‘After killing a freshwater crocodile at a spring at Mount Evelyn (the Evelyn Range is now the crocodile), the little fruit bat fled from the scene. Hiding in a cave on the way, he eluded this pursuers. He then fled to Pompey’s Pillar before moving onto Wulangku on Bedford Downs’

This painting is not related to the Kurrirr Kurrirr series of paintings held in the NGA; however the site is mentioned in its verses.

(Plate 7.2.1.4). Yilirnpirn 1983. Emphasises the chipped and missing white dotting and also the evidence of over-painted dotting inside the outer white line.

(Plate 7.2.1.5). *Yilirnpirn* 1983. This detail highlights the character of the brush stroke marks.

(Plate 7.2.1. 6). Yilrinpîrn 1983. Gridded. Each section is 9.2 (H) x 20.66 (W) cm.

Upper Left Corner  Top Centre  Upper Right Corner
Upper Left        Upper Centre  Upper Right
Centre Left      Centre           Centre Right
Lower Left       Lower Centre  Lower Right
Lower Left Corner  Bottom Centre  Lower Right Corner

(Plate 7.2.1.7 Upper Left Corner)

**Upper Left Corner:** The white dotting in this section appears to be of similar size and shape with most of the dots merging with each other. The white dotting edging the upper and left edges of this section is almost completely rubbed off – only stained marks remain on the edge of the board. The black area of the section is very flat, however there is a reddish tinge, the NGA conservator David Wise says, is due to the natural weathering process of the plywood board. It would appear that on close examination there is a thin translucent red ochre coat applied prior to the application of the black pigment.
Top Centre: The white dotting in this section appears to be of various sizes and shapes. On the upper outer edge the dotting has almost disappeared with only vague circular marks remaining. The white dotting on the lower right of the section is chipped and cracked. Note this dotting is on the black area. The black pigment area is very flat, transparent and appears quite rubbed back across the majority of this section with a red tinge showing through most of the area. The white, approximately 1cm wide, diagonal section in the lower right corner shows a fine textured surface. There is a small red dot on the right side of centre in the black area of this section.

Upper Right Corner: The white dotting, along outer edge of this section, is of a different size and shape to the white dotting along the left to central area of the section. The outer edge white dotting is almost non-existent with only the remnants of rubbed off dotting evident. The other white dotting which edges the thick white textured line, which is approximately 2 to 2.5cm wide, is chipped and cracked and is of a smaller size. On the inner edge of the white part there is evidence of white dotting which has been covered by both white and mid yellow pigment. The thick textured white part is quite thick and grainy in texture with dark gritty bits embedded in comparison with the rest of the section which is very flat and non-textured. The yellow ochre area is quite transparent with brush strokes clearly seen. The black area is transparent with a reddish tinge showing through.

Upper Left: This section is dominated by flat black pigment with reddish tinge showing through. The white dotting on the left side is worn and chipped. This dotting is quite irregular in shape but consistent in size. The white dotting on the lower left border of this section is of a smaller dimension but again showing irregularity of shape. This white dotting is also chipped and cracked.
Upper Centre: The black area in this section is quite flat with a reddish tinge showing through. The white dotting that moves in diagonal direction, from bottom centre to right upper corner (from bottom to top), exhibits variations in size and shape with evidence of chipping and cracking throughout. The thick white line, which is of a gritty texture, is approximately 1.5 cm in this section. Mirroring the white dotting in direction, there is a parallel row of dotting which has been over-painted with yellow pigment. There is evidence of pigment bleeding in this areas and this tends to highlight the over-painted dotting. The mid yellow area that abuts clearly shows the brush strokes that follow the contour of the shape.

Upper Right: On the outer right edge of this section the white dotting is rubbed almost out of existence leaving only a pale stain along this edge. The white dotting that borders the thick white gritty line, approximately 2 cm wide, that runs from top to bottom to the right of centre of this section, is chipped and cracked and of various size and shape. On the inside of the white gritty line there is evidence of bleeding pigment. The left side of the section is dominated by an area of yellow pigment. Where it abuts, on the inside of the white line, the yellow has reacted with the white pigment and has left a defined edging which has highlighted covered dotting. This covered dotting has been over painted in yellow pigment which is of a lighter tone than the rest of the yellow area. In the upper right part of the paler yellow section white dotting are clearly visible. The black space between the two white dotted areas is very flat with a reddish tinge appearing in places. There is a black hair imbedded in the paler yellow pigment section in the upper right corner. There is a vivid white over-painted mark on the middle to upper part of the thick white textured line. There is an obvious scratch on the right side in the black pigment segment.

Centre Left: The white dotting throughout this section shows evidence of cracking and chipping with the dotting on the outer left edge almost worn off. The shape and size of the dotting shows variation. The inner white dotting is positioned on the black area bordering on the thick white textured line. The black area of this section is flat and transparent with red tinges of colour showing through. The thick white gritty textured portion is sandwiched between the inner side of the white dotting and the yellow pigment area. The yellow portion shows indications of a coat of tonal different yellow being applied. Brush stroking is evident, and indicates that application of this yellow pigment was from left to right, radiating
from the upper left corner of the yellow area.

(Plate 7.2.1.14). **Centre**

**Centre**: The white dotting in this section is of similar size and shape with evidence of wear, chipping and cracking. The white dotting is located on the black section and borders the thick white textured area. The approximately 2cm white pigment, thickly applied line is bordered on the inside by a roughly applied pale yellow pigment border which has covered an inner dotted edge. This dotted edge can still be seen through the applied ochre. The remainder of this section consists of a slightly different tone of yellow pigment. Brush stroke marks can be clearly seen throughout. The brush stroke marks indicate a horizontal application of pigment.

(Plate 7.2.1.15). **Centre Right**

**Centre Right**: This section can be roughly divided into 3 segments; on the right is the black section, on the left is yellow pigment area and in the centre, which again can be divided into 3 segments, an area of white vertical dotting (right side) and a tonal lighter yellow pigment vertical line approximately 1 to 1.5cm on the left and in the centre an approximately 2 to 2.5cm thick white line running vertically which bisects the two main segments. The white dotting in the centre is of different sizes and shapes with most chipped and scratched, on the right outer edge of the section there is the remnants of a white dotted edge – only vague outlines remain. In the centre of inner white dotting several white dots have been placed on the thick white line. The black segment on the right is flat in texture and there is an obvious rubbed back area on the right outer side. The yellow segment on the left quite transparent with brush stroking evident, mainly running from top to bottom following the contours of the overall shape which dominates the painting. The lighter yellow central line is bleeding pigment into the central white line and in doing so exposes the over-painted dotting.

(Plate 7.2.1.16). **Lower Left**

**Lower Left**: There are two vertical samples of white dotting in this section and they are both bordering the flat black pigment area on the left of the section. In the left outer edge white dotting the pigment is almost entirely absent. The left inner white dotting shows evidence of chipping and cracking and also blending of dots. Most of this segment of dotting has been applied half on the black pigment segment and half on the adjacent thick white textured vertical line. In the white segment the pigment is embedded with gritty pieces. The lighter yellow pigment dominates the rest of the area of the section with brush
stroking clearly visible. The direction of the brush strokes is diagonal in orientation from upper left to lower right. The application of the pigment is watery and thin. There is a small light mark in the yellow section in the middle lower margin of the section.

(Plate 7.2.1.17). **Lower Centre**

**Lower Centre**: This section is dominated by the yellow pigment portion; there is no dotting in this section. There is the upper part of a white crystalline mark which is approximately 3 -3.5cm in circumference with an outer darker ‘oily’ discolouration circle approximately 6cm -7cm in the lower left to centre part of the section. This mark is in the lower left corner of this section. The brush stroking is clearly seen as evinced with a 2.5 cm wide ‘start of painting’ mark which gives proof of direction of brush stroking.

(Plate 7.2.1.18). **Lower Right**

**Lower Right**: This section is dominated by three section; yellow pigment on left, white diagonal line in centre and black pigment section to the left. The white dotting is encapsulated in the black section. On the right outer edge the white dotting is almost disappeared with on remnant marks along edge. The inner white dotted edge is chipped and cracked with evidence of black pigment bleeding around dotting. The black pigment area is very flat with a vague reddish tinge showing through. The yellow pigment portion where it borders the thick white textured area has been over-painted with an approximately 1.5cm wide lighter tone yellow pigment which was used to cover an inner dotted edge. In parts, the pigment has separated, and has bled around the dotting thus making the covered dotting obvious. Vertical orientation brush stroke marks are clearly seen in the larger yellow pigment section. There is a small light coloured mark n the lower centre of the section

(Plate 7.2.1.19). **Lower Left Corner**

**Lower Left Corner**: There are two small chip marks in the thickly applied white section which expose the black pigment underneath. This indicates that the white section was over-painted and that the remnant covered dotting, which is seen on the inner side of the thick textured 2 – 2.5 cm wide white line, originally outlined the yellow section. These dots have been covered with a layer of slightly lighter tone yellow pigment The white dotting throughout this section borders the black portion of the section. The outer edge dotting is rubbed back and only vague outlines still exist. The inner dotting is on the whole smaller than the outer white dotting and is very chipped and cracked and in several sections dots have disappeared. The dotting throughout the section shows variation in size and shape. On the inner edge of
the thick white textured line one can clearly see the bleeding of pigment between the yellow and the white section, probably due to the black under layer of black and the watery nature of the yellow pigment that abuts. The yellow area of the section is covered with a lighter yellow pigment that is quite transparent showing the brush strokes clearly.

(Plate 7.2.1.20). **Bottom Centre**

**Lower Bottom:** The parallel horizontal lines of white dotting enclose a narrow segment of black pigment at the bottom of this section. The dots are all chipped and cracked with many heavily rubbed back. The dots are all irregular in shape but fairly consistent in size. Above this black segment there is a horizontal thick white textured 2cm wide uneven line, which on its upper side is bordered by a approximately 1cm wide pale yellow pigment line. This yellow pigment line is covering a line of dotting which is shown by the uneven nature of the upper side of the textured white line. There is obvious pigment bleeding throughout the entire length of the upper side of the white line and this forms a scalloped line along the length. An obvious feature of this segment is a 3 – 3.5 cm wide white crystalline mark on the upper left side of the section. Around this mark is a wider approximately 6 cm ‘oily’ mark which is truncated by the pale yellow pigment line at its base. The remainder of the section comprises the yellow pigment section which of transparent and watery in appearance with brush strokes clearly visible. The black section between the dotting is flat and non-textured.

(Plate 7.2.1.21). **Lower Right Corner**

**Lower Right Corner:** The white dotting throughout this section is irregular in size and shape with the right side edge dotting non-existent. The remainder of dotting is chipped, cracked and rubbed heavily. The black pigment area between the dotting is flat transparent with reddish tinge showing through. The thickly applied white textured 2- 3cm wide line shows evidence of black pigment bleeding into white on upper outer right side. On the inner side of the white line there is obvious pigment bleeding along the entire area. Covered dotting is seen as bleeding pigment forms a partial scalloped line along the length of the inner line. The yellow pigment area is patchy, with different tonal yellow pigment areas, lighter in the bottom half and slightly darker in the upper half. Brush stroke marks are clearly seen with the marks following the contour of the shape. There is a small light coloured mark in the upper left corner of the section.

Summary: This painting was clearly painted with very thin, transparent layers of pigment with evidence of design changes with the over-painting of the thick white pigment line surrounding the central shape. The poor condition of the painting, with most of the dotting worn, rubbed or missing is probably due to poor handling and storage of the painting at Turkey Creek. Very little information accompanied this painting when examining it at the NGA and most information was gained from Macha’s files in Perth which I examined in February 2008 and exhibition catalogues.
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7.2.2  *Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1983*


Information from National Gallery of Australia, art dealer Mary Macha:

- **Title:** *Lake Gregory, Western Australia*
- **Date:** 1983
- **Medium:** Natural pigments on hardboard
- **Measurement Description:** 46 x 61.5 cm
- **Collection:** National Gallery of Australia (NGA) purchased 1987
- **NGA Collection Catalogue No.:** Acquistion No. 87.1035
- **Alternate Name(s):** *The Dog and the Emu at Lake Gregory*

**Name of Artist:** Rover Thomas

**Also Known as:** (Ropa, Roba)

**Alternate Spelling(s):**

- **Born:** 1926
- **Place of Birth:** Yalda Soak, north east of Well 33 on Canning Stock Route, Western Australia
- **Died:** 12 April 1998
- **Place of Death:** Walumba Aged Care Hostel, Warmun (Turkey Creek), Western Australia
- **Region:** East Kimberley W.A.
- **Domicile:** Warmun (Turkey Creek) W.A.
- **Language Group:** Kukutja/Wankgajunga
- **Social Affiliation (Skin Group):** Joolama (Julama) - Miriwoong
- **Art Centre:** Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra
- **Date:** 1983
- **Medium detail:** natural pigments of composition board (Masonite)

**Dimensions:**

- Image Size: 46 (H) x 61.5 (W) cm
- Frame Size: 48 x 64 x 4.5 x .5 cm

**Inscriptions:**

- Front: none
In Verso:

**Upper Centre**: White label, black printed, NGA symbol (10 x 4 cm);
Inscription: Artist: Rover Thomas (Joolama); Title: Lake Gregory, Western Australia

**1983**
Medium: natural pigments on hardboard;
Credit Line: Purchased 1987;
Acc: 87.1035;
IRN: 68879

**Upper Left**: Cream Label (7 x 4 cm) attached to D-latch, black pen, handwritten;
Inscription: (Front) 87.1035, Thomas, Rover; (back of label); handwritten pencil:

**HSIIA**

**Centre Right**: Handwritten, black pen;
Inscription: G.B.W. 94.

**Lower Right**: 2 cm white painted area with black pen handwritten on inside of frame
Inscription: 1987.1035

**Lower Right**: Pencil on inside of frame
Inscription: 87.1035

**Frame**:
Frame Type: Wood with Velcro attachments
Framer: NGA
Hanging Method: D-latches
Historical/Original Frame Details: unknown

**Acquisition Details**:
Method: unknown
Date 1987
Value: unknown
Original Price: unknown
Date Record Created: 1987

**Provenance**:
Person: Mary Macha, Perth
Date: 1983
Place: Turkey Creek (Warmun) W.A.
Details: sent to M.Macha after buying trip.

**Location History**:
Where located: National Gallery of Australia - off-site storage facility
Other locations: dates: unknown

**Value**:
Original Price: unknown
Value: unknown
Value Method: unknown

**Bibliography/References**:

**Exhibition Catalogue**:

**Bibliography**:

**Exhibition Catalogue**:

**Remarks**:
Notes: Name of painting, *Lake Gregory, Western Australia* 1983 is different from title in *Roads Cross: Paintings of Rover Thomas* exhibition catalogue 1994. It has the same NGA catalogue No. 87.1035, but in the exhibition catalogue the title is *The Dog and the Emu at Lake Gregory* 1983. In catalogue it is called *Barragu*
Information from Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas exhibition catalogue 1994: p.58:

The Dog and the Emu at Lake Gregory 1983
‘Near Lake Gregory, that bin them kill ’im that Emu, that Dog kill him. He dead. That important place. Middle of the water this one: saltwater – something like whirlpool (1). They had a big fight, fight, fight. Long time. That river (2) come down from Gordon Downs, Sturt Creek, all that part. Another river (3) came from Kurtu (Guda Soak) far away, Canning Stock Route, big river too. Special place. Big river (4). Biggest country’. (quotation marks indicate Rover’s words).

An explanation is given: ‘Two emus are chased from Inverway in the Northern Territory by two dingoes, one black, one white, They move through Birrundudu (in the Northern Territory) through Gordon Downs before moving along Sturt Creek (Kiliki) They leave some sacred objects at meeting places a they travel. The emus separate but are hunted back together by the dingoes. Finally exhausted, they are killed at Lake Gregory. After eating the emus, the dingoes moved to Mulan (Comets Bore). Here they stayed’.

From Macha catalogue sheet:

Barragu. Site where the dog killed the emu.
Circle is important site. Lake Gregory
Two Dingoes and the flood

There were two emu up north from around Invermay Station, from Nungaroo Creek, who were chased by two dingo. A big distance away from Mulan at Nungaroo.

People were walking. The emus were in front. The people were singing and dancing, and they were in between the dingoes and the emus. There were floodwaters behind the dingoes.

When people were camping the flood would stop. There was one old man, he had a string line and he would cut the water while they camped. He would hold the waters back while they camped. While they would sing and dance. Where they camped the water was held up. That is where the billabongs in Sturt Creek are now. Like at Bindalaorro.

The black and white water bird, the one with the long legs, the little bird was with the people. Birds and other animals joined the people as they moved south, singing and dancing.

They were coming down, straight down to the lake on the Sturt River side. But the dingo chased the emu round the other side. Around to number 51 well (water bore) around to Gillang-gillam.

The dingo chased the emu back and forth on the main lake. One dingo was chasing one emu and the other dingo was chasing the second emu. Back and forth. Each dingo grabbed an emu when they passed but they each grabbed the wrong emu. They grabbed ‘em and killed ‘em and ate ‘em.

The people on the other edge of the lake, in the main channel, camped again. In that main camp they sung and danced, that was where we call Lera Yard.

When the two dingos were full they walked up the other channel to Mulan.

There was a soak there and they dug in. They’re still there.

Then the water came in from both sides and all the people got drowned.

One old man walked off and sang them (he put a deadly curse on them all). They all drowned because they hadn’t shared some food with him. But when he walked off, another old man spat on him, cursed him, so that first old man who walked off died too.

From: Rex Johns, elder and founder of Mulan, Tanami Desert, East Kimberley, WA. as told to Douglas Goudie October 2003.

(Map 7.2.2.2). Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1983. Map of dotting drawn 26 September 2007. Dots size .3 to .5cm in diameter.

(Plate 7.2.4). Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1983. Detail. Typical example of dotting found throughout the painting; cracked, chipped, and merged dots, showing dissimilar size and shape.
(Map 7.2.2.3). Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1983. Map of surface appearance drawn 26 September 2007.

(Plate 7.2.2.5). Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1983. Detail indicating a thick over-painting and ‘touch up’ section on areas of the red background.

(Plate 7.2.2.6). Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1983. Detail of section of gritty touched-up surface on left side of painting showing the obvious brush strokes in the painting.
(Map 7.2.5). Lake Gregory Western Australia 1983. Areas of black used in painting. Drawn 26 September 2007.

Upper Left Corner: There is irregularity of the white dotting in this section in both size and shape. The dotting size throughout the whole painting is .3 -.5cm. The dotting is chipped and cracked with the dotting on the outer edges of the board almost non-existent. The white dotting on the right side of this section in some places has merged. White dotting in this right side is almost triangular in shape. Some lower right side dotting is missing. The top left corner of board is chipped, with a section missing; however, the board appears to have been like this before the painting was executed as dotting is following the outline of the missing section of the board. There is evidence of two small water marks in the centre of the yellow pigment area of the section. In the dark pigment segments there is evident over painting. This can be seen clearly in the upper centre of the section where the end of a brush stroke is apparent. The type of brush for this over-painting obviously a round headed as the lift off of the brush leaves a crescent shape. The dark over paint is of a rather thin and watery
consistency – not much pigment. The yellow pigment section shows several coats of pigment over-painting as there is a gritty texture throughout this section. There are several 1 to 2cm scratches in the upper central area.

(Plate 7.2.2.9) **Top Centre**

Top Centre – The white dotting in this section is variable in shape and size. Most white edge dotting in upper part of section is either missing or badly chipped. The edge of the board is broken and damaged. The white dotting, on the left section of the section, clearly shows merging of dotting occurring. In the red pigment area, between the top two lines of white dotting, evidence of the overall red pigment underpainting of the board can be seen with this redness showing through the yellow pigment. Throughout the yellow pigment area there is apparent watermark damage. The yellow pigment section is very flat with some light textured areas in the left section with the brush strokes clearly evident. The brush strokes are from left to right throughout this section. For almost two thirds of this section the yellow pigment is slightly lighter and of a more watery consistency. There are three (3) dark hairs embedded in the yellow pigment in the centre of this section.

(Plate 7.2.2.10). **Upper Right Corner:**

Upper Right Corner: Note the irregularity of the size and shape of the white dotting throughout the section. The edge of the board (masonite) is worn and chipped. The right corner is of an irregular shape. The white dotting along the edge of this section is chipped and cracked, with sections almost worn off: in upper left corner and around the right corner of the section. Throughout this section there is evidence of white dots merging together; on the lower right side and on the outer edge of black on the curve. There is strong evidence of the brushstroke direction in the inner yellow pigment area of the section. The brushstroke direction is both left to right and right to left in the left hand side of the section and from top to bottom following the curve of the black in right side of section. There is evidence of watermarks throughout this section. In the black pigment area the brush stroking is clearly evident. The beginning of a stroke is clearly seen in the centre right of the black section. Note the round shape of the brush mark indicating the use of a 1.5cm round tipped paintbrush. The black section shows that several coats of black have been applied. The application of pigments throughout this section is quite translucent and watery throughout. The outer section of red pigment bounded by white dotting is the remnant of the first coat of red ochre applied over the whole board.

(Plate 7.2.2.11). **Upper Left**
**Upper Left:** There is variation in shape and size of white dotting throughout this section. Dotting is chipped, cracked or worn off along left side of section. Throughout the section there is evidence of merging of white dots especially on right side of ‘emu’ figure. There is a gritty medium textured area in the left and lower centre of the yellow pigment area and this is indicative of over-painting with a thicker coarser pigment. The brush-stroking direction is clearly seen in the yellow area and is in a top to bottom orientation. It can be clearly seen that in the black in the ‘emu’ figure was painted prior to the yellow pigment whereas in the left hand black section, the black was painted over the yellow, several times. The thin red section on the outer left side of the section is a residue of the original overall red ochre painted board.  

(Plate 7.2.2.12). **Upper Centre**

![Image](image1)

**Upper Centre:** The white dotting appears to be of a more uniform size throughout this section with many areas of merged dots. There is a clear indication of water marking in the upper right section. Brush-stroking is visible in a top to bottom orientation. The brush-stroking and size of paint brush used, approximately 1.5cm wide. The black pigment is painted in just one brush-stroke from left to right, following the curve of the line. It is obvious that the black pigment section has been added over the yellow section. There is a slightly darker area of pigment in the centre left side of the yellow section. In the white part of the ‘dog’s’ head, it is apparent that this section has been over-painted and that it was probably black previously. The evidence to support this is seen in the dark pigment coming through the white in the ‘ears’ of the ‘dog’.  

(Plate 7.2.2.13). **Upper Right**

![Image](image2)

**Upper Right:** Throughout this section the white dotting shows differences in size and shape, with several areas showing blending of dots. In the right side edge of the section the dotting is quite small in size (approximately .3cm) and is worn and chipped. Much of the rest of the dotting shows chipping and cracking. There is an indication of water marking from the centre to the right side of the section. The brushstrokes, which are quite evident, run from top to bottom on right side of yellow pigment section and from left to right on the left side of the yellow section. In the black area the brush strokes are very clear; they follow the contours of the line. The end of a stroke is very obvious in the upper right vertical section where over-painting has occurred. The horizontal section crosses over the vertical black line except where the over-painting has occurred. In this section the application of pigments is very watery and translucent with previous coat (or coats) of pigment clearly obvious through top layer. The outer right side red area of the section is the remainder of the overall first coat of the board. The texture of this segment is light.
Centre Left: Note that there is quite a variation of size and shape in white dotting with areas of blended dotting: especially in the lower central section. There is marked cracking and chipping to dotting in left side of section. The yellow pigment section of this painting has been over-painted with a coarser type of pigment; this is seen below the ‘head’ of the ‘emu’ figure on the right side of this section. Red under-pigment is clearly seen around ‘eye’ of ‘emu’. It appears that the ‘emu’ was originally painted in red ochre then over painted in black but this was done prior to final yellow ochre coat. White dotting is always painted last after all design and colour changes. In the yellow section the direction of the brush stroke is from left to right in a diagonal movement. In the black section the pigment is very translucent and watery and the brush-stroking is clearly evident following the contours of the line.

Centre: The white dotting in this section is of similar size and shape. Most dots are chipped and cracked. The ‘dog’ figure on the right side of the section has clearly been over-painted in white as there is evidence of black pigment showing through the white. This white pigment is very thick and brush stroke marks are clearly seen. The outer edging of white dotting on the upper side of the ‘dog’ is very thick. It is also chipped and cracked with areas of pigment missing. There is no dotting around the rest of the figure. Throughout this section the brush stroke marks in the yellow pigment area appear to follow the contours of the figures. ‘Touch up’ areas of yellow pigment can be seen around legs and face of ‘dog’. This pigment is quite different in tone to other parts of yellow pigment seen in the overall section. In the black area in lower left corner of the section there is clear proof that the black has been over painted with a darker slightly thicker black pigment. On the left side of the black area there is a lighter black portion.

Centre Right: The white dotting shows variation in the size and shape of the dots, with the dotting along the right outer edge showing cracking chipping and warn areas. There is evidence of water marking in the upper right of the section. Evidence of brush stroking is clearly seen in the yellow section and is from top to bottom in orientation. In the black sections the brushstrokes again follow the contours of the line. The pigment used throughout this area are quite translucent and in the black areas quite watery in appearance. The right side red pigment area of this section reveals the original first overall red ochre coat of the board.
Lower Left: The white dotting in this section is relatively similar in size and shape, with the left outer edge of dotting chipped and cracked. The yellow pigment area of the section has areas of marks: in the centre right there are small rubbed and scratched areas and in the lower left there is part of a patch of a darker crystalline pigment. The brush strokes in the black parts of the section are clearly visible once again following the contours of the line. It is obvious that the black sections have been added after the yellow pigment as the brush strokes in the yellow area as the brush strokes in the yellow part are from the top to the bottom and the black horizontal line crosses over the yellow brushstroke marks. In the black left side area there is evidence of water marking. The thin red left outer area is a remnant of the original red pigment which covered the entire board.

Lower Centre: White dotting in this section is of a variation of size and shape with evidence of merging of dotting on edges of the black section. In the yellow section there are several small chipped and scratched marks in the lower centre of this section. There is also obvious ‘touch up’ yellow pigment spots between the ‘legs’ and ‘tail’ of the ‘dog’ figure, this yellow pigment is thicker, more opaque and tonally different. This figure has clearly once been black and then over-painted in thick white pigment as there are several areas where the dark pigment is clearly showing through. In the black section there is definite evidence of at least two different layers of pigment and brush stroke is clearly evidenced; following the contour of the line. The brush strokes in the yellow section are clearly visible moving predominately top to bottom with strokes moving around the white ‘dog’ figure. The brush strokes are clearly visible in the ‘dog’ figure following the contours of the shape.

Lower Right: The white dotting throughout this section displays a difference in shape and size with areas throughout of merged white dotting. The dotting on the outer left side of the section is almost rubbed off and the rest of the dotting shows evidence of chipping and cracking. The white dotted edged yellow circle that dominates this section was added after the rest of the yellow ochre. The background brush stoking indicates that it was painted from top to bottom and the circle was added over this with a slightly darker yellow pigment. This circle was painted anti-clockwise with a 1.5cm round head paintbrush. The red outer right area of the section is evidence of the original overall colour of the board. In the left side of the section is the white ‘tail’ of the ‘dog’ figure with a section of ‘touch up’ yellow opaque pigment.
Lower Left Corner: The white dotting in this section shows variation both in size and shape with areas of merged dotting in several places. There are missing white dots around the left hand corner of this section. Most of the white dotting in the outer two line of dotting are damaged; scratched or chipped. There is a round approximately 2cm crystalline dot in the upper left of the section. In the lower part of the section there are several 2-3cm scratches across the black area. In this black section the brush stroking is clearly seen, the pigment in this section is very thin and watery. Brush-stroking in the yellow section is from left to right. The yellow pigment is quite translucent and the under red pigment is apparent. The red pigment outer area is the remnant of the original overall painted board.

Bottom Centre: White dotting in this section is relatively similar in size and shape with much of the dotting scratched or chipped. The yellow pigment area is marred by several small chips and rubbed marks. The under pigment is clearly seen showing through the yellow pigment and brush-stoke marks indicate a left to right orientation. In the black area the watery and thin pigment shows up the several different layers of applied pigments. The lower red pigment strip is the remainder of the original first red coat that covered the entire board.

Lower Right Corner: The white dotting throughout this section shows a variation of size and shape with areas of merged dotting throughout. The outer white dotting is in parts missing, chipped and cracked. In the yellow section of the painting the red under painting is showing through in several parts. The brush strokes, which are evident, are basically following the contours of the board. In the black part there is evidence of the end of a brush stroke, this is seen in the curve of the black line; the lift off point of the round headed brush. In the slightly right of centre is part of the yellow, white dotted edged circle which can clearly been seen as having been added after the final coat on the yellow section. The outer red area of the section is quite worn and there is a textured mark in the lower corner (? a footwear print). This section was originally the red first coat of the board.

Summary:
This painting shows a great deal of wear and tear, with scratches and dotting missing all over the surface of the painting. There is what appears to be part of a foot print in the lower right corner of the painting which was made while the painting was still wet. There is very obvious evidence of touching-up of the surface by Thomas or persons unknown and this would have been done prior to sending down to Perth to Macha. There are
watermarks and crystalline marks which have resulted from poor storage and handling of the painting at Turkey Creek. When examining this painting at NGA I was given almost no additional information other than name, date, medium, dimensions and acquisition no., all other information has been attained from exhibition catalogues and Macha’s file in Perth which I examined in February 2008.
7.2.3 *Ngamarrin (the snake near Turkey Creek) 1984*


Information in sheets sourced from National Gallery of Australia and art dealer Mary Macha, Perth:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th><em>Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek)</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>natural ochres on hardboard (plywood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement Description</td>
<td>91 x 181 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection</td>
<td>National Gallery Of Australia (NGA); purchased from Gallery admission funds 1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGA Collection Catalogue No.</td>
<td>Acquisition No. 84.3032.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Name of Artist:** Rover Thomas  
**Also Known as:** (Ropa, Roba)  
**Alternate Spelling(s):**

**Born:** 1926  
**Place of Birth:** Yalda Soak, north east of Well 33 on Canning Stock Route, Western Australia  
**Died:** 12 April 1998  
**Place of Death:** Walumba Aged Care Hostel, Warmun (Turkey Creek), Western Australia  
**Region:** East Kimberley W.A.  
**Domicile:** Warmun (Turkey Creek) W.A.  
**Language Group:** Kukutja/Wankgajunga  
**Social Affiliation (Skin Group):** Joolama (Julama) - Miriwoong  
**Art Centre:** Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra  
**Date:** 1984  
**Medium detail:** natural earth pigments on hardboard (plywood)  
**Dimensions:**  
- Image Size: 91 x 181 cm  
- Frame Size: 92.5 x 183 cm  
**Inscriptions:**  
- Front: none  
- In Verso: **Upper centre:** label (white): handwritten black text:  
  - Inscription: 463/84.3032.3  
  - **Left upper corner:** cream coloured label attached to D latch: handwritten black:  
    - Inscription: 84.3032  
  - **Centre to Lower centre:** Handwritten black text:
Inscription: (upside down): Forward to:
   Paddy Jaminji
   Warmun Community
   Turkey Creek

Frame:
   Frame Type: Wooden
   Framer: NGA
   Hanging Method: D-clips
   Historical/Original Frame Details: unknown

Acquisition Details:
   Method: Purchased from NGA admission charges
   Date 1984
   Value: unknown
   Original Price: Unknown
   Date Record Created: 1984

Provenance:
   Person: Mary Macha
   Date: 1984
   Place: Perth
   Details: this painting commissioned by Mary Macha and painted at Subiaco, Perth.

Location History:
   Where located: NGA – Storage facility at Hume ACT
   Other locations: dates: unknown

Value:
   Original Price: unknown
   Value: unknown
   Value Method: unknown

Bibliography/References:

Exhibition History:

Bibliography:
   Book:

   Exhibition Catalogue:
   Thomas, Rover with Akerman, Kim, Macha, Mary, Christensen, Will & Caruana, Wally (1994), Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas exhibition catalogue, 18 February – 5 June, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, p.38 (colour illus.), p.60, 64.

Remarks:
   Notes:
(Plate 7.2.3.2). Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek) 1984. Original catalogue sheet in Macha files February 2008.
The information concerning the story this painting is from 1994 *Roads Cross: Paintings of Rover Thomas* exhibition catalogue: p.60:

(1) The Snake is shown crawling over the hills at Turkey Creek. (2) Burnt grass and shadows. (3) Turkey Creek. (4) The place where the old woman was involved in the car accident.

The appropriate songline in the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony, recorded in *Roads Cross: Paintings of Rover Thomas* Exhibition Catalogue (1994): p.27, which this painting refers to is:

*Wulangkuya pirpiririja ngaya niya Wulangkuya.*

They move southwards. They come to Wungkul (Wangkul), the junction at Turkey Creek where the old woman had her accident. She finds the Snake there. They came to that place where the boy from Derby had been initiated at Turkey Creek. That place is called Wulangkuya.

This painting shows the Rainbow Serpent (Ngamarrin) crawling over the hills at Turkey Creek. The Dreamtime Ancestors, travelling southwards, came to Wangkul Junction.

Another version of this songline that sings about the accident site where the old lady died near Turkey Creek (Warmun) was recorded at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts files (n.d.) at Kununurra is:

*Kalimbiwarayi ngoodoo-ngoodoowayi, nyimba yilbirri*

This is the site where an Aboriginal woman had a car accident, but died from her injuries in the west on her way to the hospital. As her spirit returns to her homelands, she, in spirit form, describes her travels to Rover. With his uncle Paddy Jaminji, Rover recorded her “songs” and painted the boards used in the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony celebrating her journey home. The dark brown ochre below the serpent represents shadows from the hills and burnt grass.
(Map 7.2.3.2). Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek) 1984. Map of Dotting drawn on 21 December 2007.

(Plate 7.2.3.3). Ngamarrin (The snake near Turkey Creek) 1984. Detail. An example of the condition of dotting throughout the painting; chipped cracked and damaged. Size of dotting .2 to .75cm.
(Map 7.2.3.3). Ngamarrin (The snake near Turkey Creek) 1984. Surface appearance map drawn 21 December 2007.

(Plate 7.2.3.4). Ngamarrin (The snake near Turkey Creek) 1984. Detail highlighting the different surface textures; gritty and grainy medium textured in the centre section; red areas rubbed back and smooth light textured. Note the chipped dotting throughout this detail.
(Map 7.2.3.4). Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek) 1984 – Brush stroke map drawn 21 December 2007.

(Plate 7.2.3.5). Ngamarrin (The snake near Turkey Creek) 1984. Detail highlighting the rubbed back surface and brush stroke direction marks. Drawn 21 December 2007.
(Map 7.2.3.5). Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek) 1984 - Map showing the use of black. Drawn 21 December 2007.

Paintings by Thomas with similar subject matter:

(Plate 7.2.3.6) *The Rainbow Serpent at Ngamarrin* 1985. (Image: Arken Museum for Moderne Kunst, Denmark) This painting is an example of the repetition of stories which occurred through Thomas’s career. This is a commissioned work by Hank Ebes and is in the Nangara Collection, Melbourne. Note that this painting is painted as a mirror image to the earlier version.

(Plate 7.2.3.17) *Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek)* 1984. Gridded. Each section 18.2 (H) x 60.3 (W) cm.

- Upper Left Corner
- Top Centre
- Upper Right Corner
- Upper Left
- Upper Centre
- Upper Right
- Centre Left
- Centre
- Centre Right
- Lower Left
- Lower Centre
- Lower Right
- Lower Left Corner
- Bottom Centre
- Lower Right Corner
Upper Left Corner: The white dotting throughout this section is of varying size and shape with obvious areas of chipped, cracked and missing dots. The outer margins of white dotting at the edge of the board demonstrate the greatest loss of dotting. There is a small, approximately 1cm, round resin mark in the upper right side. The red pigment area shows evidence of being rubbed back of any extra or grainy pigment before being over painted with a very thin slightly shiny watery pigment layer. Brush stroke marks and rub back marks are conspicuous. In the yellow area there is a light, grainy, flatter but thicker textured surface with the brushstrokes not so conspicuous. The black dotted enclosed line is patchy and quite bituminous-looking.

Top Centre: The white dotting throughout this section is variable in shape and size with areas of missing, merged, chipped and cracked. In the red section on the left the rubbed back surface is clearly obvious with a thicker more shiny section of pigment in the upper centre and upper right of this segment. In the darker red/brown section, the surface is light to medium textured with the brush stroke marks clearly seen following the curve of the shape. In the two areas of black in this segment the surface is gritty and bituminous-looking, with areas of the red under-painted surface coming through the black.

Upper Right Corner: The white dotting is conspicuous by its variability in size and shape. There are areas of merged, chipped, cracked and missing dotting throughout this section. The upper red area of this segment has been rubbed back and over painted with a thin patchy, watery, shiny pigment. The central horizontal red/brown area is light to medium thicker textured throughout. The brushstrokes are evident and follow the curvature of the shape. The black areas in this section are gritty and bituminous looking. In the dark red pigment area on the right side of this section there are dog hairs embedded in the surface in several places. This area has been rubbed back and has a smooth lightly textured shiny surface. The light red wavy, dot enclosed line in the section is very flat and indications are that is actually the light red under painted first coat of the painting.
(Plate 7.2.3.11). **Upper Left**

Upper Left: The white dotting is irregular in size and shape. There are areas of merged, chipped, cracked and missing dotting throughout this section. The yellow area in this segment is of light to medium texture with a grainy flat appearance throughout. Brushstrokes are apparent in this area. In the red sections of this segment the surface is smooth, with a watery transparent look and the brush stroke marks are obvious.

(Plate 7.2.3.12). **Upper Centre**

Upper Centre: The white dotting is distinct by its irregularity of size and shape. There are areas of merged, chipped, and cracked dotting throughout this section. The black areas on the right and in the upper left area have a surface appearance that is gritty, shiny, bituminous-looking, and medium textured. Brushstrokes are evident but not conspicuous. The red/brown section is thickly applied with medium texture with the brushstrokes clearly visible and following the curvature of the shape. In the upper left red area the surface is smooth and the pigment thinly applied with rubbed back marks and brush strokes clearly seen. The surface of the flat, red, dotted edged central line is clearly that of the original coating of the board.

(Plate 7.2.3.13). **Upper Right**

Upper Right: The white dotting is conspicuous by its variability in size and shape. There are areas of merged, chipped, cracked and missing dotting throughout this section. The black area on the left side is gritty and in parts glossy with a medium texture. There are several dusty dog footprints on the surface of this area. The central and right side flat, red dotted edged vertical lines are the original coating of the board. The dark red shiny, gritty light to medium textured areas on the central to right side and far right of the section clearly show the previously rubbed back pigment surface and subsequent watery dark red pigment layers. The white dotting in this section was not completed and a section of the black vertical line and the dark red portion is left undotted. There are dark hairs and dusty dog footprints on the surface of this area. The small yellow pigment area is thickly applied with a grainy texture.
Centre Left: The white dotting is conspicuous by its variability in size and shape. There are areas of merged, chipped, cracked and missing dotting throughout this section. There are three (3) white dots placed on bottom side of the yellow area on the left side. The larger white dot is actually a 1cm white dot then later over-painted to be a 1.75cm white dot. The surface of black area in the lower central and right side of the segment is medium textured with gritty, shiny areas throughout. The vertical black line on the left side of the segment has been over painted as the under pigment is clearly visible on the right margin of this line and it abruptly ends at the bottom of this section. The dark red area on the left side of this segment appears also to have been added later as the texture of the pigment is different to the other dark red pigment areas in this painting.

Centre: The white dotting is conspicuous by its irregularity of shape and size. There are areas of merged, chipped, and cracked dotting throughout this section. The surface of the black section is medium textured with a gritty, in parts shiny appearance with the red pigment under painting discernable throughout this segment. The lower yellow area shows rubbed back underpainting with a thinly watery applied final pigment surface. The upper left horizontal, wavy, red, dotted edged line shows infiltration by black pigment on its lower right side. This red line is a remnant of the original overall red pigment coating on the board.

Centre Right: The white dotting in this section shows similar size but irregular shape. The dotting on the right margin of the section is rubbed or missing in sections. On the surface of the black pigment area on the left is a dusty dog foot print and dark small hairs are embedded throughout the area. The surface of this black area is gritty with a medium texture. The red under pigment surface is showing through throughout this area. In the dark red pigment part on the right the surface is thin, watery and semi shiny looking with the marks from the previous surface obvious and the bush strokes in the top layer distinct. The orientation of the strokes is predominately vertical. The yellow section on the right is thickly applied with a grainy textured surface. The two (2) vertically orientated red, dotted edged lines in the centre and the right side of the segment are the remnant of the original red pigmented surface coat of the board. On the far right of this segment is a dark red vertical section which is thickly applied and has a sticky appearance.
(Plate 7.2.3.17). **Lower Left**

Lower Left: The white dotting is conspicuous by its irregularity in size and shape throughout this section sometimes merged, chipped, or cracked. The black section of this segment is gritty, with flat and shiny areas throughout. The under painted red surface of this area is clearly apparent throughout the black pigment. The two (2) dotted edged red sections on the left are almost the same tone however the texture of the red area on the far left is grainier all over than the other. The two red sections in the centre and on the right are conspicuous by their heavy rubbed back surface and lightly and thinly applied final pigment coat. The yellow dotted edged area is thickly applied and is very flat in appearance. Throughout the whole section the brushstrokes are obvious.

(Plate 7.2.3.18). **Lower Centre**

Lower Centre: The white dotting in this section is of similar size but of irregularity of shape. The surface of the yellow, white dotted edged, lines in the upper left and right sides of this section have been heavily applied and are of medium texture. The two (2) black pigment areas in the upper left and upper right of this section are gritty, grainy textured with the under red painted pigment showing through. The dominant red area of this segment has been heavily rubbed back prior to final, thin watery coat of red pigment being applied. The brushstrokes throughout this area are conspicuous.

(Plate 7.2.3.19). **Lower Right**

Lower Right: The white dotting in this section is irregular in shape and size with areas of merged, cracked, chipped and rubbed off dotting especially on the right margin of this section. The surface of the lower red pigment area shows the rubbed back under surface with the surface of the board showing through. On the left of centre in this red pigment area there are several large water stains. In the horizontal, yellow, white dotted edged line there also appears to a water mark on the left side of centre. In this line there is also a bleeding of darker pigment into the yellow pigment at the junction of the vertical line at the upper left of centre of this section. The dark red area on the upper right side of this section is smooth, shiny with brushstrokes very evident. On the far upper right of this section there is a confluence of two (2) dotted edged line. One is red and the other black. At this junction there is a merging of the black and red pigments.
Lower Left Corner: The white dotting throughout this section is variable in size and shape with chipped, scratched, merged and missing dotting apparent, especially in the dotting surrounding the black pigment area on the left and in the dotting on the margin of this section. In the dark red vertical dotted edged line on the left side of the segment there is marked bleeding of pigment into the lower horizontally oriented yellow dotted edged line. At this point of merging there is also a group of ‘rogue’ white dots outside the borders of the dark red line. Where the two (2) dotted edged yellow vertical lines, one on the right and one on the left side of this segment, intersect the lower horizontally oriented yellow line, there is an obvious disparity of pigment types. The vertically oriented yellow pigment is darker than the horizontally orientated yellow line pigment. There are white edged water marks in the horizontally oriented yellow line. In the dark red pigment section on the far left in this section the surface texture is grainier than the other red sections in this segment. The two red areas on the central and right sides of this segment feature the rubbed back under surface with light, watery red pigment final surface that shows the grain of the wood board surface.

Bottom Centre: The dotting throughout the surface appears of similar size but not shape with the lower margin dotting rubbed back or chipped and cracked. The upper red pigment surface has water marks throughout with indications of the rubbed back under surface and the light textured watery pigment final coat. The lower yellow pigment surface is more densely applied with areas of grainy, gritty pigment. Brush marks are evident throughout the segment.

Lower Right Corner: The dotting throughout this section is irregular in shape and size. The lower margin white dotting in parts is rubbed back, chipped or cracked. The upper red pigment surface has water marks throughout with indications of the rubbed back under surface and the light textured watery pigment final coat. The lower yellow pigment surface is more densely applied with areas of grainy, gritty pigment but does show evidence of having been rubbed back in parts. Brush stroke marks are evident throughout the segment.

Summary:
This painting was obviously painted outside with extraneous matter; hairs, small grains of dirt and dog footprints over sections of the painting. There is obvious evidence of chemical reactions occurring between pigment layers resulting in a poor surface coverage in some areas. There was little information (name date, medium, dimensions and acquisition no.) given by the NGA to accompany the examination of the painting. Other information was gained from examining art dealer Macha’s files in Perth in February 2008 and exhibition catalogues.
7.2.4  *Untitled 1984*

(Plate 7.2.4.1).  *Untitled 1984* (Image: Art Gallery of New South Wales).

Information sourced from Art Gallery of New South Wales and Art Dealer Mary Macha, Perth:

- **Title:** *Untitled*
- **Date:** 1984
- **Medium:** Natural pigments and bush gum on plywood
- **Measurement Description:** 90.7 x 180.7cm
- **Collection:** Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW); purchased under the terms of the Florence Tucker Blake Bequest in 1995
- **AGNSW Collection Catalogue No.** Acquisition No. 99.1995
- **Alternate Name(s):** none

**Name of Artist:** Rover Thomas

**Also Known as:** Rover Thomas Joolama, Rover Thomas Julama,

**Alternate Spelling(s):** Rover: Rober, Roper, Ropa, Roba

**Born:** 1926

**Place of Birth:** Yalda Soak, north east of Well 33 on Canning Stock Route, Western Australia

**Died:** 12 April 1998

**Place of Death:** Walumba Aged Care Hostel, Warmun (Turkey Creek), Western Australia

**Region:** East Kimberley W.A.

**Domicile:** Warmun (Turkey Creek) W.A.

**Language Group:** Kukutja/Wankgajunga

**Social Affiliation (Skin Group):** Joolama (Julama) - Miriwoong

**Art Centre:** Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra

**Date:** 1984

**Medium detail:** Natural pigments and bush gum on plywood

**Dimensions:**
- Image Size: 181 x 91 cm (180.7 x 90.7cm AGNSW measurement)
- Frame Size: 183 x 92.5 x 4.5 x .5cms

**Inscriptions:**
- **Front:** none
- **In Verso:** Documentation on labels attached to back of painting
  - **Upper R corner:** Label: Registration Art Gallery of New South Wales
  - (Blue coloured Label – hand filled in – blue biro)
  - **Inscription: Number [printed]:** 99.1999 [handwritten blue ball point pen]
Jack Kelly a Kadia was riding along Hall’s Creek (or Hann Creek) near Black Gin Yard. He say the cattle running and tongueing, really knocked up. “Alright”, he said “Don’t take off your saddles. Something wrong up here” They got on the horses and galloped up and they found a big mob of blackfellas cutting up two killers (bullocks).

One fella when he saw the stockmen hid inside the cuts of the bullock. His name was Jadinj, a Miriwoong man. The kadia looked at the bullock but didn’t see the old man.

They chased the rest of the mob up to Black Gin Yard. He said to the blackfellas. “Get some wood to cook up this beef” After that he told the blackfellas to stand up. They pulled out their guns and shot the old people. Then they smashed the children on the rocks.

The old man who was hiding came up and called (to) the people “Brrrrrr” like the magpie, to warn them, but they hear (answer) him.

They burnt all the bodies.

One old woman was left alive. She has a bullet in her dilly bag that she found in the bush. She gave the bullet to Jack Kelly because she was mundjong (feeble minded) and didn’t know what was wrong. Jack Kelly put the bullet in his gun and shot the old lady in the shoulder. She went back to Texas Downs to the homestead.

The old lady was called Dadbury (Cadbury). A Miriwoong woman. She lived for many years at Spring Creek.

Reference No. 13562. (Note: This story possibly told to Don McLeod or Mary Macha by Rover Thomas or more likely Paddy Jaminji).
Location History:
Where located: AGNSW storage area
Other locations: dates: unknown

Value:
Original Price $900 (Mary Macha original documentation (unknown date)
$16,000 AGNSW paid for painting in 1995
Value: unknown

Bibliography/References:

Exhibition History


Bibliography
Exhibition Catalogue:
Belinda Carrigan (Ed) (2003), Rover Thomas: I want to paint exhibition catalogue, Holmes a Court Gallery, Perth, pp77


Remarks:
Notes: I detected quite a distinct smell emanating from the painting – a burnt charcoal-like smell when examining this painting on 26 April 2007.
The old man who was hiding came up and called the people 'Brrrrr' like the magpie, to warn them but they didn't take notice.

They burnt all the bodies.

One old woman was left alive. She had a bullet in her dilly bag, that she found in the bush. She gave the bullet to Jack Kelly, because she was Munjung and didn't know what was wrong. Jack Kelly put the bullet in his gun and shot the old woman in the shoulder.

She went back to Texas Downs to the homestead.

The old lady was called Dabury. A Mirriwung woman. She lived for many years at Spring Creek.

Material:

Natural pigment in bush resin base on plywood.

Size:

1800 x 900 x 6 mm.

Price:

$900

(Plate 7.2.4.2). *Untitled 1984*. Original catalogue sheet in Mary Macha’s files, February 2008.
PAINTING NO. 2

Artist: Rover Thomas

1. Jack Kelly and Kading (white person) was riding along Horse Creek near Black Gin yard. He say "The cattle running and tongueing nearly knucked up". "Alright", he said "Don't take off your saddles. Something wrong up here."

They got on their horses and galloped up and they found a big mob of blackfellows cutting up two killers. One fell when he saw the stockman, hid inside the guts of the bullock. His name was Jading. A Mirriwung man. The Kading looked at the bullock but didn't see the old man. They chased the rest of the mob up to Black Gin yard. He said to the blackfellows "Get some wood and cook up this beer." After that he told the blackfellows to stand up. They pulled out their guns and shot the old people. Then they smashed the children on the rocks.

The old man who was hiding came up and called the people "Brrrrrr" like the magpie, to warn them but they didn't take notice.

They burst all the bodies.

One old woman was left alive. She had a bullet in her dilly bag, that she found in the bush. She gave the bullet to Jack Kelly, because she was Munjong and didn't know what was wrong. Jack Kelly put the bullet in his gun and shot the old woman in the shoulder.

She went back to Texas Downs to the homestead.

The old lady was called Dadbury. A Mirriwung woman. She lived for many years at Spring Creek.

Material:
Natural pigment in bush resin base on plywood.

Size:
1800 x 900 x 6 mm.

Price:
$900

(Plate 7.2.4.3). Untitled 1984. Original catalogue sheet documentation in Mary Macha’s Files, February 2008, relating the story of the painting.
(Map 7.2.4.1). *Untitled* 1984. Map of dotting drawn April 2007. Size of dots range from .5 to 1.5cm. Outer edge of painting has deteriorated with dots missing.

(Plate 7.2.4.4). *Untitled* 1984. Detail showing irregular dotting both size and shape, dotting chipped, cracked and missing.

(Plate 7.2.4.5). *Untitled* 1984. Detail surface appearance. Loss of dotting on edges, chipped and cracked with missing dotting. Rubbed back dark section with under-painting apparent and tonal changes across area. Gritty and irregular surface (on this section thicker than other parts of the painting).


- Width of brushstrokes – approximately 4 cm – possible use of ochre block in some areas. Probably rubbed back after painting but before final coating.
- Under-painted in red pigment
- Underpainting is visible in patches on right side of painting
- Pigment areas are very flat and non-reflective
- Textured and grainy yellow pigment on left side of painting

The left side shape is more thickly applied with pigment than the right side shape.
(Map 7.2.4.5). *Untitled 1984* - Map of use of black in the painting drawn 26 April 2007.

(Plate 7.2.4.6). *Untitled 1984*. Gridded. Each section is 18.2 (H) x 60.3 (W) cms

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(Plate 7.2.4.7). **Upper Right Corner**

Upper Right Corner: The white dotted edging around the red pigment shape is irregular in shape and size. The white dotting on the right and top outer edge of this section is almost non-existent. There are several scratches very evident in the upper and right hand side of this section. There is a large white watermark, approximately 10cm in width, on upper right side of section inside dotted edge. There are small pale dots interspersed across the red ochre area of the section. They appear to be small water marks. The whole of the red pigment area has a rubbed appearance. The black pigment area is very worn and rubbed off by wear and there is obvious red under-painting showing through the dark pigment.

(Plate 7.2.4.8). **Top Centre**

Top Centre: The black pigment areas surrounding the three (3) forms in this section are worn away and the red pigment underpainting is visible. There are shiny, glossy patches of poorly mixed natural resin binder visible throughout the black pigment area especially between the left yellow and red central form. The white dotted edge of the painting is barely discernable with the white dots cracked and chipped. The white dotting around the shapes is irregular and of slightly different sizes. Some dots run into each other. This can be seen on right hand red ochre shape in several places. On right side red pigment shape there is a round mark of thicker waxy appearance covered in red pigment. Also in this area there is a black hair attached to the painting. Actual brush stroking is evident in the yellow pigment shape on the left. This yellow pigment is of a thicker medium texture. The direction of the brush stroking in all the shapes is from left to right following the contours of the shapes.

(Plate 7.2.4.9). **Upper Left Corner**

Upper Left Corner: The white dotting throughout this section is of irregular shape and size with the majority of the white dots chipped, scratched or missing. On outer edge of this section the white dotting is barely visible. The black pigment part of the section is very worn, very flat and light in texture. There is a glossy patch in the black pigment sector in the upper left corner. Brushstrokes and direction of brush strokes is very evident in yellow pigment form. Brush stroking in this part follows the contours of the form. This part has a medium textured surface with evidence of a mixture of size of grains in the pigment.

(Plate 7.2.4.10). **Upper Right**

Upper Right: Note on right outer edge of section there is only remnant dotting. The vertical white dotting on the right side of the section is of similar size and shape with the majority of the dots chipped and cracked. In the upper portion of the black pigment segment on the right there are pale round markings. The black section is very worn and rubbed back with little black pigment visible. The under-painted red pigment is very visible and it is also rubbed off in parts. Interspersed across the red pigment area there is pale dotting, probably small water marks. Brush strokes can be discerned. On the black section on the right side the brush stroke direction is from the top to the bottom. In the red pigment area the brush strokes are both from the top to the bottom and
from the bottom to the top.

(Plate 7.2.4.11). Upper Centre

Upper Centre: Differences in size and shape of white dotting is clearly evident with some dots merged. Some of the dots are elliptical in shape. In the black pigment areas surrounding the coloured forms in this section there are areas of shininess, evidence of thicker not well mixed natural resin binder. The majority of the black pigment area is very flat and patchy with red tinge from the unde coat showing through. The direction of brush strokes on the right side of the red pigment section are, on the left side, from bottom to top, but in the central part, it is from the top to the bottom following the curvature of the form to the right side of the form.

(Plate 7.2.4.12). Upper Left

Upper Left: In the yellow pigment section the textured surface is very evident with grains of pigment visible. There is a distinct tonal shift in colour (dark-light-dark) across the area. The direction of brush strokes in this yellow area is, on left side, from top to bottom, in centre it is left to right, and on right side it is diagonally from top to bottom. The white dotted edging is quite degraded and on the right side several white dots have disappeared. The dotting throughout this section shows irregularities in size and shape with most dotting is chipped and scratched.

(Plate 7.2.4.13). Centre Right

Centre Right: In this section the white vertical dotting is mostly spherical in shape with some irregularity in size. There is cracking and chipping evident on the dots. Along the outer edge of this section the white dotting is almost non-existent with only vague outlines visible. The black pigment area on right is almost completely worn off. Brush strokes are clearly evident throughout the red pigment part with the underlying texture of board apparent. Direction of brush strokes in this area are predominantly from top to bottom with some left to right diagonally laid down strokes – these strokes are probably from the original underpainting on the board.

(Plate 7.2.4.14). Centre

Centre: On the right side of this section in the red pigment area, the brush strokes are clearly apparent. Direction of brush strokes is originating from bottom to top in a left direction. In the centre, following the dotted line, the direction is more upright, following the curves of the dotted edge. In the lower left section of this segment the yellow pigment, the direction of the brush stroking on left, is from left to right. In the black pigment section the brushstrokes can be seen and direction of the strokes is twofold. On the left side the brushstrokes originate from the left to right, however on the lower right side the brushstrokes come from bottom to top, following the direction of the dotted lines. This black section has wear patches, with under
pigment showing through and has throughout slightly thicker shiny patches. The white dotting in this section is irregular in shape and size. The shape of dots is clearly seen on left side, rounded on topside and irregular on lower side.

(Plate 7.2.4.15). **Centre Left**

Centre Left: The black pigment area on left very worn. The left outer dotted edge is almost entirely non-existent. The white dotted edging in the rest of this section is cracked and worn. The dots are of irregular shape and size. There is a tonal shift in the central yellow pigment area: darker right, lighter left. Brush-stroking is in two directions across this section: from right – top to bottom diagonally and from left – top to bottom diagonally. The strokes from the right being painted over the strokes from the left. On extreme left of yellow pigment section, the direction of strokes is from top to bottom. The yellow section is medium textured with grains of ochre clearly visible.

(Plate 7.2.4.16). **Lower Right**

Lower Right: On the right side of the section the black area is almost completely rubbed off with faint evidence of white dotting seen on the outer edge. The white dotted edge encasing the red form is chipped and cracked. The dots are of irregular shape and very close together and of similar size. The brush stroke marks are very obvious in this section. This segment of light texture overall. The direction of the brush strokes on the right are from top to bottom, in the centre, the strokes are from right to left - left to right diagonally but over-painted with strokes from top to bottom. On the left side the strokes are from almost all directions but predominately from bottom to top. The immediacy of the strokes is clearly seen in this section.

(Plate 7.2.4.17). **Lower Centre**

Lower Centre: The irregularity of size and shape of white dotting is clearly apparent in this section. The tonal change in the yellow pigment form is highlighted in this section – darker at top and grading to lighter at bottom. Brush stroking is very obvious in both the right yellow and the left red areas. On the left, in the yellow part, the direction of brush strokes in the upper darker section, from left to right and in the lighter bottom section, the strokes are from right to left. In the yellow area, on right side, the beginning of a brush stroke can be discerned. It measures 4 cm in width. The black pigment section shows almost no wear and is very flat and opaque. The texture in the yellow pigment section is light to medium and on the red area, light.

(Plate 7.2.4.18). **Lower Left**

Lower Left: The dark pigment area on left side of the section is worn with the white edge dotting almost disappeared and only a vague outline can be seen. The white dotting on edge of yellow pigment area is worn
and cracked, and is irregular in size and shape. The medium texture of surface of the yellow area is very apparent with grains of differing sizes visible. Darker areas of pigment are seen across the upper part of this area. Brush stroke marks are evident especially at top right. Direction of brush strokes is from both the left and right with strokes coming from the top in upper section. This can be seen in the lighter pigment overlaying the darker pigment area in the upper section.

(Plate 7.2.4.19). Lower Right Corner

Lower Right Corner: Wear is clearly visible in the black area of this section with scratches apparent throughout the area. There is remnant outer white edge dotting seen on the lower edge of this section whereas on the right side edge there is only faint evidence of edge dotting. The dotting that appears surrounding the red ochre area is irregular in shape and chipped and cracked but is of a fairly uniform size. Dots can be seen to almost run into each other with almost no gaps between. In the red pigment area brush strokes are clearly seen. These strokes are predominately from left to right, following the curve of the form. The texture of the board can be seen through the pigment surface.

(Plate 7.2.4.20). Bottom Centre

Lower Centre: Wear can be seen in the lower right side of black area with scratches and loss of pigment. The upper black area is fairly intact with minimal loss of pigment. The white dotted outer edging of the section is discernable however very cracked and chipped. The white dotting that edges the yellow and red pigment shapes is irregular in shape and size. This is seen especially on the left side of red ochre shape in this section. On the yellow pigment portion the dotting is chipped and cracked however it is of similar shape and size. The brushstrokes on the red pigment shape are predominately from the left to right following the curve of the shape. On the yellow pigment section this is reversed with the brush strokes from the right to the left but again following the curve of the shape.

(Plate 7.2.4.21). Lower Left Corner

Lower Left Corner: The black pigment area in the lower part of this section is worn and scratched with red under pigment visible. The white dotted outer edge is visible but cracked and chipped with many dots missing leaving faint round marks. The white dots on the edging surrounding the yellow pigment shape are very irregular in shape. This is very noticeable with larger dots on the left side. These large dots measure 1.25cm. From the shape of the dots, the direction of how they were painted can be ascertained. Here the more rounded section of the dot is to the bottom with the irregular section to the top – this then indicates that the dot was either painted away from the painter or the board was turned. In the yellow pigment area there is a tonal shift in colour from left (darker) to right (lighter). The direction of the brush strokes is from left to right following the curve of the line of dotting.

This painting while in very poor condition with rubbed back areas, missing dotting and water marks is nevertheless a very powerful painting with is very simple iconography. The different surface textures and tonal gradations of colour of the two shapes gives this painting a great balance. The wear and tear, especially on the outer edges of the painting was probably due to its rough handling and storage at Warmun prior to being sent.
to art dealer Mary Macha in Perth. The information that was given at AGNSW was quite expansive – all documentation except documents relating to the price the gallery paid for this painting was given. Unable to access back of painting to document. All other information was gained from Macha’s files in February 2008 and exhibition catalogues.
7.2.5 Lake Argyle 1986


This information has been sourced from National Gallery of Australia and art dealer Mary Macha, Perth:

Title: Lake Argyle  
Date: 1986  
Medium: natural pigments on canvas  
Measurement Description: 90 x 180cm  
Collection: National Gallery of Australia (NGA); purchased 1987  
NGA Collection Catalogue No.: Acquisition No. 87.1033  
Alternate Name(s): none

Name of Artist: Rover Thomas  
Also Known as: (Ropa, Roba)  
Alternate Spelling(s):  
Born: 1926  
Place of Birth: Yalda Soak, north east of Well 33 on Canning Stock Route, Western Australia  
Died: 12 April 1998  
Place of Death: Walumba Aged Care Hostel, Warmun (Turkey Creek), Western Australia  
Region: East Kimberley W.A.  
Domicile: Warmun (Turkey Creek)W.A.  
Language Group: Kukutja/Wankgajunga  
Social Affiliation (Skin Group): Joolama (Julama) - Miriwoong  
Art Centre: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra,  
Date: 1986  
Medium detail: natural pigments on canvas  
Dimensions:  
Image Size: 180.5 x 90  
Frame Size: 182 x 92 cm  
Inscriptions:  
Front: none  
In Verso:  
Documentation attached to back of painting  
Upper centre: Black printed label with NGA logo on right upper corner:  
Inscription: Artist: Rover Thomas Joolama printed 2/07/2007
Title: Lake Argyle 1986
Medium: natural pigments on canvas
Cr Line: Purchased 1987
Acc#: 87:1033 IRN 68873
Upper Right Corner on Fome Core: Cream label: Printed in black
Inscription: 87.1033
Thomas, Rover
Lake Argyle
1986
Natural pigment on canvas
Collection: NGA
Purchased 1987
Case# ACT22, ANG#63

Frame:
Frame Type: Wood - Ash
Framer: National Gallery of Australia
Hanging Method: D Rings and Oz Clips
Historical/Original Frame Details: unframed

Acquisition Details:
Method: unknown
Date: 1987
Value: unknown
Original Price: unknown
Date Record Created: 1987

Provenance:
Person: Mary Macha – Perth (R.T.1806)
Date: 1986
Place: Warmun
Details: sent down to art dealer Macha in Perth from Warmun community by truck.

Location History:
Where located: National Gallery Of Australia Storage facility – Hume ACT
Other locations: dates: unknown

Value:
Original Price: unknown
Value: Unknown

Bibliography/References:
Exhibition History
1990: L’ete Australien a Montpellier, Musee Fabre Gallery, Montpellier


2000: Susan Jenkins and Carly Lane (Curators), Contemporary Aboriginal Australian Aboriginal Art in Modern Worlds: World of Dreamings, (2 February – 9 April 2000), State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia.

2000: Susan Jenkins and Carly Lane (curators) Aboriginal Art in Modern Worlds, (8 September – 19 November), National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.
Bibliography:
Exhibition Catalogue;


Periodical:

Remarks:

Notes:
(Plate 7.2.5.2). Lake Argyle 1986. Original catalogue sheet in Macha’s files, February 2008, however this description has been collated incorrectly and is actually for another painting of the same period: Banana Springs 1986 (Image: Mary Macha files, R.T.31086).
(Plate 7.2.5.3). Original documentation *Banana Springs* 1986, natural pigments on canvas, 90 x 180cm NGA (Image: Mary Macha’s files February 2008). This is a companion painting to *Lake Argyle* 1986 and this sheet gives the description relating to *Lake Argyle* 1986.

(Plate 7.2.5.4). Photograph of Macha’s dog Murdoch with Rover Thomas painting *Lake Argyle* 1986 in
In the 1997 *Eye of the Storm Exhibition* Catalogue: p. 92, curator Avril Quaill says:

The damming of the Ord River in the 1960s to create a freshwater lake for hydro-electric power and farm irrigation is the subject of Lake Argyle 1986. The painting shows the dam in the Ord River and the flooded lake. Lake Argyle contains about six times the volume in Sydney Harbour. Thomas’s works hints at the social trauma caused by the scale of the lake and cultural loss as the site is where a star fell to earth in the Dreaming (Leary 1997:92).

In Thomas’s own words in *Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas* exhibition catalogue 1994: p58 he says:

‘Yeah, that dam, Ord River dam (1), that’s it there. Lake (2) one there, water go in …he got no corroboree for this one. Star bin fall long time. Dreamtime, you know. Star bin fall here (3), Dreamtime. Big hole there. The water, the lake, go right down. No corroboree because Kartiya (white man) bin made dam. But big story where star bin fall…oh yeah, but [in] my drawing, water go in there, he go all the way water. Long time ago, but still a hole there. Lake, Lake, Argyle lake’. (Thomas et al 1994:58).

From Macha catalogue sheet of the painting (February 2008):

- Depicted: Lake Argyle. (Water Country)
- Black Section. Lake Argyle
- Red Section. Hills

(Plate 7.2.5.5). *Lake Argyle* 1986. Detail. Example of white dotting. Note irregularity of size and especially shape of dots with chipped, cracked and missing on outer edge of painting with some merging of dots.
(Map 7.2.5.3). *Lake Argyle* 1986 – Surface appearance map drawn 7 February 2008.

(Plate 7.2.5.6). *Lake Argyle* 1986. Detail. Surface appearance of painting highlighting the shiny, glossy, slightly grainy surface of painting throughout all areas of painting.

(Plate 7.2.5.7). *Lake Argyle* 1986. Detail in the upper centre giving an example of the strong brush-stroking used throughout this painting. Note: very shiny surface. Rubbed under-surface of painting showing through.

(Map 7.2.5.5). *Lake Argyle* 1986. Surface colour/texture map drawn 7 February 2008.
(Plate 7.2.5.8). *Lake Argyle* 1987. Detail showing surface appearance of painting. Note the glossy light medium textured area on the right, and the ‘shiny’ surface in the black area.

(Map 7.2.5.6). *Lake Argyle* 1986 – Map of use of black in the painting drawn on 7 February 2008.

(Plate 7.2.5.9). Lake Argyle 1986. Gridded. Each section is 18 (H) x 60 (W)cm.

Upper Left Corner: The white dotting throughout this section is chipped and cracked with a missing section of dots on the upper left corner. There are areas of fused dotting throughout this section. The black sections of this part of the paintings shows evidence of poor mixing of the natural resin binder to pigment, making the surface of these areas look patchy. The black section in the lower right part shows evidence of shininess. Throughout the brown section the surface is patchy, revealing the surface of the painting. Brush strokes are clearly evident throughout section.

(Plate 7.2.5.10). Upper Left Corner

Upper Left Corner: The white dotting throughout this section is chipped and cracked with a missing section of dots on the upper left corner. There are areas of fused dotting throughout this section. The black sections of this part of the paintings shows evidence of poor mixing of the natural resin binder to pigment, making the surface of these areas look patchy. The black section in the lower right part shows evidence of shininess. Throughout the brown section the surface is patchy, revealing the surface of the painting. Brush strokes are clearly evident throughout section.

(Plate 7.2.5.11). Top Centre

Top Centre: The white dotting in this section is cracked and chipped on the upper border. The small section of white dotting on the lower left side of this portion highlights the irregularity of shape and size of dotting. The brown section shows evidence of brush strokes and also of the rubbing back of previous layers of pigment. There is evidence of a shiny granulated area on left side of section. There is a faint vertical mark
approximately 4–6 cms through the centre of this section.

(Plate 7.2.5.12). Upper Right Corner

**Upper Right Corner**: The white dotting is chipped and cracked throughout this section of the painting with areas of merged dotting especially on left side of section. There is an area of missing dotting on the upper right corner of this portion. In the black area in this section there are areas of shininess throughout especially in the bottom centre with the under painting clearly visible through the top coat. There is clear evidence of a distinct delineation mark between the black and the brown section which the white dotting has not covered. Diagonal brush strokes are evident throughout whole section.

(Plate 7.2.5.13). Upper Left

**Upper Left**: The white dotting throughout this section appears to be uniform however the shape of the dotting is irregular with sections of fused dots throughout. The dots are chipped and cracked all through this section. Throughout the black sections in this portion the surface is glossy and shiny in parts with the under painting clearly seen through the transparent over painting. In the brown section, the surface is darker and more thickly applied than in surrounding areas of the painting although the under-surface is visible.

(Plate 7.2.5.14). Upper Centre

**Upper Centre**: The white dotting in this portion shows evidence of irregularity of size and shape as well as chipping, cracking and fusing with some dots missing. In the lower black area the surface is transparent in sections throughout but with areas of thicker, shiny marks. The brush strokes follow the shape of the brown section mainly in a horizontal aspect. There is evidence of a faint vertical mark approximately 4–6 cm wide through the centre of this section probably due to the vertical strut of the stretcher.

(Plate 7.2.5.15). Upper Right

**Upper Right**: The white dotting throughout this section is irregular in shape and size with some chipped, cracked and fused dots. The black section on the left side of this section shows areas of glossiness with areas of underpainting revealed. Brush stroking is in vertical orientation. In the brown section the brush stroking is obvious throughout and is in a horizontal orientation. The surface is shiny throughout this section.
Centre Left: Throughout this section the white dotting is irregular in shape and size with areas of fused dotting. There is evidence of chipping and cracking in these dots. The black parts in this section all show areas of glossiness and visible evidence of brown underpainting. In the brown part there is evidence of over-painting in a slightly darker brown in the lower right part of this section. Brush stroking is clearly evident throughout this section.

Centre: The white dotting shows irregularity of shape and size. There is some chipping and cracking of the dots. In the black section, on the right hand side, there is evidence of the beginning of a brush stroke (diagonally oriented) which is approximately 8cm in width. There is also a faint vertical mark through the centre of this section of approximately 4-6cm in width. There is obvious shininess and under-painting throughout the black section.

Centre Right: The white dotting in this section shows, especially on the left side dotting, irregularity in size and shape and a section of fused dotting. The dotting on the far right side shows evidence of chipping and cracking but is of regular size and shape. In the brown section brush stroking is very evident. Areas of thicker, shinier pigment are evident throughout with the underpainting very visible. The brush stroking in the small black area in this section follows the contours of the brown segment.

Lower Left: The white dotting throughout this section is irregular in shape and size with some fused areas of dotting. The brush stroking in the dominant black section is obvious and in a vertical orientation. There are areas of glossiness throughout this black section especially on the left side. In the brown areas of this section the under-painting is visible.
Lower Centre: The white dotting in this section shows an evenness of size however there is an irregularity of shape. In the centre of the brown section there is an area of thicker shiny mark. Brush strokes are evident throughout this section with areas of underpainting visible. There is a faint vertical mark approximately 4-6 cm in the centre of this section.

Lower Right: The white dotting in this section shows, on the left, a regularity of size and shape however on the lower left side the dotting is irregular in shape and size and also there are areas of fused dotting. There is clear evidence of the delineation between the black and brown sections in the lower left side of this section. In the centre of the brown area there is a section of thicker glossy pigment. The brush strokes throughout this section are obvious.

Lower Left Corner: The white dotting in this section shows irregularity of shape and size, fused dotting, chipped and cracked dots and missing dotting. The missing dots are on the lower left corner of the section. In the centre of the black part of the section there is evident of the beginning of a brush stroke (horizontally oriented) which is approximately 8 cm in width. Throughout the black section the brown under-painting is visible.

Bottom Centre: The white dotting throughout shows evidence of chipping and cracking and along the bottom perimeter of this section there are missing dots. The dotting is regular is size but not in shape. The black section on the left side shows an area of thicker, shiny pigment. The brush strokes throughout this section are obvious. The brown under-painting is visible in the black section. There is a faint vertical mark, approximately 4-6 cm in the centre of this section.
Lower Right Corner: The white dotting in this section shows areas of missing dotting especially along the outer lower and right side edges of this section. The dots are irregular in shape and size with some areas of fused dotting. The brush strokes are obvious throughout this section. In the black part there is an area of thicker, shinier pigment lying in a diagonal orientation in the centre of this section. The brown under-painting is visible in this black area. In the brown section there are thicker, shinier sections: one in a diagonal orientation from upper centre to lower right of section and the other in the upper left part of the section.

Summary
The obvious use of natural bloodwood resin binder, which imparts a shiny, glossy surface when dry, has been used throughout this painting. The pigment to binder ratio Thomas has used in this painting allows the brush strokes to be very visible and gives a great immediacy to this work. The painting has been painted on the ground as was usual with nearly all Thomas’s paintings however there is really very little extraneous materials imbedded on the surface. Whilst examining this painting little documentation other than the name, date, medium, dimensions and acquisition no. were given to me by the NGA, most information was gathered from Macha’s files in Perth in February 2008 and from exhibition catalogues.
7.2.6  *Frog Hollow Country 1987*

![Image of Frog Hollow Country 1987](Plate 7.2.6.1).


This information has been sourced from the National Gallery of Australia and art dealer Mary Macha, Perth.

- **Title:** *Frog Hollow Country*
- **Date:** 1987
- **Medium:** natural pigments on canvas
- **Measurement Description:** 90 x 180cm
- **Collection:** National Gallery of Australia (NGA) ;Purchased from Gallery admission charges 1988
- **NGA Collection Catalogue No.:** Acquisition No. 88.2395
- **Alternate names:** none

**Name of Artist:** Rover Thomas

**Also Known as:** (Ropa, Roba)

**Alternate Spelling(s):**

**Born:** 1926

**Place of Birth:** Yalda Soak, north east of Well 33 on Canning Stock Route, Western Australia

**Died:** 12 April 1998

**Place of Death:** Walumba Aged Care Hostel, Warmun (Turkey Creek), Western Australia

**Region:** East Kimberley W.A.

**Domicile:** Warmun (Turkey Creek) W.A.

**Language Group:** Kukutja/Wankgajunga

**Social Affiliation (Skin Group):** Joolama (Julama) – Miriwoong

**Art Centre:** Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra (1985-1996).

**Date:** 1987

**Medium detail:** natural pigments and natural binders on canvas

**Dimensions:**
- **Image Size:** 180.5 cm x 92.5 cm
- **Frame Size:** 181cm x 95cm

**Inscriptions:**
- **Front:** none
- **In Verso:**
  - **Upper Centre:** White printed label with NGA logo (10 x 4cm) - on right side of label:
    - Inscription (printed) 2.7.2008
  - On left side of label:
    - Inscription: Artist: Rover Thomas [Joolama].
    - Title: *Frog Hollow Country 1987* (italics).
    - Med: Natural pigments on canvas.
    - Cr Line: purchased from gallery charges 1988.
    - Acc#: 88.2395 IRN 83592.
  - **Left lower centre:** White label (6 x 10cm) handwritten in texta:
Inscription: Rover Thomas Frog Hollow Country 88.239
Lower right corner: inside frame - handwritten black pen: Inscription:88.239
Right upper side – attached to D-Latch: Cream paper label (7 x 4cm) – handwritten in black pen:
Inscription: 88.2395.

Frame:
Frame Type: Wood – Ash
Framer: NGA
Hanging Method: 2 hole D-Latch
Historical/Original Frame Details: unknown

Acquisition Details:
Method: purchased from gallery charges
Date: 1988
Value: unknown
Original Price: $2,000
Date Record Created: 1988

Provenance:
Person: Mary Macha, Perth
Date: 1987
Place: Warmun
Details: MM Cat No. RT1987

Location History:
Where located: NGA storage area – Hume ACT
Other locations: dates: unknown

Value:
Original Price: $2,000.
Value: unknown
Valuer: unknown

Bibliography/References:
Exhibition History:

Bibliography:
Exhibition Catalogue:
Thomas, Rover with Akerman, Kim, Macha, Mary, Christensen, Will & Caruana, Wally 1994), Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas exhibition catalogue, 18 February – 5 June, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, p13 (colour illus.), 58, 63.

Remarks: This painting sold to NGA with Nardihyilli 1987 (NGA Acc# 88.2396) (MM File No. R.T. 2987) as a pair for $4000.
From Roads Cross: The paintings of Rover Thomas exhibition catalogue 1994: p. 58:

[The] name there Frog Hollow. That the [Halls Creek] to Wyndham road. This [road] go to mine (2)[access road and clearing made by the Main Roads Department]. This road go to Turkey Creek [Warmun] (3). Lulumalulu, Lulumalulu. Sugar Bag Hill (4). Sugar Bag. Lot of words [important law], blackfella law.’

From Mary Macha catalogue sheet:

RH [right hand] vertical angled line represents Hall’s Creek Rd. Small offshoot line with knob finish, represents a track cleared with parking facilities, made by Main Roads repair unit. Horizontal wavy line represents Frog Hollow River. Upper wavy line represents hills.
(Plate 7.2.6.3). *Frog Hollow Country* 1987. Detail showing an example of typical dotting throughout the painting which focuses on the irregular size and shape of dotting.


(Plate 7.2.6.4). *Frog Hollow Country* 1987. Detail showing close-up of surface highlighting the poor surface quality of the black areas in the painting.

(Plate 7.2.6.5). *Frog Hollow Country* 1987. Detail highlighting brush strokes and direction of brush strokes. Note long strokes following contours of white dotted edged, black lines.

(Plate 7.2.6.6). *Frog Hollow Country* 1987. Gridded. Each section 18 (H) x 60 (W) cm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Upper Left Corner</th>
<th>Top Centre</th>
<th>Upper Right Corner</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Left</td>
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<td>Lower Left Corner</td>
<td>Bottom Centre</td>
<td>Lower Right Corner</td>
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</table>

(Plate 7.2.6.7). **Upper Left Corner**

**Upper Left Corner:** White dotting throughout this section shows variation in size and shape of dotting. All the white dotting appears on the red pigment in this section. The dotting on the margins of this segment is chipped and cracked. There are dots missing or rubbed back in the left upper corner. There are several areas of merged white dotting. The surface of the black pigment areas shows light textured areas of granular material and evidence of patchy white residue. This patchiness on the surface is due to poor preparation of pigment used. The top layer appears to have reacted with the under layer. In the red areas, the surface is light to medium textured throughout with an area of medium texture on the right side. This red area shows indications of having been over-painted. The brush strokes are clearly visible throughout this section and follow the curvature of the lines. There are several hairs embedded in the red surface on each side of the white dotting on the right side of this section.
**Top Centre:** The white dotting in this section shows variation in size and shape of dotting. All the white dotting is placed on the red areas in this section. There are a couple of areas of merged dotting. The dotting on the upper margin of this segment is chipped and cracked. In the red section, on the left, there are indications that this part has been over-painted with a slightly different and darker, slightly more grainy pigment. This is also evident in the black areas in this segment where there is a white patchy residue on the surface where the under layers have reacted to being over-painted. Brush strokes are clearly visible throughout this section with the strokes closely following the curvature of the lines.

**Upper Right Corner:** Clearly evident is the variation in size and shape of the white dotting throughout this section. All the white dotting is placed on the red section of the surface. There are chipped, cracked and missing dotting on the upper and right side margins. There is a black hair imbedded in the surface of the red section on the left side of the right side white dotted, diagonally oriented, black line. There is a medium to heavy textured surface on the red pigment area on the lower left side. On the right side of this segment the surface of the red pigment area is of a thicker darker pigment. In the black areas the patchy white residue is visible. On the left, diagonally oriented, black segment the black has been over-painted covering the edges of some of the white dotting. Brush strokes are clearly evident throughout.

**Upper Left:** The white dotting throughout this section is irregular in size and shape with areas of merged dotting. The dotting on the left margin of this segment is chipped and cracked. The black pigment surfaces throughout this segment are lightly textured with patches of grainy white residue with distinct patches of over-painting. In the red pigment sections the surface is light textured with the left side of the section showing clear visible signs of over painting with slightly grainier and darker pigment. Brush strokes are conspicuous throughout this segment.

(Plate 7.2.6.11). **Upper Centre**
**Upper Centre:** The white dotting throughout this section shows variation in both size and shape. The red pigment surface is lightly textured with the left side darker than the rest of this segment. Brush stroke marks are clearly visible throughout. The black pigment areas feature patchy white areas throughout. There is obvious indication of over-painting in the left black section.  
(Plate 7.2.6.12). **Upper Right**

**Upper Right:** The white dotting throughout this section shows considerable variation in size and shape with several areas of merged dotting. The red pigment areas are lightly grained with a section of darker over painted pigment on the central to right side of this section. The black sections show visible areas of white patchy pigment and areas of over-painting after dotting. Brush strokes are discernable throughout.  
(Plate 7.2.6.13). **Centre Left**

**Centre Left:** White dotting throughout this segment is irregular in shape and size with several areas of merged dotting. This segment highlights the disparity of size in the dotting throughout this painting with dots measured from 1.75cm to 1cm. The largest being on the left margin of this section. The red pigment surface throughout this segment is lightly textured and demonstrates indications of over-painting throughout with a darker pigment. The black areas are lightly to medium textured with white residue discernable all over these areas. Brush stokes are evident throughout and follow the contours of the segments in this section.  
(Plate 7.2.6.14). **Centre**

**Centre:** White dotting throughout this section is variable in size and shape. The black pigment areas in this section are light to medium grainy textured with observable over-painting patches. This is seen in the left side black pigment area where the black pigment has over-painted some of the white dotted areas on the lower side of the black area. There is a small .3cm black dot on the right side of centre. The pigment in the red sections is lightly grained with very evident diagonal brush stoking through the central section.  
(Plate 7.2.6.15). **Centre Right**

**Centre Right:** The white dotting throughout this section shows variation in both size and shape. There several
areas of missing dotting in the centre of this segment. There is obvious over-painting in the red pigment section with some of the white dotting being almost cut in two. This is clearly seen on the right side of the section on the vertical line of dotting just inside the margin line of dotting. The black sections of this segment have a lightly grained texture with areas of white residue from poorly prepared pigment. There is distinct over-painting with more stable black pigment throughout these black sections. Brush stroke marks are unmistakable throughout the red pigment parts of this segment

(Plate 7.2.6.16). **Lower Left**

**Lower Left**: The white dotting throughout this section shows irregularities in both size and shape with areas of merged dotting. In the red pigment areas there is clearly discernable the margin between the darker and lighter pigment areas on the left side. The left side is darker with slightly more textured surface. The brush stroke marks in this area are diagonal and obvious. On the lower right side of this segment there is an observable more textured red pigment surface. In the black sections the surface is lightly texture with obvious white deposits along its boundaries. There are distinct sections of over-painting in these black sections.

(Plate 7.2.6.17). **Lower Centre**

**Lower Centre**: In this section the white dotting shows only slight variation in the size and shape of the white dotting. In the red pigment areas, the pigment on the lower and right side is darker and more textured than in the upper left side. Brush stroke marks are conspicuous throughout. In the black segment the white residue is obvious. Over-painting is also conspicuous in this black segment with areas of white dotting being over-painted this is overt in the upper central area of white dotting.

(Plate 7.2.6.18). **Lower Right**

**Lower Right**: White dotting in this section is variable in both size and shape with indications of merged and missing dots. In the black sections there are areas of white patchy residue and clear conspicuous areas of over-painting. This is clearly seen in the right side vertically oriented black segment where some of the black over painting has cut across some of the white dots. Brush strokes are clearly visible and following the contours of the black areas throughout the red portions of this section.
Lower Left Corner: The white dotting in this section is variable in size and shape and shows areas of missing or rubbed dotting especially along the margin of this section. In the lower left side of this section there is an area of grainy darker pigment which grades to lighter across to the right. Brush stokes are clearly visible and are in a horizontal orientation. In the black pigment areas there is evidence of the white patchy deposits on the right side of this segment. On the left side of the black pigment area there is visible over-painting.

Bottom Centre: The white dotting along the lower margin of this section is inconsistent in size and shape with the majority of the dots showing evidence of cracking or rubbing. The red pigment surface texture is light to medium with grains of pigment obvious. The brush strokes in this segment are obvious and in horizontal orientation.

Lower Right Corner: The white dotting in this section show irregular size and shape with areas of merged, cracked chipped and missing dots. The black section shows little evidence of the white patchy residue however it has been unmistakeably over-painted. The red pigment areas are lighter in the left side than the right side with a overall light gritty texture. Brush stroke marks are apparent throughout this section.

Summary:
This painting, with its sinuous lines, is a typical example of Thomas at his best during this middle period of his painting. In this painting he delineates a detailed map of the area which is imbedded with the past and the present. This is a finely balanced composition with the brush strokes outlining all the elements and giving substance to the country he is painting about. When closely looking at this painting at the NGA at the Hume storage facility I was given very little useful information other than the name, date, medium, dimensions and acquisition number. Most of the information concerning this painting was gleaned from Macha’s files which I studied in Perth in February 2008.
7.2.7  *Ngarin Janu Country 1988*

Information sourced from Art Gallery of New South Wales and Waringarri Aboriginal Arts Kununurra

**Title:**  *Ngarin Janu Country*

**Date:**  1988

**Medium:**  earth pigments in synthetic polymer resin on canvas

**Measurement Description:**  100 x 140 cm

**Collection:**  Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW)

**AGNSW Collection Catalogue No.:**  Acquisition No. 512.1988

**Alternate Name(s):**  Ngarin Janu Country

**Name of Artist:**  Rover Thomas

**Also Known as:**

**Alternate Spelling(s):**  (Roper, Ropa, Roba)

**Born:**  1926

**Place of Birth:**  Yalda Soak, north east of Well 33 on Canning Stock Route, Western Australia

**Died:**  12 April 1998

**Place of Death:**  Walumba Aged Care Hostel, Warmun (Turkey Creek), Western Australia

**Region:**  East Kimberley W.A.

**Domicile:**  Warmun (Turkey Creek) W.A.

**Language Group:**  Kukutja/Wankgajunga

**Social Affiliation (Skin Group):**  Joolama (Julama) - Miriwoong

**Art Centre:**  Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra

**Date:**  1988

**Medium detail:**  ground earth pigments in synthetic polymer resin on canvas

**Dimensions:**

- Image Size: 140 x 100 cm
- Frame Size: 144 x 103.5 x 3.5 x 1.5 cm

**Inscriptions:**

- Front: none
- In Verso: Registration Label[printed]
  - No. [printed]: 512.1988 [handwritten blue ball point pen]
  - Artist [printed]: Rover Thomas [handwritten blue ball point pen]
  - Title [printed]: Ngarin Janu Country [handwritten blue ball point pen]
  - Medium [printed]: ground earth pigments in synthetic polymer resin
Frame:
- Frame Type: Wood (maple) stained (red).
- Framer: AGNSW
- Hanging Method: D-ring – 29 cm from top of painting
- Historical/Original Frame Details: Unknown

Acquisition Details:
- Method: Purchase/Collection
- Date: 29 November 1988
- Source: Aboriginal Arts Australia Ltd (Australia) - vendor
- Value:
- Original Price: $2,000.00
- Date Record Created: 1988

Provenance:
- 2. Aboriginal Arts Australia – Art from the Kimberley Exhibition 1988
- Date: 10.8.88

Place: Frog Hollow (near Warmun)

Details: Waringarri records show it was initially sold on 1.10.88 at Aboriginal Artists Gallery Sydney - $2,000. (Artist Commission $666.00)

Location History:
- Where located: AGNSW
- Other locations: dates: unknown

Value:
- Original Price: $2,000
- Value: unknown
- Valuer: unknown

Bibliography/References:

Exhibition History:

Bibliography:

Exhibition Catalogue:
- Perkins, Hetti and West, Margie (Curatorial Eds) (2007), One Sun One Moon: Aboriginal Art in Australia, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, p61 (colour illus.).
- Carrigan, Belinda (Editor) (2003), Rover Thomas: I want to Paint exhibition catalogue, Holmes a Court Gallery, East Perth, p77 (colour illus).

Book:
- James, Bruce (1999) 'Australian Collection: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art'
Neale, Margo (1993), ‘Landmaps’ in *Yiribana: An Introduction to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collection*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, pp74 – 75, 75 (colour illus.) 138, 139, plate no. 35.


**Periodical:**


**Remarks:**
Notes: In Waringarri Aboriginal Arts Kununurra: catalogue No. AP1691 (10.8.1988) Another catalogue code was S 1420 which references the actual canvas stretcher and pigments purchased and used by the artist. Painting was purchased for $340.00 from Thomas by Waringarri Aboriginal Arts. It was then sold through Warringarri Aboriginal Arts on 1.10.988 to Australian Aboriginal Arts for an exhibition *Aboriginal Art of the East Kimberley* in Sydney in 1988 and was sold to AGNSW for $2,000. Thomas was residing at Frog Hollow at the time.
(Plate 7.2.7.3). Copy of Price List (page 1) of *Aboriginal Art of East Kimberley* Exhibition 1988. Note No.3; *Ngarin Janu Country* 1988 - $2,000.00 (Waringarri Aboriginal Arts files).

(Plate 7.2.7.4). List of Sales of Rover Thomas Paintings during 1988 (Waringarri Aboriginal Arts Files), *Ngarin Janu Country* 1988 is highlighted.
Interpretation of elements in painting. Information from Waringarri Aboriginal Arts files:

1. Ngarin Janu – Lake or large body of water
2. Miwuda – Big Hill
3. Dalidali – Sandbar
4. Where people tried to cross
5. Kulijita – Hill

Story on catalogue information sheet AP1691 in Waringarri Aboriginal Arts files:

Ngarin Janu Country (or Ngarinjanoo Country) is near the Canning Stock Route (CSR). Ngarinjanoo is a lake and swamp with reeds near the CSR between Well 33 and Kintore. This is Thomas’s father’s country. The proper law for this place is called Ngoooloooolbarr. It is associated with the men’s song and flood dreamings.

This painting is about a Dreamtime story when the big lake (Ngarin Janu) got flooded. The people who lived there tried to escape the flood, but they were drowned when they tried to cross the channel between the sandbar and the Big Hill (Miwuda).
Two Dingoes and the flood

There were two emu up north from around Inverway Station, from Nungaroo Creek, who were chased by two dingo. A big distance away from Mulan at Nungaroo.

People were walking. The emus were in front. The people were singing and dancing, and they were in between the dingoes and the emus. There were floodwaters behind the dingoes. When people were camping the flood would stop. There was one old man, he had a string line and he would cut the water while they camped. He would hold the waters back while they camped. While they would sing and dance. Where they camped the water was held up. That is where the billabongs in Sturt Creek are now. Like at Bindaeroor. The black and white water bird, the one with the long legs, the little bird was with the people. Birds and other animals joined the people as they moved south, singing and dancing.

They were coming down, straight down to the lake on the Sturt River side. But the dingo chased the emu round the other side. Around to number 51 well (water bore) around to Gilling-gillam.

The dingo chased the emu back and forth on the main lake. One dingo was chasing one emu and the other dingo was chasing the second emu. Back and forth. Each dingo grabbed an emu when they passed but they each grabbed the wrong emu. They grabbed ‘em and killed ‘em and ate ‘em.

The people on the other edge of the lake, in the main channel, camped again. In that main camp they sung and danced, that was where we call Lera Yard.

When the two dingo’s were full they walked up the other channel to Mulan. There was a soak there and they dug in. They’re still there.

Then the water came in from both sides and all the people got drowned.

One old man walked off and sang the (he put a deadly curse on them all). They all drowned because they hadn’t shared some food with him. But when he walked off, another old man spat on him, cursed him, so that first old man who walked off died too.

From: Rex Johns, elder and founder of Mulan, Tanami Desert, East Kimberley, WA. as told to Douglas Goudie October 2003.

(Plate 7.2.7.5). This Dreaming track story about the Dingo and Emu which includes the local men’s flood Dreaming story is in Dr Douglas Goudie (2004). ‘Section 6: Extreme weather impacts – old’ in Disruptive Weather Warnings and Weather Knowledge in Remote Australian Indigenous Communities: Research Report for Bureau of Meterology (Melbourne) May 2004, Townsville, Centre for Disaster Studies, James Cook University. p 85.

Misinformation about this story:

Margot Neale (Ed) in Yiribana: An Introduction to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collection, The Art Gallery of New South Wales 1993 p.74 states about this painting:

It delineates Rover’s country, from above as well as vertically, scarred by the gouging actions of large scale mining and massacres and denuded by pastoralists. This is not a map of a land that is animated by ancestral journeys and coloured by a profusion of new growth, but rather a map of the topography that is both geological and historic, an ancient land that has witnessed human interaction and suffered ignoble treatment (Neale 1993:74).

This is quite a different take on what the actually painting relates too.

(Plate 7.2.7.6). *Ngarin Janu Country* 1988. Detail of typical dotting throughout painting with variation in size, shape and evidence of chipped, cracked and merged dotting.

(Plate 7.2.7.7). *Ngarin Janu Country* 1988. Detail of typical dotting throughout painting with variation in size, shape and evidence of chipped, cracked and merged dotting.

(Plate 7.2.7.8). Ngarin Janu Country 1988. Detailing the water marking on left lower side of painting

(Plate 7.2.7.9). *Ngarin Janu Country* 1988. Detail highlighting brush strokes showing direction with evidence of darker section (left) having been added after lighter section (right).

(Plate 7.2.7.10). *Ngarin Janu Country* 1988. Gridded. Each section 20 (H) x 46.6 (W) cm.
Upper Left Corner: The white dotting throughout this section is both irregular in size and shape. A good example of irregular white dotting size is seen in the central curving line of white dotting. The dotting has been applied from top to bottom as evinced by the larger dots followed by series of smaller dots. Brush stoke marks are clearly evident in right side lighter pigment area with approximately 3 cm wide brush marks visible. Brush strokes are also visible in the slightly darker yellow pigment on the left. The darker left side has been painted after the section on the right as the brush strokes on the right side are truncated indicating overpainting. There are also some small white ‘dots’ in the centre of the left outer edge inside the white dotted margin. The application of pigment is very flat, not textured in both sections.

Top Centre: The white dotting throughout this section is irregular in shape and size. The vertical white dotting which bisects this section appears to have a dark pigment ‘bleeding’ around each dot. In the right side black pigment area, there is a textured, shiny area extending across the part. Brush strokes are clearly seen in the yellow pigment section. The direction of strokes is primarily from top to bottom however there is evidence of horizontal brushstroke marks. These marks are probably from a previous coat of pigment. A reddish tinge from under-painting is detected throughout the black area. This highlights the thin watery nature of the black pigment. There is a black hair imbedded in the black section close to the white dotted edge in the centre of the section.

Upper Right Corner: There is an irregularity in the white dotting of size and shape throughout this section. The dotting in this section is cracked and chipped especially on the outer right edge. The black section is very flat in texture with no shiny sections but there is a slight reddish tinge coming through the pigment. On close examination brush stroke marks are evident.
(7.2.7.14). Upper Left

Upper Left: There is variation throughout the section of the white dotting in size and shape especially on right side of section. The diagonally oriented white dotting that intersects this section shows evidence of direction of dotting from top of section to bottom, larger dots followed by smaller dots repeated at intervals. Brush strokes are clearly seen throughout this section in both areas. On the right side the brush width is clearly able to be ascertained and is 3cm wide. The surface texture of this section is very flat. In the left side, the dark yellow pigment, brush stroke direction is mainly diagonal in a right to left orientation and is top to bottom on the outer left side of this pigment area. In the lighter yellow pigment area the brush stroke direction is diagonally from right to left.

(7.2.7.15). Upper Centre

Upper centre: There is variability in white dotting of size and shape, with little separation between dotting. The black section shows evidence of shininess in most of this section. Brush strokes are clearly seen in yellow ochre section however they are very to see in the black section. There appears to be black pigment ‘bleeding’ around the white dotting. This is most obvious in the upper section of white dotting. In the yellow section the brushstrokes follow the contour of the dotted line.

(7.2.7.16). Upper Right

Upper Right: Note the very irregular sized and shaped white dotting on the right outer margin. This dotting is cracked and chipped. The black section is very flat with no shininess and light texture. Brush strokes are seen on close examination and are multidirectional but with a strong top to bottom orientation.

(7.2.7.17). Centre Left

Centre Left: The white dotting in this section is inconsistent in size and shape. This is clearly seen, in the right side of the section, in the size difference between the white dotting around the darker yellow ochre
section and the larger white dotting delineating the black section; the difference being approximately .4cm and .75cm. Again dotting direction can be worked out by size differences of dots; the larger dot followed by smaller dotting indicating direction. So direction of the white dotting on the darker yellow is from right to left whereas the dotting on the black section is from left to right. Brush stroke direction is clearly seen in the dark yellow area as is the poor pigment blending. There is a prominent dark area in the centre of the dark yellow ochre section. There is a watermark on the yellow area on the left side of this section with pigment staining around its edges. This marking extends down the yellow ochre section.

(7.2.7.18). **Centre**

![Image](image1.png)

**Centre**: There is irregularity of the white dotting in size and shape throughout the section. White dotting on border of yellow pigment section has been applied from right to left whereas the white dotting on the red pigment area is from left to right. On the left side, the white dots show evidence of pigment ‘bleeding’ along edge of dotting. The black area is quite shiny with brushstrokes hard to delineate. Brushstrokes are clearly seen in red pigment section. There is a black hair imbedded in the red part close to the white dotting in the right lower corner of the section.

(7.2.7.19). **Centre Right**

![Image](image2.png)

**Centre Right**: There is throughout the section irregular white dotting in size and shape. The white dotting on outer right margin is chipped and cracked. The black area is very flat with a light texture and on close examination brush strokes are evident. The direction of brush strokes in this area, are diagonally from right to left. There are hairs embedded in the red pigment section adjacent to the edge of diagonally oriented white dotting in the lower left side.

(7.2.7.20). **Lower Left**

![Image](image3.png)

**Lower Left**: There is obvious irregularity of size and shape of the white dotting throughout this section. In particular the white dotting bordering on the yellow/black part in the centre of thee section. Some of the white dots have merged together. This part clearly illustrates the different sized dotting that occurs. Brush stroke marks are clearly seen on the dark yellow area in the upper left portion of this section and are in a diagonally right to left orientation. Evidence of a watermark appears on the lower left corner of the section, commencing about six (6) white dots from the lower left corner and goes from the dark yellow ochre to the yellow ochre.
sections. In the yellow pigment area the brush stroke orientation is diagonally right to left. The orientation of brush strokes in the black area are diagonally in both directions and in same in the red pigment area. In the black area there is a glossy, shiny section in the centre of the area.

(7.2.7.21). **Lower Centre**

![Image](image1)

**Lower Centre**: There is variability of white dotting in size and shape in the diagonally oriented line of dotting. Brush strokes are clearly evident in the red pigment section. There is an inconsistency of tone of colour throughout the red area which is probably due to separation of pigment throughout this area, indicating poor mixing and preparation of pigments. Overall the surface is flat with a light texture.

(7.2.7.22). **Lower Right**

![Image](image2)

**Lower Right**: There is variation in the size and shape of the dotting throughout this section. Direction of dotting is from left to right. Dotting on right edge of the section is chipped and cracked. There is a white mark inside the white dotting on the black section on the right. Brush strokes are clearly evident in red pigment section, the brush strokes being in both directions across the area. There is clear evidence of separation of pigment in the red pigment portion of this section.

(7.2.7.23). **Left Lower Corner**

![Image](image3)

**Left Lower Corner**: Note that the white dotting is irregular in both size and shape in this section with dotting in several places merging into each other. The white dotting is chipped and cracked around the lower left corner. There is a watermark in the yellow pigment section in the upper left and this watermark carries down through the black section to the bottom left corner of this section. This watermark is edged by darker pigment. Brush stroke marks are clearly seen in the red pigment section and the direction of the strokes is from upper right to lower left and from left to right along the bottom of the section.
(7.2.7.24). **Bottom Centre**

- **Bottom Centre**: The white dotting on bottom edge of this section shows a variation in both size and shape. Many of the white dots have merged together along this edge. Brush strokes are clearly evident throughout the red pigment area. The strokes appear to be in many directions but predominantly they are horizontally oriented along bottom half of section with vertical strokes evident on both the right and left sides of this section.

(7.2.7.25). **Right Lower Corner**

- **Right Lower Corner**: Note the irregularity of the white dotting in both shape and size along the right and bottom outer edges of this section. The white dots are chipped and cracked on the outer right side edge. Brush strokes are evident with a right to left horizontal orientation across the section. There is a .5cm black mark in the right lower corner of this section.

**Summary**:

In this painting, the use of the strong black, diagonally oriented, element depicting water flooding out of a lake, gives it a great sense of power. There is a sense of movement in time, of events actually happening. The surface of the painting although of light texture, is imbedded with hairs and has watermarks from being poorly handled. The brush strokes are strong and multidirectional giving this painting a great sense of immediacy. When studying this painting at the AGNSW, little information was given with this painting other than name, date, medium, dimensions and acquisition number. Most information was gained from the files of Waringarri Aboriginal Arts at Kununurra where I did fieldwork in October 2006, October 2007 and April 2009.
7.2.8 *The burning site 1990*


Information from National Gallery of Australia:

**Title:** The burning site  
**Date:** 1990  
**Medium:** natural pigments on canvas  
**Measurement Description:** 90 x 180cm  
**Collection:** National Gallery of Australia (NGA); purchased 1990  
**Alternate Name(s):** The burning site – Bedford Downs

**Name of Artist:** Rover Thomas  
**Also Known as:** (Ropa, Roba)  
**Alternate Spelling(s):** unknown  
**Born:** 1926  
**Place of Birth:** Yalda Soak, north east of Well 33 on Canning Stock Route, Western Australia  
**Died:** 12 April 1998  
**Place of Death:** Walumba Aged Care Hostel, Warmun (Turkey Creek), Western Australia  
**Region:** East Kimberley W.A.

**Domicile:** Warmun (Turkey Creek) W.A.  
**Social Affiliation (Skin Group):** Joolama (Julama) – Miriwoong  
**Art Centre:** Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra  
**Date:** 1990  
**Medium detail:** natural pigments on canvas  
**Dimensions:**  
- Image Size: 180cm x 90cm (180.5 x 90.5cm)  
- Frame Size: 182.5cm x 92.5cm  

**Inscriptions:**  
- **Front:** none  
- **In Verso:** Upper Left Corner: On Fome-Core backing - handwritten, black texta:  

**Language Group:** Kukutja/Wankgajunga  
**Inscription:** ROVER THOMAS, “THE BURNING SITE”, ACC. 90.1728  
**Lower left Corner:** Inside of frame – handwritten black pen (upside down): Inscription: 90.1728  
**Lower Left Corner:** Inside of frame handwritten, black texta (upside down) Inscription: ROVER  
**Upper Centre:** White, black printed, 4 x 10 cm, label with NGA logo on
right upper corner and inscription below logo: Printed: 2/07/2007:
Inscription on left side of label:
Artist: Rover Thomas [Joolama]
Title: The burning site 1990
Med: natural gum and pigments on canvas
Cr. Line: Purchased 1990
Acc#: 90.1728 IRN: 148444
Attached to Right D-Latch: Cream coloured paper label – handwritten, black pen- Inscription: 90.1728
Lower Right Corner: Tucked into frame (upside down), white, printed description label: Inscription (seen): [The] burning site, [Bedford]

Frame: Frame Type: Wood - Ash
Framer: NGA
Hanging Method: 2 hole D – latch
Historical/Original Frame Details: unknown

Acquisition Details: Method: unknown
Date: 1990
Value: unknown
Original Price: unknown
Date Record Created: 1990

Provenance: Person: Mary Macha, Perth
Date: 1990
Place: unknown where painted
Details: unknown

Location History: Where located: NGA storage facility at Hume ACT
Other locations: dates: unknown
Value: Original Price: unknown
Value: unknown
Valuer: unknown

Downs Killings, natural pigments on canvas, [purchased] 1990

Bibliography/References:

Exhibition History:

Bibliography:
Books:

Exhibition Catalogue:
Thomas, Rover with Akerman, Kim, Macha, Mary, Christensen, Will & Caruana, Wally (1994), Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas exhibition catalogue, 18 February – 5 June, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, p56 (colour illus.), 61, 64.

Remarks: Notes:
Information from *Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas* exhibition catalogue: p.61:

1. Mount King [Manking hill as per catalogue sheet]
2. Hill
3. Hill [Gauraro hill as per catalogue sheet]
4. The road to Turkey Creek
5. The road to Lansdowne [Gauraro road as per catalogue sheet]
6. Bedford Homestead
7. The road to Mount House [Gunkin road as per catalogue sheet]
8. The place where the bodies were burnt
9. The place where wood was collected in a wagon. (Thomas et al 1994:61)

Information about the Bedford Downs killings from Raftspace Gallery and *Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas* exhibition catalogue p.53:

This painting relates to the Bedford Downs killings in the 1920s. A group of *Gija* men were jailed for spearing a milking cow near Mt King, an emu Dreaming place, to the west of the homestead (www.raftartspace.com.au). On their release from jail they walked over 200 kilometres back to Bedford Downs. Shortly after their return, the manager Paddy Quilty, it is reported, directed some of the men to collect loads of firewood using a dray. The wood was distributed in piles throughout the ration camp. The manager then distributed food to the people in the camp; he gave them beef, bread and ham, that had been laced with strychnine. Apparently other white men, managers from adjacent stations were there. The strychnine did its work. Some victims who were in agony and incapacitated by the effects of the poison were shot by the whites. Only one man escaped by climbing a high hill where the horsemen could not follow. The wood assembled earlier was used to cremate the dead. It is likely that this event occurred in or about 1924. (Thomas et al 1994: 53). Other versions of this story state that only two Aboriginal men were killed.
Bedford Downs Killings

We go ten hour.
Alright.
They been put that wood like that.
Right round.
Might be four – four trip.
Got a wagon. You know.
One. Two Three. Four. Five.
Six Trip.

Put him right round – that wood.
Like that. You know.
Long time.
Yeah. Right round.
Like that. You know.

And he ask
And him say.
‘One more’ him be say
‘That’s nearly ‘bout right’. Him be say.
Right.
‘Put him right on top that wagon.
Put him really high.
‘That’s the last run’.

‘Alright.
Put them right round the camps. Right
Right round.’
That wood. You know.
But they never thinking about, them people. You know.
But they –
They been getting the wood for themselves. You know.
Them mob. You know.
They never been think about.
Poor fellow –
They do know nothing about.
‘Alright’ him be say.
‘We’ll be closing for dinner now.’
Lunch. You know.
‘Come on Come on over.’
All lots – they been singing out from the wagon. You know.
‘Come’ they say.
That meat –
meat.
He got a poison –
Strychnine. You know.
Put ‘im long meat.
Bread
Ham
Butter
And strychnine – there in centre.
-with that, that mob – with that –
Where they been having that poison.
You know
[The manager].

Anyhow all the white man bin there. Too many.
He from Bedford.
Well I know only that old man now.

That manager from that Bedford –
[the manager], now.
That’s the one now.
But him bin call that mob from every station. You know.
Yeah. Bedford. Yes.
Strychnine. You know.
All bin mix up – all up.
Poison one. You know.

‘Come now. Come’.
Him bin sing out ‘Come on. Dinner’.

All bin come
All they bin come
- from side you know.
‘Come on. Get ‘im tucker.’

Bite im.
Chomp. Chomp. Chomp.
That really cruel one.
Chomp. Chomp.
- fall down.
Bite him,
Next one –
Chomp, chomp, chomp,
- fall down.
Everyone of them.

And same time this on
Crack
Crack
- poor fellow
- got a Forty-four.

‘Alright’ him be say.
All them blokes been falling down everyways.
They been falling down everyways.

Only one bloke bin save.
Him bin fall down,
Crack. This one.

They bin shooting along him. Shooting.
But him right on top f gully. You know.
Horse gotten gallop.
Horse. You know.
They were save.
High hill, that country. Big mountain.
And he asked:
‘We’ll get him next time.’

Only one.
Only one boy call Crickadall.
Name of that. Crickadall.
That’s only one bloke bin saved.
Him Crickadall.
He Dunham boy too.
He from Dunham Station.
Yeah. Crickadall. One boy been got away


(Plate 7.2.8.4). The burning site 1990. Detailing typical example of dotting throughout the painting being similar in size but irregular in shape.
(Map 7.2.8.3). The burning site 1990. Surface appearance map drawn 8 May 2008.

(Plate 7.2.8.5). The burning site 1990. Highlighting the flat rubbed back surface showing ‘furry’ rubbed back canvas and the ‘bleeding’ pigment on the left side of this segment.

The burning site 1990. Highlighting the rub marks where the pigment on the canvas has been rubbed back to make the surface flat and non-textured. Brush stroke marks are obvious and in a diagonal to horizontal orientation.


(Plate 7.2.8.7). *The burning site* 1990. Gridded. Each section 18 (H) × 60 (W) cm.

Upper Left Corner | Top Centre | Upper Right Corner
---|---|---
Upper Left | Upper Centre | Upper Right
Centre Left | Centre | Centre Right
Lower Left | Lower Centre | Lower Right
Lower Left Corner | Bottom Centre | Lower Right Corner
(Plate 7.2.8.8). **Upper Left Corner**

**Upper Left Corner**: White dotting throughout this section is of consistent size but not of shape. There are no cracked or chipped dots. There is a faint round mark, the size of a cup in the brown pigment area on the left side of this section. The entire surface of this section is very flat with no shiny or glossy areas. The surface of the canvas is light textured with very few grains of pigment evident. The brush strokes however are evident throughout.

(Plate 7.2.8.9). **Top Centre**

**Top Centre**: Throughout this section the white dotting is not chipped or cracked and is of consistent size. The shape of the dots is irregular. There is quite a difference in pigment colour in the brown areas of this section. The brown segment on the right shows areas of previous pigment layers having been rubbed back so that under-layers are discernable. The vertically oriented, brown, dotted edged central line shows a marked variation in brown pigment. It appears that the white pigment used in the dotting was applied whilst the brown pigment was still wet and the white pigment has been mixed with the brown in this section, then let to dry and then the white dotting has been applied. The surface of this segment is very flat with a light texture.

(Plate 7.2.8.10.). **Upper Right Corner**

**Upper Right Corner**: There is a variability of dotting size and shape in this section. In the outer edge of this section the dots are obviously larger than the dotting around the brown pigment area. The white dotting is not chipped or scratched. There is a colour variation in the brown section and is lighter in colour on the left side than on the right. The surface of the black section is very flat colour and lightly textured.

(Plate 7.2.8.11). **Upper Left**

**Upper Left**: The white dotting in this section shows a consistency of size and shape. There are no cracked or missing dots but there is evidence of merged dots. There is a marked variation of values in the brown pigment areas of this section. On the right side the brown areas have a lighter value than on the left side. This is due to the bleeding of white pigment, from applied white dotting, into the brown, being mixed and then let dry and then the white dotting being re-applied. The black areas show a less marked variation in colour however the red under-pigment is apparent throughout the black areas.
Upper Centre: The white dotting in this section show a consistency in size but not in shape with areas of fused dotting occurring in several places. The central, vertically oriented, brown pigment line shows again the milky-look of mixed pigments with pigment bleed along its edges. In all the brown pigment areas of the segment, brush stroke marks are clearly visible. In the black pigment areas the brush stroke marks are also discernable. The texture throughout this segment is light and the surface is very flat and previous pigment layers have been rubbed back.

Upper Right: The white dotting in this section is of similar size and shape. The brown pigment area has been previously rubbed back of grainy material and then coated with a thin watery pigment layer. The rub marks and the brush stroke marks are distinct. On the lower left corner of this segment there is unmistakeable evidence of canvas showing through the pigment layers. The black pigment portion is flat and light textured with obvious brush stroke marks. There are several hairs embedded in the surface of the section in the lower right corner.

Centre Left: The white dotting in this section is of similar size and shape. There is a distinct difference in the tone of brown pigment in the left side pigment area and the right side pigment portion. Brushstroke marks and rub marks are discernable. There is a distinct horizontal mark across the centre of the section with the pigment appearing to be darker in the lower half. Throughout the whole segment brush strokes are clearly visible and follow the contours of the shapes. The texture of the section is light.

Centre: The white dotting in this section is of similar size and shape with some areas of merged dotting. There is pigment ‘bleed’ along the left side of the vertically oriented brown dotted edged line in the centre of the segment which also shows mixed pigment in its upper section. This is also seen in the horizontally oriented
brown pigment line in the lower part of this segment. The black pigment areas are lightly textured with the under red pigment evident throughout.

(Plate 7.2.8.16). **Centre Right**

**Centre Right:** The white dotting is of similar size and shape with several areas of merged dotting. The black areas of this section are light textured with the red under-pigment showing through in patches. The brown pigment areas in this section have distinct rub marks and brush strokes are visible.

(Plate 7.2.8.17). **Lower Left**

**Lower Left:** The white dotting throughout this segment is of similar size and shape with some areas of merged dotting. There is a distinct horizontal mark, approximately one third of the way down from the top margin of this portion, with the upper section of brown pigment being darker than the lower part. In the brown pigment area in the lower central area there are several black hairs. This brown pigment area shows unmistakable areas of rub marks from previous coatings and distinct brush strokes from the final application of brown pigment. The black areas and the brown areas are of light texture.

(Plate 7.2.8.18). **Lower Centre**

**Lower Centre:** The size of the white dotting shows patches of variation however the shape of the dots is similar all through his section. There is noticeable variation in the colour of the white dotting in the three (3) rows of right nearly horizontal lines of dotting near the centre of the segment. The brown pigment areas show distinct sections of rub marks from previous coatings and distinct brushstrokes from the final application of brown pigment. The black pigment parts are heavily rubbed and the red pigment from previous coats is apparent through the pigment.

(Plate 7.2.8.19). **Lower Right**

**Lower Right:** The white dotting is inconsistent in size and shape in several areas in this section. On the upper left side of the brown pigment areas there are several very small dark marks on the surface. The area highlights
the vertical rub marks that are consistent throughout this painting. The brush strokes of the final pigment coat are discernable throughout this section and are in a diagonal orientation throughout the majority of this brown pigment area. The texture throughout this segment is light. There are several small watermarks in lower central area in the brown pigment area.

(Plate 7.2.8.20). **Left Lower Corner**

**Left Lower Corner**: There is variation of size and shape throughout the white dotting in this segment. The brown pigment section of this portion shows evidence of having been rubbed back prior to application of final, watery, brown pigment coat. There are horizontal and vertical brushstrokes throughout this area. The brushstrokes in the black section are obvious and follow the contours of the lines.

(Plate 7.2.8.21). **Bottom Centre**

**Bottom Centre**: The white dotting throughout this section is variable in size and shape and has merged dots in several areas. There is a black 1.6cm diameter, non-dotted edged circle in the lower left of centre part of the segment. This clearly was added after completion. There is an area of pigment ‘bleed’ on the left side of the vertically oriented, right side, white dotted edged, black pigment line. Throughout the black pigment section there are obvious patches of red under-pigment visible. The brown pigment areas in this segment show evidence of having been rubbed back prior to application of final, watery, brown pigment coat. This final coat follows the contours of the shapes.

(Plate 7.2.8.22). **Right Lower Corner**

**Right Lower Corner**: The white dotting in this section is inconsistent in size and shape. On the lower left side of the upper horizontal line of white dotting there is a section of dots that have been over-painted leaving a white smudgy area along the top of the new dotting. The black pigment areas are of a light texture with patches of red pigment coming through from the under painted coat. The brown pigment area is lightly textured with brush strokes visible. There are several small watermarks in the central to right brown pigment area.

**Summary**

What strikes one when first seeing this painting is its ‘flatness’, its very rubbed back surface with parts of the raw canvas showing through. There are no areas of shininess. There are marks and short hairs, probably dog hairs, imbedded in the surface and the watery quality of the pigment used, all give a feeling of immediacy and strength to the painting. There is symmetry in the design where the landscape is seen from above and the hills, through the strong brush strokes, have been given volume and the roads that have been documented cut
through the landscape. A powerful, yet simple painting containing so much information. Most information gained on this painting has been from the exhibition catalogues and Macha’s files seen in February 2008 in Perth.
7.2.9  *Cyclone Tracy* 1991

Information sourced from National Gallery of Australia and art dealer Mary Macha:

**Title:**  *Cyclone Tracy*

**Date:** 1991

**Medium:** natural pigments on canvas

**Measurement Description:** 183 x 168 cm

**Collection:** National Gallery of Australia (NGA); purchased 1991

**NGA Collection Catalogue No.:** Acquisition No. 91.826

**Alternate Name(s):** none

**Name of Artist:** Rover Thomas

**Also Known as:** (Ropa, Roba)

**Alternate Spelling(s):**

**Born:** 1926

**Place of Birth:** Yalda Soak, north east of Well 33 on Canning Stock Route, Western Australia

**Died:** 12 April 1998

**Place of Death:** Walumba Aged Care Hostel, Warmun (Turkey Creek), Western Australia

**Region:** East Kimberley W.A.

**Domicile:** Warmun (Turkey Creek) W.A.

**Language Group:** Kukutja/Wankgajunga

**Social Affiliation (Skin Group):** Joolama (Julama) - Miriwoong

**Art Centre:** Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra

**Date:** 1991

**Medium detail:** natural pigments on canvas

**Dimensions:**

- Image Size: 183 x 168 cm
- Frame Size: 184.5 cm x 169.5 cm

**Inscriptions:**

Front: none

In verso:

Upper left corner: handwritten black text: Inscription: Rover Thomas “Cyclone Tracey” Acc. 91.826.

Upper Centre: White Label (4 x 10cm) with black printed NGA logo on right side of label: Inscription: Printed 1/07/2007. On left side of label:
Inscription: Artist: Rover Thomas [Joolama].
Title: Cyclone Tracy.
Medium: natural pigments on canvas.
Acc#: 91.826 IRN 148012

Upper right corner: White label (7.5 x 10cm), black printed:
Inscription: National Gallery of Australia:
Acc. No.: 91.826.
Artist: Rover Thomas.
Title: Cyclone Tracy.
Date: 1991
Medium natural pigments on canvas.
Ex Title:
Crate No.:

Lower right: White label (4 x 10cm), black printed:
Inscription: Thomas, Rover
Cyclone Tracy 1991
natural pigments on canvas
183.0 x 168.0cm
National Gallery of Australia
1991.826

Lower right corner on fome-core backing in a vertical orientation: black pen:
Inscription: 1991.826
Lower right corner inside of wood frame: pencil upside down:
Inscription 91.826
Lower right corner: white painted 2cm mark: handwritten vertical orientation:
Inscription: 1991.826
Upper left Corner: Cream coloured label attached with red and white nylon thread and metal eyelet to D-latch: printed black:
Inscription: National Gallery of Australia
Handwritten black pen (overwritten):
Inscription 91.826

Frame: Frame Type: Wood - Ash
Framer: NGA
Hanging Method: 2 hole D- Latch and Oz Clip
Historical/Original Frame Details:

Acquisition Details:
Method: Direct from Mary Macha Perth
Date: 1991
Value: unknown
Original Price: $5000
Date Record Created:

Provenance: Person: Mary Macha - Perth
Date:1991
Place: Perth
Details: painting commissioned by Macha, painted in Subiaco, Perth.

Location History:
Where located: – Project Gallery (Level 1)
Other locations: dates: 8.5.2008 viewed at NGA storage facility at Hume ACT

Value: Original Price: $5000
Value: unknown
Bibliography/References:

Exhibition History:


1999: Masterworks by Contemporary Aboriginal Artists: An Exhibition to Tour Europe/America/Asia, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

2000: Susan Jenkins and Carly Lane (Curators), Contemporary Aboriginal Australian Art in Modern Worlds: World of Dreamings, State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia and at National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

2000: Susan Jenkins and Carly Lane (Curators), Aboriginal Art in Modern Worlds, 8 September -19 November, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

2000: Garma Exhibition (1 September – 15 November 2000) (per NGA information)


Bibliography:

Book:
Gascoigne, Hester (ed) (1992), An Introduction to the National Gallery of Australia, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, p27 (colour illus.).
Thomas, Nicholas (1999), Possessions: Indigenous Art/Colonial Culture, Thames & Hudson, London, front cover (colour illus.).

Periodical:


Jenkins, Susan (2002), ‘Colour and Country: Aspects of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art hang’, Artonview, Issue 32 (Summer), pp45, (colour illus.), 48 (colour illus.).


Exhibition Catalogue:
Thomas, Rover with Akerman, Kim, Macha, Mary, Christensen, Will & Caruana, Wally (1994), Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas exhibition catalogue, 18 February – 5 June, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, front cover (colour illus.), 60, 64.

*Masterworks by Contemporary Aboriginal Artists: An Exhibition to Tour Europe/America/Asia* exhibition catalogue (1999), National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, front cover (colour illus.).


Remarks:

Notes: 21.12.2007 *Cyclone Tracy* hanging in – Project exhibition space at NGA
Text Box beside painting: 19 x 8.5 cm on left side of painting:
Inscription: Rover Thomas (Joolama)
Kukatja/Wangkajunga people
Australian born c1926 died 1998 Australia
Cyclone Tracy
1991 Warmun (Turkey Creek) Kimberley Western Australia
natural earth pigments on canvas
Purchased 1991 1991.826
In the 1997 *Eye of the Storm* exhibition catalogue: p 92, Avril Quail says:

‘Cyclone Tracy 1991 recalls the origins of the *Krill Krill [Kurrirr Kurrirr]* ceremony. The black form represents the cyclone gathering intensity as it heads towards and engulfs Darwin. The shape relates to conventional images of the subject developed in early dance emblems. Minor winds are shown as forms emanating from the main image feed the storm, the red ones picking up the dust’

From *Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas* exhibition catalogue 1994: p 60:

(1) the start of the wind,
(2) the full force of the cyclone,
(3) The winds feeding the cyclone,
(4) Wind filled with red dust.

(See song number 31) of Kurriirr Kurriirr ceremony recorded prior to Thomas going to Venice Biennale in 1990 by anthropologist Will Christensen. This song appears in *Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas* exhibition catalogue 1994: p 27. This song is translated as:

*N gumuli warra tawun [Darwin] pirringa.*

Looking across from Kununurra they see that Darwin has been flattened by the cyclone. The Rainbow Serpent destroyed Darwin

Waringari Aboriginal Arts at Kununurra recorded at a performance of the Kurriirr Kurriirr (date unknown) this songline for Cyclone Tracy as:

*N gumooli-warra Darwin birringa*...
(Plate 7.2.9.3). Copy of original documentation for Paddy Jaminji Cyclone Tracy 1984 painting. This painting is attributed to Jaminji by Macha in her documentation but is now attributed to Thomas by the NGA and renamed The Rainbow Serpent destroyed Darwin 1983. The importance of the catalogue documentation is the inscription on the back of the card. The inscription reads:

1. This is a story about Darwin and Cyclone Tracy.
2. Rover Thomas visited Darwin after the Cyclone and he told Paddy Tjumpanji [Jaminji] the story about the buildings where they all fell down. This is a Krill Krill [Kurrirr Kurrirr] painting.
3. The black part is the saltwater place and the brown part is the city area.

Told by Jaminji to Don MacLeod on 4/10/1984. (Image: Macha files February 2008)

(Plate 7.2.9.4). *Cyclone Tracy* 1991. Detail is highlighting consistency of dotting size. Note white dotting is on red pigment section (outside dotting) This is consistent throughout painting.

(Plate 7.2.9.5). *Cyclone Tracy* 1991. This detail is focussing on the bleeding of pigments into each other. The white dots have been applied whilst light yellow pigment is still wet. Also highlights the thin watery consistency of pigments used and applied on still wet surfaces.

(Map 7.2.9.6). Cyclone Tracy 1991. Detail of lower right corner highlighting the evidence of rubbing back the previous pigment layer of the red pigment before applying another layer. ‘Scratch’ marks evident.

(Map 7.2.9.7). Cyclone Tracy 1991. Detail featuring brush stroke marks in the yellow pigment area with areas of pigment ‘mixing’ probably due to non-drying of red pigment before adding yellow pigment.

(Plate 7.2.9.8). Cyclone Tracy 1991. Detail showing all over medium textured surface in black pigment area of painting. Very difficult in photographs to see brush stroking but it is obvious when examining painting closely.

Other paintings attributed to Thomas with similar subject theme:


Title: Cyclone Tracy  
Date: 1995  
Medium: ochre on canvas  
Measurement Description: 50 x 70 cm  
Collection: Private Collection: Art Galleries Schubert


Title: Cyclone Tracy  
Date: 1995  
Medium: Natural pigments on canvas  
Measurement Description: 60 x 120 cm  
Collection: Private Collection

Title: Cyclone Tracy  
Date: 1995  
Medium: Ochre on canvas  
Measurement Description: 99.5 x 182  
Collection: Private Collection, Utopia Art Sydney, Kimberley Art, Melbourne

(Plate 7.2.9.12). Cyclone Tracy 1991. Gridded. Each section 36.6(H) x 56cm.

Upper Left Corner   Top Centre   Upper Right Corner  
Upper Left           Upper Centre   Upper Right      
Centre Left          Centre            Centre Right  
Lower Left           Lower Centre      Lower Right     
Lower Left Corner    Bottom Centre   Lower Right Corner

(Plate 7.2.9.13). Upper Left Corner
Upper Left Corner: There is yellow and white dotting throughout this section. Both types of dotting display irregularity in shape and size. The yellow dotting in the upper outer edge of the section shows an obvious range in size. Brush stroke marks are obvious throughout the red pigment section with blending of red and yellow pigment along each yellow shape. There is evident bleeding of red pigment into the yellow pigment from the white dotting being applied on the wet red pigment in the yellow shape on the left of the segment. Evidence of mixing of pigment between yellow and red occurs throughout this section and is caused by the red pigment not being dried prior to applying the yellow pigment. The brush used has picked up the red pigment and mixed it with the yellow making the contact areas appear ‘pinkish’ in colour.

(Plate 7.2.9.14). Top Centre

Top Centre: There is both yellow and white dotting in this section. There is irregularity in both size and shape in the dotting. This is especially seen in the horizontal yellow dotting in the upper margin of this section. There is no dotting in two places on the upper edge of this section. In the white dotted line in the bottom part of this section, the white pigment has been applied over too wet a surface of the yellow section allowing the white pigment to bleed. Evidence of mixing of pigment between yellow and red occurs throughout this section making the contact areas appear ‘pinkish’ in colour. Brush strokes are clearly seen in the red and yellow pigment parts and follow the contours of the forms.

(Plate 7.2.9.15). Upper Right Corner

Upper Right Corner: The white and yellow dotting throughout this segment shows variation in size and shape. In the right corner the yellow dots are fused. There is separation of pigment along both the yellow and white dotting in the lower part of this section. The dotting appears to have been applied onto a wet surface in the red section and is ‘bleeding’ and leaving water-like marks on the surface. Brush strokes are clearly visible throughout this section and follow the contours of the forms.
(Plate 7.2.9.16). **Upper Left**

**Upper Left**: The white and yellow dotting shows variation in size and shape. The white dotting on the left side of the section shows evidence of ‘bleeding’. There is white pigment mixed into the black section on several places on the margin between the black and red section. This is caused by pigment being applied to a too wet surface. The black pigment area appears to ‘sparkle’ and this occurs across the whole black central area of the painting. This is due to fine grains of charcoal in the pigment mixture. There are several hairs embedded in the lower white dotting on the yellow pigment in the left side of the section. The section of red pigment on the left side is darker than in other sections of this portion and appears to have been added after the other red but prior to the dotting. Brush strokes are clearly visible throughout this segment.

(Plate 7.2.9.17). **Upper Centre**

**Upper Centre**: The yellow dotting in the upper left corner of this section is of similar size and shape. The surface of the black section is of medium texture with an all-over grainy, sparkling appearance.

(Plate 7.2.9.18). **Upper Right**

**Upper Right**: The white dotting on the right margin of this section is of irregular shape and size with some dotting almost merging. The black surface in this portion is of medium texture with an all-over grainy, sparkling appearance. Brush strokes are discernable.
Centre Left: The white and yellow dotting in this segment is of similar size but of irregular shape. The yellow dotting in this segment has bled into the lower central to right red pigment area. The red pigment in the left white edged vertically oriented line is a slightly darker shade. This red pigment section has been over-painted. The black section is medium textured with sparkling grains throughout. The yellow section appears to have been mixed with the still wet red section and there is a pinkish colour along the border area.

Centre: All over flat black (charcoal) pigment – no shiny areas but does have sparkling fine grains of charcoal throughout. Brush stroke marks are seen throughout this section.

Centre Right: The white dotting on the right side of the segment is of irregular shape but of nearly consistent size. The majority of the segment is flat black (charcoal) with a textured surface. Brush stroke marks are evident throughout the area.
Lower Left: The white dotting throughout this section is irregular in shape and size – ranging from .5 to .75cm. In the fourth line of dotting, from the left side, there are numerous gaps in the line of white dotting. There is a section of yellow dotting in the upper right corner of the segment. There is a clear sign of bleeding pigment in the white dotted outlined yellow section on the right hand side of the section. The white dotting appears to have been applied to the still wet red pigment resulting white pigment ‘mixing’ with the red pigment and drying into a pinkish red margin about 1 to 1.5cm along the length of the yellow section outside the white dotting. Brush strokes are evident in all sections of the segment.

Lower Centre: White and yellow dotting displays irregular size and shape especially in the yellow section. There is evidence of pigment bleed from the white dotting into the black section and into the red section. It is clear that the yellow sections were painted after the red sections as the yellow is also bleeding into the red. Brush stroke are evident in the yellow section and especially so in the black section of this segment.

Lower Right: The white dotting on the right side of the segment is of irregular shape but of nearly consistent size. There are clear breaks in the dotted line indicating the ‘stop/start’ of painting technique. The majority of the segment is flat black (charcoal) with a textured surface. Brush stroke marks are visible
throughout the segment.

(Plate 7.2.9.25). **Lower Left Corner**

Lower Left Corner: The white dotting in this section highlights the irregularity in shape and size of dotting style. There is evidence of merged dots. The dotting is carried out on the ‘outside’ of the yellow sections. Brush strokes are obvious throughout all sections and follow the contours of the shapes. The yellow pigment is clearly applied over the red sections as bleeding occurs in the red sections. The white dotting appears to have been applied on the red whilst it was still wet causing further bleeding.

(Plate 7.2.9.26). **Bottom Centre**

Bottom Centre: The white dotting in this segment is irregular in shape and size with merged dotting occurring in the lower left of the section. There is yellow dotting in the upper right side of this section. Brush stroke marks are clearly seen in all sections of this segment. Blending of pigment between red pigment and yellow pigment sections is obvious.

(Plate 7.2.9.27). **Lower Right Corner**

Lower Right Corner: There is yellow and white dotting though this segment and the size and shape of all the dotting is irregular. There is obvious bleeding of white pigment of the dotting into areas of the red pigment. Also there is blending of yellow and red pigment throughout but more obvious in the left side of the section. There is visible bleeding of pigment into the black section from the left yellow shape. Brush
stroke marks are evident throughout with obvious rubbed back under-pigment in the central red area of the segment with vertical rub marks visible.

**Summary**

*Cyclone Tracy* 1991 is one of Thomas’s iconic paintings. The powerful iconography of this painting overwhelms the senses when one first views this painting. The dominant use of black in this painting is what achieves this effect and the poor painting techniques used by Thomas don’t detract from the overall effect. This painting, with its strong brush strokes which all seem to move away from the central black motif, help to strengthen the powerful presence this painting emits. My first look at this painting was on the walls of the Project exhibition space at NGA and it dominated the space even though it is not an overly large painting. Seeing it again in Hume storage facility gave me a chance to look more closely. Where on the walls of the gallery the black motif was almost without light and drew one in to look closer; close up it sparkled and the surface almost seethed. I feel this is a powerful very emotive painting. For research purposes I was only given name, date, medium, dimension and Acquisition number by the NGA, all other information came from Macha’ files in February 2008 at Perth or from exhibition catalogues and journal articles.
7.2.10 *Night Sky 1995*


Information sourced from National Gallery of Australia and Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra:

Title: *Night Sky*
Date: 1995
Medium: Natural pigments on canvas
Measurement Description: 200 x 161 cm
Collection: National Gallery of Australia
NGA Collection Catalogue No. NGA Acquisition No. 96.2
Other Catalogue No. Waringarri Aboriginal Arts Kununurra - AP0638
Alternate Name(s):

Name of Artist: Rover Thomas
Also Known as: (Ropa, Roba)
Alternate Spelling(s):
Born: 1926
Place of Birth: Yalda Soak, north east of Well 33 on Canning Stock Route, Western Australia
Died: 12 April 1998
Place of Death: Walumba Aged Care Hostel, Warmun (Turkey Creek), Western Australia
Region: East Kimberley W.A.
Domicile: Warmun (Turkey Creek) W.A.
Language Group: Kukutja/Wankgajunga
Social Affiliation (Skin Group): Joolama (Julama) - Miriwoong
Art Centre: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra
Date: 1995
**Medium detail**: natural pigments on canvas

**Dimensions**:
- Image Size: 161 x 200cm
- Frame Size: 163.5 x 202.5

**Inscriptions**:
- Front: none
- In Verso: **Upper Right Corner**: white label printed: orientation vertical
  - Inscription: National Gallery of Australia
  - Acc No.: 96.2
  - Title: Night Sky
  - Date: 1995
  - Medium: natural pigment on canvas
  - Purchased: 1996
- **Left Centre**: white label printed: writing horizontal
  - Inscription: same as label in Upper Right Corner
- **Upper Left Corner**: White label, black writing, printed, 10 x 4cm
  - Inscription: NGA symbol in Right Upper Corner
  - below symbol is printed: 2.07.2007
  - On Left side of Label:
  - Artist: Rover Thomas (Joolama)
  - Acc No. 96.2
  - Title: Night Sky
  - Date: 1995
  - Medium: natural pigments on canvas
  - Purchased: 1996

**Frame**: Frame Type: hardwood - ash
- Framer: NGA
- Hanging Method: 2 hole D latch (25cm from top of frame of painting)
- Historical/Original Frame Details: unknown

**Acquisition Details**:
- Date: NGA Acquisition No. 96.2 (1996)
- Value: unknown
- Original Price: unknown
- Date Record Created: 1996

**Provenance**:
- Person: 1. Waringarri Aboriginal Arts – Kununurra
  2. William Mora Galleries Melbourne, *Rover Thomas Well 33 Revisited and Turkey Creek Artists* Exhibition 18 November – 20 December 1995
- Date: 25 October 1995
- Place: Warmun
- Details: painted at Warmun for exhibition at William Mora Galleries Melbourne.

**Location History**:
- Where located: NGA storage area
- Other locations: dates: unknown

**Value**:
- Original Price: unknown
- Value: unknown
- Valuer: Unknown

**Bibliography/References**:

**Exhibition History**:


2000: Susan Jenkins and Carly Lane (curators), *Contemporary Aboriginal Australian Aboriginal Art in Modern Worlds: World of Dreaming*, State Hermitage Museum, St Petersberg, Russia and at National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

**Bibliography:**

**Exhibition Catalogue:**


**Periodical:**

Night Sky 1995. Copy of original Waringarri Aboriginal Arts catalogue sheet and description. (The odd chequered effect on the painting is due to scanning a photocopy) (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Rover Thomas file).

Night Sky 1995. AP0638. Part of original Waringarri Aboriginal Arts catalogue documentation highlighting date painting was executed (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Rover Thomas file).
(Plate 7.2.10.4). *Night Sky* 1995. Copy of invitation to *Rover Thomas Well 33 Revisited and Turkey Creek Artists* Exhibition 18 November – 20 December 1995 at William Mora Galleries Melbourne (Front and Reverse). *Night Sky* 1995 was exhibited and sold to NGA in this exhibition (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Rover Thomas file).

(Plate 7.2.10.5). *Night Sky* 1995. Part of copy of original handwritten documentation by Waringarri Aboriginal Arts for paintings to be exhibited in *Rover Thomas Well 33 Revisited and Turkey Creek Artists* Exhibition 1995 at William Mora Galleries, Melbourne. Note AP0638: *Night Sky* 1995 is the first on the list (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Rover Thomas file).
(Plate 7.2.10.6). *Night Sky* 1995. Detail showing typical example of dotting throughout the painting.
Night Sky 1995 was produced as a result of Thomas’s journey revisiting his birth country down the Canning Stock Route to Yalda Soak near Well 33 in September 1995.

The sky is shown as (1) red  
(2) the central circle represents the moon  
(3) the four smaller circles in each corner of the painting are bright stars of the Milky Way.

In an excerpt by curator Avril Quaill from The Eye of the Storm exhibition catalogue 1997: p.92 about Night Sky 1995, she says that the painting:

…was produced as a result of a journey by Thomas last year to revisit his country of birth – his first visit in 40 years. One of the personally significant moments on the trip is recorded in this painting; as Thomas and his party approached the Canning Stock Route, they camped one night at a permanent waterhole, Thomas saw the reflection of the moon and the stars in the night sky. In the painting, the sky is shown as red, the central circle represents the moon and the four smaller circles the bright stars of the Milky Way.

(Plate 7.2.10.7). *Night Sky* 1995. Detail highlighting surface of the painting, on left side, which is imbedded with dirt particles.

(Plate 7.2.10.8). Night Sky 1995. Detail focussing not only on the brush stroke marks but also the marks made by rubbing back the surface of the canvas of the under-painted pigment layer. This leaves the surface very flat with little or no grainy texture and the raw canvas showing through to the top layer.

(Plate 7.2.10.9). *Night Sky* 1995. Gridded. Each section 40 (H) x 53.6 (W)cm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Upper Left Corner</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Upper Left Corner: The white dotting throughout this section is irregular in size and shape with many dots merging into each other. There is grit, probably sand/dirt particles, embedded throughout the left border segment (Black, red, yellow) with some grit thinly dispersed through the red area. In the large red area brush strokes can be seen and is in a top to bottom, bottom to top orientation. Brushstroke width is approximately 3-4cm. The yellow line has been added over the red area. The approximately 7cm white dotted edged black circle in the upper left has been added after the red area. There is a black hair embedded in the lower left corner of this section in the black segment. The outer, white dotted edged, black line turns an almost perfect right angle in the upper left corner with the vertical left part of the line double the width of the upper horizontal part of the line.

Top Centre: There is great variation in shape and size of the white dotting throughout this section with lines of dotting merging into other lines of dotting. This is especially apparent in the dotting bordering the red line between the black and the yellow lines in the upper area of this section. In the centre of the upper section the yellow and red lines actually merge – the yellow was painted over the red. In the red area that dominates this section the brush-strokes are in an top to bottom, bottom to top orientation however close examination show that a previous layer of pigment was painted on in a horizontal orientation. There is a hair embed in the centre of this section in the yellow line and a hair in the centre of the red area.

Upper Right Corner: The white dotting in this section is of different sizes and shapes with the dotting in some areas showing no separation. The approximately 7cm black, white dotted edged circle on the upper right of the section is surrounded by a 8cm to *.5cm irregular, very flat slightly darker red pigment circle than used in the rest of this section. This slightly darker pigment circle is not edged with any white
dotting. On close examination this circle appears to have formed from the under-red pigment used to coat the canvas prior to commencement of painting and subsequent coats of a lighter slightly thicker red pigment have failed to cover this area. The large red pigment area of this section shows a top to bottom, bottom to top orientation in the evident brush-stroking. There is a black hair embedded in the lower right corner of the section in the black line. The black, white dotted edged line turns the upper right corner with an almost perfect right angle. The upper, horizontal part of the black line is almost double the width of the right vertical part of the line.

(Plate 7.2.10.13). Upper Left

Upper Left: There is obvious disparity in the size and shape of the white dotting throughout this section with some of the dots merging. The surface on the left side of this section is textured and gritty and this spreads throughout into the yellow line. There is some overflow of this gritty surface thinly dispersed across the red area. The yellow line has obviously been painted over the red pigment and is of a slightly thicker consistency. In the red area of this section the surface is not textured and is very flat with brushstrokes clearly evident.

(Plate 7.2.10.14). Upper Centre

Upper Centre: The brushstrokes in the red pigment in this section are clearly evident with a top to bottom, bottom to top orientation with underlying evidence of horizontal brush-stroke marks. The surface is very flat and un-textured. There is a small stick/ part of a blade of grass embedded in centre right of this section.

(Plate 7.2.10.15). Upper Right

Upper Right: There is a raised red covered dot in the middle of the red line on the left side – possible a drop of pure gum resin. Very small pieces of either stick or grass stalks are embedded in the middle of the red area. The white dotting throughout this section is of slightly different size and shape. The brush-stroking in the red area shows a diagonal orientation.
**Centre Left:** The white dotting in this section, in comparison with the left side of the painting, is quite irregular in both size and shape with many dots merging together. There is evidence through the horizontal centre part of this section of an underlying over-painted approximately 6 - 6.5cm wide line which traverses the whole section. In the red area there is evidence of brushstrokes criss-crossing from several directions. In the left of this section the surface is quite gritty in texture with grains of sand/dirt embedded to the surface.

**Centre:** The black circle of approximately 15 - 17cm wide, that dominates this section, is surrounded by white dotting, which is approximately .8cm in width. The dots are of similar size and shape. There is an inner circle of yellow dotting which surrounds a white oval approximately 5cm in width. The yellow dots are of similar size, being approximately 1cm in width, however they are not very spherical – they have a ‘tail’ which indicates the direction of the application of the dots. The pigment in this oval is quite transparent and show evidence of being added later. The black in the circle is quite shiny in appearance and the brushstrokes are very obvious and move in a circular fashion, going around the central white oval. Brushstrokes are seen in the red section and orientate in both directions; vertically and horizontally.

**Centre Right:** There is evidence through the horizontal centre part of this section of an underlying over-painted approximately 6 - 6.5cm wide line which traverses the whole section. In the red area there is evidence of brushstrokes in the upper right part with brushstrokes widths able to be measured – 3.5 to
4cm wide. The white dotting throughout is of similar size and shape. On the very edge of the right side of this section outside the white dotting there is red pigment showing indicating the undercoat before the black and yellow was added.

(Plate 7.2.10.19). **Lower Left**

![Image](image1)

**Lower Left**: Throughout the red part there is quite a gritty surface and indications of over-painting by a slightly different red pigment. Brush-strokes were clearly evident. The surface on the left side of the painting is embedded with sand/dirt throughout. The white dotting in this section is of various size and shape with some merging of dotting.

(Plate 7.2.10.20). **Lower Centre**

![Image](image2)

**Lower Centre**: Throughout this section there are very small sticks or shafts of grass embedded in the surface. The brushstrokes are clearly evident throughout with a vertical orientation and also there is indication of a horizontally oriented previous coat.

(Plate 7.2.10.21). **Lower Right**

![Image](image3)

**Lower Right**: The white dotting throughout this section is of similar size and shape. There is slight evidence of bleeding of pigment on the between the yellow line and the red area in the centre of the right side. The brushstrokes in the red area indicate a vertical orientation.
Lower Left Corner: The white dotting in this section shows irregularities in size and shape. On the left of centre of this section there is a black circle, approximately 6 – 7cm wide, with a small white central dot. The white dots that surround this circle are of different shapes and sizes - from .3 to .6cm in width. The wide yellow line is quite irregular in width. The vertical left part of the yellow line is tapering from the top to the bottom. The lower horizontal part of this line is quite wide on the lower left corner. of this section. In the red area there is evidence of a darker textured surface on the ride side of the section. The outer, white dotted edged, black line turns the lower left corner in an almost perfect right angle. The vertical left part of this line is almost the same as the horizontal bottom part of this line.

Bottom Centre: The white dotting in this section is of varying sizes and shape. The yellow and the red line appear to merge in the lower left side of this section. The lines of dotting are only 1cm apart. Throughout the red area the surface is gritty and shows indications of having been over-painted with a slightly different tone of red pigment.

Lower Right Corner: In the lower right corner the yellow pigment has over-painted the red outside the dotted edge. The yellow, white dotted edged, inside line is twice the width on the right vertical part in contrast to the horizontal lower part. Also in this corner there is a small black circle, approximately 5 - 5.5cm wide, which is surrounded by white dotting with a small white dot in the centre. This circle is
inside the white dotted edged yellow line. The outer black, white dotted edged, line tuned the corner in an almost perfect right angle. The horizontal, lower part of the black line is the same width as the vertical, right part of this line. There is a black hair embedded in the black line in the upper right side of the section.

Summary
This painting is a large format painting and showcases Thomas use of desert iconography when painting his family’s country. However, he has reinterpreted the traditional circle-within-a circle inference of place/or waterhole and instead these circles are the moon and stars reflected in water. The surface of this painting indicates that it was painted on the ground whilst a breeze was blowing as there are grains of dirt and small pieces of grass imbedded in the pigment all along the left margin of the painting. The majority of information concerning this painting was gained from fieldwork in 2006, 2007 and 2009 at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts at Kununurra. Very little information, only name, date, medium, dimensions and acquisition number was given by NGA when closely studying this painting n 21 December 2007 at Hume Storage Facility.
7.3 Part 3: Analysis of Data Sheets

7.3.1 Introduction

A close examination of Thomas’s paintings highlighted several distinct technical characteristics that appear in all the paintings examined: the surface appearance and texture of his paintings, his dotting techniques and his brush stroking.

7.3.2 Surface Appearance

The surface appearance of all the paintings examined showed similar characteristics. The surface of early paintings on board; Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1983, Yilirpirn 1983, Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek) 1984, and Untitled 1984, all show clear areas of cracking, flaking, water damage and poor pigment preparation. On the later canvas paintings; Lake Argyle 1986, Frog Hollow Country 1987, Ngarin Janu 1989, The burning site 1990, Cyclone Tracy 1991 and Night Sky 1995, the surface appearance also highlighted poor pigment preparation, but the cracking and flaking was less apparent.

In all ten paintings it was evident that Thomas rubbed back the surface of his painting between subsequent layers of pigment. In some cases the surface of the board or canvas was apparent through the pigment layers; for example Untitled 1984 (Plate 7.3.1) where the surface was so rubbed back that the grain of the board could be seen. In Night Sky 1995 (Plate 7.3.2) the raw canvas is obvious in several sections of the painting.

In all paintings examined there was indication of his poor preparation and his application of the ochre used on his paintings. I have detailed this information in Chapter 6. In any one painting, for example an early painting such as; Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1993 (Plate 7.3.3) or a late painting such as; Cyclone Tracy 1991
(Plate 7.3.4), there were often several different hues of a colour. This led to an overall patchy effect not only in the colour but also in the texture on most of his paintings. He also often changed the design or colour of certain elements of the painting when he ‘touched up’ his work. This ‘touch-up’ work was either carried out at the time of painting or when the painting was delivered to Waringarri Aboriginal Arts in Kununurra or to the Warmun community or to the various art dealers who commissioned works. ‘Touch-up’ work was carried out by Thomas or others as seen in Plate 7.3.5. This change of design, colour and texture could be seen in close ups of some of the examined paintings (Plate 7.3.6, Plate 7.3.7, Plate 7.3.8, Plate 7.3.9). This practice of over-painting, touch-ups, changes of colour and design elements was consistent throughout this group of paintings. The following examples highlighted this aspect of his painting practice. For instance Plate 7.3.6, a detail of Lake Gregory 1983, drew attention to an area of ‘touch up’, in the centre of this section, with a different hue of yellow pigment visible. There was evidence of over-painting, on left side of the detail, with gritty yellow pigment. Also there was over-painting with white pigment on the original black ‘dog’ figure on right side of section.

In Plate 7.3.7, a part of Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek) 1984, shows the different hues of yellow ochre used on this painting and the poor surface quality in the lower part of this section. There was a clear delineation where two different yellow hues meet.

The segment (Plate 7.3.8) of Frog Hollow Country 1987 focuses on the poor mixing of the black pigment, probably charcoal, with natural binder. The black throughout the painting was over-painted with a poorly mixed second coat leaving milky-looking areas throughout the black sections. The red parts of this section showed evidence of the rubbing back of previous layers of pigment. This was shown in the oblique marking which was visible across this section.
The segment of *Night Sky* 1995 (Plate 7.3.9) highlighted the dissimilar tonal qualities of differently mixed red pigments. Areas of brush marks of ‘touch-up’ areas were clearly visible. This evidence indicated that Thomas’s paintings were probably executed over many days. Anecdotally it has been shown that from his earliest paintings Thomas’s mixing of pigments and touch-up techniques were poorly executed.

### 7.3.3 Texture

The textural surface qualities of works of ochre/pigment paintings can be divided into three basic types:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heavy</td>
<td>Thick impasto, overall gritty surface appearance, with grains of pigment obvious and widespread, brushstrokes not obvious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Impasto, overall surface shows obvious light grains in pigment, some brushstrokes apparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light</td>
<td>Pigment used as a wash, surface without grains of pigment, surface smooth, brushstrokes obvious.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All Thomas’s ten paintings fall into the medium to light category of textural surface quality except *Cyclone Tracy* 1991 which exhibited an area of heavy a textured surface. Some paintings have denser areas of gritty, grainy pigment however this is only a small proportion of the percentage of the surface area. The heavy textured surface seen in the centre of *Cyclone Tracy* 1991 (Plate 7.3.10) shows the pigment used had some particles of different sized grains. This painting was executed in Perth and
Thomas would go to Kings Park and collect charcoal from the barbeques in the park and grind up and prepare the pigment himself (Mary Macha (2008), pers. comm. February).

Another example of this type of surface treatment is Ngamarrin (*The Serpent near Turkey Creek*) 1984 (Plate 7.3.11) where in some sections the surface was medium textured and in others was finely grained. Other materials can also be seen on the surface; hairs and the dusty footprints of a dog.

In the other paintings the surface texture of the paintings was light. An example was the early painting *Yilirnpirin* 1983 (Plate 7.3.12) which emphasised the light textural quality of many of his early paintings whilst (Plate 7.3.13) *Lake Gregory W.A.* 1983 was an example of a mixture of textural surface treatment. On the left side of this segment of the painting there were indications it had been touched-up with a thicker and grainer pigment on and around the white animal representation.

An example of the textural quality of the surface of a middle period painting was Plate 7.3.14 *Lake Argyle* 1987 which demonstrated a medium to light surface texture. In this painting Thomas used bloodwood (*galiwun*) resin binder (Phyllis Thomas (2007), pers. comm. October) as the bonding agent for his pigment which gave a semi-gloss sheen to the painting. The surface of the painting had a light, fine grainy effect with brush strokes clearly evident.

An example of surface texture in a late period painting was Plate 7.3.15 *Night Sky* 1995. This segment showed a light to medium textured surface. It was noticeable that there was a denser concentration of pigment used in the yellow pigment. This layer of yellow had been added over the red pigment. It was a thicker coat of pigment but brush strokes marks were still evident.

In the later paintings Thomas used a denser concentration of ochre/pigment when preparing the paint, hence the more opaque appearance of the paintings. In this period, from the early 1990’s till his death, fellow artist Rusty Peters helped him in the
preparation of his pigments (Kevin Kelly (2007), pers. comm. October). In 1989 Peters moved to Kununurra and worked at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts. He assisted artists, Thomas in particular, and learned the many facets of the art trade whilst also painting occasionally. He was a long-time friend of Rover Thomas, caring for him on most of the trips Thomas made in the later part of his life (www.raftartspace.com).

7.3.4 Dotting

As I have shown in my scrutiny of rock gallery paintings and desert art, in Chapter 6, the motif of dotting is integral to Aboriginal painting in the desert and the East Kimberley. One of the most important aspects to identifying and responding to the question as what constitutes a Rover Thomas painting was his dotting style. This element in his paintings was obvious and significant. In all his early paintings he used a stick as the implement to form the dotting. Later he used a brush, supplied by Waringarri Aboriginal Arts or art dealer Mary Macha, with very short bristles. The bristles had been deliberately shortened, as seen in the close up photograph (Plate 7.3.16) (Kevin Kelly (2007), pers. comm. October).

A comparison between the ten examined paintings highlighted Thomas’s style of dotting. A common feature in all the paintings was the irregularity of size and shape of dots. In all paintings examined the outer boundary of the paintings is dotted.

In the early paintings on board the dotting is highly irregular in size and shape with little spacing between the dots so the dotting often merged together. Thomas’s poor techniques of pigment preparation caused uncertain adhesion to the previous layer of pigment. This led to chipped, cracked or missed dotting, especially around the margins of these paintings. The rubbed edge probably occurred through the rough handling of the boards after the completion of the painting.
From mid-1985 onwards Thomas used a more stable binder for his pigments (which I described in Chapter 6) which led to the dotting remaining attached to the paintings, although he still at times used a poorer quality resin resulting in some of his later paintings showing evidence with problems of cracked and chipped dotting. Also on close examination the amount of pigment used in the dotting of his early paintings appears to be less than in the middle and late years of his painting practice. Different types of ochre/pigments used led to different outcomes and changed the overall look of the dotting in his painting over time. In the middle period his dotting was more consistent in size and shape and the better quality of purer ochres/pigments used gave overall better adhesion. Thomas’s switch to a more stable binder, the gum resin from the Kurrajong tree (as discussed in Chapter 6), in the mid 1980’s meant that the dotting stayed on the board or canvas more readily.

I have observed an apparent problem that occurred in many of the paintings was that Thomas did not allow the previous layers to dry properly before applying the final dotting. This also occurred when he made corrections and then over-dotted. As a consequence the edges of the dotting in some paintings for example *Cyclone Tracy* 1991 (Plate 7.3.17) and *The burning site* 1990 (Plate 7.3.18) have drawn pigment from the under-layer and the dotting became merged and blurred.

In his later paintings the dotting again became more inconsistent in size and shape. This deterioration in quality of practice can be attributed to his failing health and his unsteady hand after suffering a series of minor strokes in the mid-1990’s. However, this ‘inconsistency’ of size and shape of dotting throughout his work can be seen as a marker of identifying a Thomas painting. In examples from the group of studied paintings; *Lake Gregory, Western Australia* 1983 (Plate 7.3.19), *Frog Hollow* 1987 (Plate 7.3.20), *The burning site* 1990 (Plate 7.3.21), and *Night Sky* 1995 (Plate 7.3.22), Thomas’s distinct dotting style was highlighted.
The detail (Plate 7.3.19) highlighted the irregularity of size and shape and the poor quality of dotting in Thomas’s early paintings. In several areas there was evidence of merging dotting and many of the dots are chipped, cracked or missing.

The section (Plate 7.3.20) showed the irregularity of size and especially the shape of his dotting in the middle period of his painting. This example also highlighted the minimal spacing between dotting.

In this segment (Plate 7.3.21) there was an indication of less irregular size and shape of dotting in Thomas’s middle period. There was only a small size difference in the dotting - 5cm to 75cm. There was little spacing between the lines of dotting with some merged dotting.

This detail (Plate 7.3.22) shows the irregular size and shape of the later period of dotting. The size difference was especially significant in this detail of the painting. This could, of course, be due to his poor eyesight and failing health. The spacing was close between the dotting.

Another characteristic of his dotting was a lack of consistency in the way that Thomas applied the dotting around the elements of the composition. The rough diagram (Plate 7.3.23) shows the three different ways dotting was applied. Thomas used a combination of all three often in the same painting.

This was clearly seen in Plate 7.3.24 where dotting was applied on one side of the black element on the outer side and then on the opposite side of the element on the between side. In Plate 7.3.25 the dotting was placed outer, inner and between.

As one can see there was little change in Thomas’s style of dotting. By looking closely at these ten paintings from different periods, one can see that the dots in his paintings all bear certain characteristics. To summarise the main dotting characteristics throughout were:

1. The irregularity in shape and size of individual units of the dotting.
2. The lines of dotting were nearly always either unsteady or uneven.

3. There was minimal spacing between dotting and at times dots merged.

4. Inconsistency occurs in the way Thomas applied the dotting around the elements of composition in his paintings.

7.3.5 Brush-stroke marks

In all the Thomas paintings examined a characteristic that was immediately discernable was the quality and immediacy of his brush-strokes. In all ten paintings the brush-strokes are long and in both directions. They followed the contours of the motifs used in the painting. This was due in part to the type, quality and preparation of the pigments used. In the early paintings the brush strokes were obvious because of the ‘watery’ or translucent nature of the pigment used. In other words, there was very little pigment used, and the surface was rubbed back prior to the next layer of pigment being applied and therefore the under-layers were apparent. In many paintings it was possible to measure the width of the brush used. These evident brush-stroke marks can be seen graphically in *Yillirnpirn* 1983 (Plate 7.3.26), *The burning site* 1990 (Plate 7.3.27) and *Ngarin Janu Country* 1988 (Plate 7.3.28).

This section of the painting (Plate 7.3.26) featured the obvious brush marks. The width of the brush-strokes was measurable and they were approximately 2.5 cm in width.

This part (Plate 7.3.27) of the painting revealed two distinct types of brush-stroke marks. One was the 3 to 4 cm wide brush-strokes that radiated from the top right corner of this section. The other was the revealed marks of a previous layer of pigment which had been laid down. This layer then appeared to have been rubbed back in a vertical manner making these marks obvious when the painting was photographed.

This segment (Plate 7.3.28) focused on the obvious brush-strokes in the section of the painting. The marks of the bristles of the brush used were quite obvious. This was
seen in the abrupt cut-off of the strokes which appeared to come out from under the
darker section. This section revealed that in this painting a major change in design had
occurred.

7.3.6 Conclusion

The close examination of the ten Thomas paintings has revealed that there were
three key areas in Thomas’s painting techniques that were consistently characteristic:
the surface appearance and texture, his dotting style and the immediacy of his
brushstrokes. Chapter 8 will look at other aspects of his paintings: subject matter,
perspective, figurative representations, as well as the role played by ceremonial practice
and rock art in shaping Thomas’s unique style.
(Plate 7.3.1). *Untitled* 1984. Showing the pigment on the surface of the board is rubbed back so the grain of the wood is showing through.

(Plate 7.3.2). *Night Sky* 1995. Detail highlighting the rubbed back surface of the painting. Arrows indicate raw canvas in the vertical marks.

(Plate 7.3.3). *Lake Gregory, Western Australia* 1983. Detail focussing on the change of hue (lower arrow) and texture of yellow pigment (upper arrow) on the painting in the upper section as shown by the arrows.

(Plate 7.3.4). *Cyclone Tracy* 1991. Detail showing, on the left, a slightly different red coloured pigment than on the right side of the segment (as indicated by arrows).

(Plate 7.3.5). Touch up work being carried out on Thomas painting *Barramundi Dreaming Site* 1990 in 1990 at art dealer Mary Macha’s Perth back lane by unknown person (Image: Mary Macha February 2008).

(Plate 7.3.6). *Lake Gregory* 1983. Arrows highlighting ‘touch-up’ areas in this painting.
(Plate 7.3.7). *Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek)* 1984. Showing the poor surface condition of this painting (left) and over-painted darker pigment (centre).

(Plate 7.3.8). *Frog Hollow Country* 1987. The blue arrows show the poor mixing technique in the black sections of this painting. The black arrows highlight the rub marks.

(Plate 7.3.9). *Night Sky* 1995. Detail highlights the change in tonal quality of added red pigment. Lower arrow indicates darker over painted pigment.

(Plate 7.3.10). *Cyclone Tracy* 1991. Detail from the centre of the painting shows heavy grained surface of this black area. Arrows indicate larger grains of pigment.

(Plate 7.3.11). *Ngamarrin (The Serpent near Turkey Creek)* 1984. Detail. Red arrows show dog prints and white arrows indicate hairs on this section. Overall the section is medium textured.

(Plate 7.3.12). *Yilirpirn* 1983. Detail highlights a rubbed back, light textured surface.
(Plate 7.3.13). Lake Gregory W.A. 1983. Shows the light textured surface of this detail with medium textured ‘touch-up’ areas (black arrows) with water mark (white arrow) evident in top right corner.

(Plate 7.3.14) Lake Argyle 1987. Surface texture is light with few grainy areas. Bloodwood natural tree resin has been used and gives an overall shiny effect.

(Plate 7.3.15) Night Sky 1995. Focus is on the thicker yellow pigment layer applied over the red pigment.

(Plate 7.3.16). Close up of Rover painting at Waringarri Aboriginal Art Kununurra in early 1990s. Note the pared down brush for dotting. (Image: Tony Elwood in Judith Ryan (1992), Images of Power: Aboriginal Art of the Kimberley, p.44).

(Plate 7.3.17). Cyclone Tracy 1991. Showing merged and blurred dotting. This has resulted from under layer being not dry before application.

(Plate 7.3.18). The burning site 1990. Detail of over-painting and blurred dotting in this painting.
Plate 7.3.19. Lake Gregory Western Australia 1983. Highlighting the variability of size and shape of dotting and the rubbed (green arrow), cracked or missing (orange arrow) and merged dotting (black arrow).

Plate 7.3.20. Frog Hollow 1987. Focussing on the irregularities of dotting in this painting. The differences in size is emphasised in this detail.

Plate 7.3.21. The burning site 1990. Detail highlighting the more consistent dotting in the middle period. Arrows indicated some merged dots.

Plate 7.3.22. Night Sky 1995. Detail showing close-up of irregularity of dotting both in size and shape. Red arrows highlight differences in size of dotting.

Plate 7.3.23. The 3 different types of ways to apply dotting (Image: Catherine Carr 2009).

Plate 7.3.24. Frog Hollow Country 1987. Detail showing dotting using both outer (red arrow) and between (black arrow) technique in this painting.
(Plate 7.3.25). \textit{Night Sky} 1995. Detail highlighting lines of dotting using outer (red arrow), inner (green arrow) and between (black arrow) dotting technique in the same painting.

(Plate 7.3.26). \textit{Yilirnpirn} 1983. Detail highlighting obvious brush stroke marks.

(Plate 7.3.27). \textit{The burning site} 1990. Highlighting the distinct brush stroke marks in the painting. Black arrows indicate surface brush strokes and white lines indicate underlying rubbing-back marks.

Previous Page: (Plate 8.1). Detail of old set of files on Waringarri Aboriginal Arts artists (Image: Catherine Carr May 2009)
8.1 Introduction

Aboriginal art is often regarded either as an ethnographic curiosity or as an expression of mystic qualities associated with ‘new age’ things (Wally Caruana in Smee 2002).

Art is the lifeblood of our communities, connecting us to the past, the present and each other (Perkins et al 2004: 8).

Thomas was the initiator, with Paddy Jaminji, of the idiosyncratic East Kimberley style. A close examination and analysis of the techniques and processes of his paintings is required in order to understand the hybridity and innovation of his paintings. One crucial factor was the contemporary art movement in the East Kimberley which owed its genesis to the rock aesthetics and the paintings created for the Kururr Kururr ceremony. (These connections have been discussed more fully in Chapters 3, 5 and 6)

In this chapter I will build on these connections and the close analysis of the ten paintings carried out in detail in Chapter 7. This chapter also looks closely at Thomas’s personal painting style in relationship to other Gija/Miriwoong paintings from the Warmun district. Firstly, I will briefly explore the painting conventions of desert painters to the south of Warmun and Gija/Miriwoong painters in the East Kimberley from the 1970’s to the 2000’s. This will highlight these two different yet adjacent painting styles. I will examine the design features that are significant in these regions.

Secondly, the role of perspective, figurative representations, influence of rock art and the role of ceremonial board stylistic conventions will also be scrutinized with the view to identifying the characteristics which single out a Rover Thomas painting.

8.2 Desert Design and Style – Painting

In much of the desert areas of central Australia, including the Great Sandy Desert in Western Australia, the emphasis on representations of totemic ancestors in rock art and ceremonial artefacts using graphic designs was of considerable importance.
For the Kukatja, Walmajarri, Wangkajunga, Pintupi and Martu people of this area one ancestor was often associated with one or more symbolic designs which were not merely decorative forms. Munn, an anthropologist working in the adjacent western desert region with the Walpiri people in the 1970’s, described these designs to be ‘strong’, ‘powerful’ and ‘important’. There were, she said, distinct classes of designs that differed in relative importance and power. However the general sense of ‘successfulness’ applied to all classes of designs. This ‘successfulness’ was related to the strength or importance of stories or ancestral beings being portrayed (Munn 1986: 33). In desert areas men and women controlled separate classes of designs, and these designs could only be considered ‘successful’ when accompanied by the appropriate singing. Singing and painting constituted the central core of ritual action connected with ancestors. In some cases rites simply represented these two elements while other ceremonies consisted of dramatisations, dancing and large scale ceremonial cycles; such as lengthy initiation ceremonies (Munn 1986: 34, Watson 1999: 166).

Thomas was born and spent his early life living with Kukatja, Wangkajunga and Walmijarri societies until the mid-1940’s. Anthropologist Barbara Glowczewski pointed out that these and many other Aboriginal societies believed that designs originated in dreams and that these designs should then be painted in the waking life of ceremony. Dreaming stories and rites make up corresponding poles of a single process (Glowczewski 1999:6). Geoffrey Bardon explained the same concept of individual Dreamings in relation to Western Desert art:

…the images do not provide a mere graphic equivalent of spoken words, thereby attaching themselves to the temporality implicit in the ordinary syntax of a sentence. Quite to the contrary, and importantly: time has become space. There is no conventional sequentially in the 'stories', but rather the accretion of space or 'place'. Since the space or 'place' is only the retelling of a story already known to a painter, the so-called story is an eternal idea in the culture of the painter. The elements or images of the story therefore have no reading direction as we understand it (Bardon 1991: 34).
While some Dreaming stories had remained quite localised others developed into ancestral tracks which traversed the full width and breadth of the central and western desert regions embracing a number of local groups and dialect units (Berndt 1972:184). One rationale for the development of such networks was that they may have helped to maintain human contact with far-flung sites in situations where there were insufficient numbers of people to do this one-to-one (Graham 2002). The *Wati Kutjarra* (Two Men), *Minyma/Kunga Kutjarra* (Two Women), and *Tingari* cycle stories were good examples of the Dreaming stories that spread throughout the desert regions.


Thomas used the *Wati Kutjarra* (Two Men) and *Minyma/Kunga Kutjarra* (Two Women) Dreaming stories as subject matter for some of his painting. These Dreaming stories were passed down through generations of storytelling and are still being told and painted on canvas today.

Munn found in her study of *Walbiri* society, in the early 1970’s, that there was a close relationship between graphic forms and the topography of ‘country’ (Munn 1986:118). She found the most prominent graphic marks were drawn by *Walbiri and*
Pintupi and by extension Kukutja, Walmajarri, Martu, Wankgujunga and other desert groups to the west where track marks of animals and birds, and circle-line notations, referred to places or journeys (Plate 8.2). The marks used could be of both of a secular nature and also used to stress particular incidents in Dreaming stories (Layton 1992: 54).

Munn found that stories of ancestor journeys began with an emergence from the ground and was finalised by a return to the ground. These journeys constituted the framework for men’s songs and narratives about ancestral events. Some songs of ancestral tracks consisted almost entirely of lists of site names connected with phrases indicating the direction of movement of ancestors between sites.

The circle and the circle-line graphic notation in acrylic paintings descended from sand painting and often appeared to reference a journey or a place. In a visual context, Darby Jampijinpa Ross painting *Yankirri Jukurrpa (Emu Dreaming)* 1987 (Plate 8.3) is an example of the circle-line arrangements. The circle denoted a locale and the line, a path or movement from place to place. The direct link between geographical information and ancestral routes was due to knowledge that was distinctive to masculine ceremonies. By contrast, women dealt more with associations to ancestors within their ‘country’ at large, rather than the details of particular ancestor routes (Munn 1986: 133).

Often, according to Munn, totemic designs such as the use of specific animal tracks to denote a specific ancestral being in paintings were part of an elaborate graphic

36 Darby Jampijinpa Ross (1910-2005) was born in the bush at Ngarliyikirlangu, north of Yuendumu, and grew up in the bush. He survived the Coniston Massacre and was widely traveled as a stockman. He began to paint in 1985 and was married to artist Ivy Napangardi Poulson. Jampijinpa’s country lay north of Yuendumu and his Dreamings were *Yankirri* (Emu), *Wardilyka* (Bush Turkey) and *Pamapardu* (Flying Ant) but he also painted *Ngapa* (Water). In this painting the artist depicts large numbers of emu ancestors (*yankirri*) that were travelling north and camped at Kunurrylpa and Ngunkurrman, two deep soakages. The emus ate bush raisins (*yakajirri*) that often grow near water. The bars represent the spears and digging sticks (symbolic of men and women, the arrow like motifs indicate the emu’s tracks, and the radiating lines represent intestines (*jawujawu*) (Ryan 2004: 157).
system that was closely tied into linguistic communication in thought and usage. The simplicity and generality of the visual elements ensured a high degree of repetition. The same visual element was used for a relatively wide range of meanings; therefore it was the context in which these graphic designs were used that ensured correct communication and interpretation (Munn 1986: 212).

Anthropologist Christine Watson, who carried out research in the Balgo area in the northern area of the Great Sandy Desert in 1992-3, stated that at the heart of the desert aesthetic is the tonal use of colour. In particular, she wrote that body painting was a special area to for artists who adapted their paintings to canvas. An example of this is Billy Thomas’s\(^{37}\) painting *Pilla Tjin Tjin* 2000 (Plate 8.4). Body painting design colours were put down in alternating bands of contrasting tonal value; that is dark and light, black and white, or red and yellow. The optical effects produced by these alternating bands of colour sets up a shimmering effect which was considered to increase the spiritual power of the body painting (Watson 2004:121). This effect was transferred from the body to the canvas by artists in the emerging art centres of Wirrimanu (Balgo Hills), Mankaja (Fitzroy Crossing) in the 1980’s. The introduced use of white people’s or *kartiya* acrylic paint increased the palette and the effects these artists could use.

In The Great Sandy desert region and more specifically around the Balgo and Fitzroy areas acrylic paints were introduced either in conjunction with ochres or separately in the 1970’s and 1980’s. Co-ordinator of Mangkaja Resource Agency, Karen Dayman, in conversations with *Wangkajunga* artists at Fitzroy Crossing in 2004

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\(^{37}\) Billy Thomas (Joongoorra) (b.1920-) was born in the bush near Billiluna, Western Australia. He first saw *kartiya* (white men) when he was a young boy. Thomas worked as a stockman, droving cattle along the Canning Stock Route. He served time as a police tracker based near Derby. After his days as a tracker and a further stint as a stockman, he retired to Mud Springs near Kununurra. He began painting in 1995. *In Pilla Tjin Tjin* 2000 he depicts rainmaking associated with country known as Pilla Tjin Tjin. A spirit man, carrying his boomerang camped here in the Dreaming and he conducted some law and ceremony that induced the rain to come followed by a rainbow. The rain left a series of waterholes which are known as *inta* (living water) because they always contain good water (Ryan 2004: 158).
about the use of non-Aboriginal pigments, observed that several artists believed that paintings using earth pigments, or as they called them, ‘bush paint’, were more valuable because of the relationship of these pigments to ceremony (Dayman 2004: 115).

In the East Kimberley the Gija, Miriwoong, Jaru and Gadgerong artists, including Thomas, all used naturally occurring pigments and ochres from the inception of painting on board or canvas from the 1970’s. When the Waringarri Aboriginal Arts centre at Kununurra was set up in 1985, it serviced the communities of Warmun (Turkey Creek), Kalumbaru and Wadeye (Port Keats) and all the outstations in the region (Kevin Kelly (2007), pers. comm. October). This practice of using naturally occurring pigments and ochres continues.

Most of the painters from the desert regions, since the 1970’s, demonstrated ‘compositional complexity’ in their paintings (Perkins et al 2004: 158). Dominating the surface in Plate 8.3 and Plate 8.4 was either infill dotting (overall dotting) or multiple lines of dotting, or simply multiple lines of paint. The use of many different motifs throughout the painting, and a strong and varied palette with complex tonal variations, was in contrast to the majority of Gija/Miriwoong painter’s works of the same period. Their works were characterised by large areas of plain colour and simplicity of composition, shown clearly in Paddy Jaminji’s (b.c1912 – d.1996) painting Kanmanturr – Elgee Cliffs 1983 (Plate 8.5).

Even though Thomas was born and spent his early life in the desert regions Thomas’s paintings showed few elements of desert style conventions. Rarely did he use infill dotting, use of multiple contrasting lines or the circle-line motif in his paintings.

8.3 The East Kimberley Style: Gija/Miriwoong Painters

The artist as an individual has been a strong and well established model since the early 1980’s in East Kimberley painting. This was especially true of Thomas and in
a broad sense has allowed for the innovation, adaptation and reinvention of traditions in each particular artist’s style. Individuality was encouraged through Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Pty Ltd based in Perth in 1973 and then established by Waringarri Aboriginal Arts in Kununurra which commenced in 1985. Curator Judith Ryan asserts that ‘Aboriginal art is a form of empowerment for its makers’ and that the individuality of artists should be viewed and judged correspondingly’ to other Australian artists (Ryan 1993: 49).

By the implementation of non-Aboriginal techniques and media the artists gave another dimension to traditional ochre palettes which had been used almost exclusively in the East Kimberley. Artists transferred the technique of outlining figures and motifs with solid or dotted lines derived from ceremonial paraphernalia, material culture objects and rock paintings directly onto first plywood boards and then onto canvas (Kellgren 2001: 360, Akerman 1999: 28). By the end of the 1970’s it appeared that ‘portable’ paintings supplanted the need to paint on the landscape and artists described these paintings as generally of the landscape and representations of the stories that related to a specific site.

In the East Kimberley nearly all meaning was linked directly to place and ‘country’ as in the Western Desert. Despite the starkly minimal abstract Gija/Miriwoong paintings all depicted parts of the landscape – hills, creeks, rivers, and Dreaming stories (Kjellgren 2001: 360, Kranenburg 2004: 42). According to Kjellgren little evidence has been found for the commercial production of paintings prior to the 1980’s in the East Kimberley. However, there were ‘tourist’ items made, such as small sculptures (Plate 8.6), small painted coolamon, incised boabs and decorated artefacts which were sold at the local Turkey Creek Roadhouse and to tourists in Kununurra and Wyndham. This was discussed more fully in Chapter 6.
In an interview local *Jaru* artist Kitty Malarvie (1945-) spoke about the early days of Turkey Creek:

Before them house bin get up we bin start doin’ bout painting and selling, you know. We used to sell him anywhere. La cantine. Pub, you know. We used to sell im. And sometime we used to take him sell him la AMPOL [local petrol station at Turkey Creek Roadhouse]…used to come back got plenty tucker (Kjellgren 1999: 166).

Because these statements are made when reminiscing about earlier times the dates are difficult to verify.

### 8.4 Style: Rover Thomas: An Analysis of Visual Criteria

Painting means to us country, that’s why people paint. We are born with it, we got it on our body, on our bones – we are born with it – it is on our skin (Peggy Patrick in Perkins et al 2004: 208).

The question to ask is: why didn’t Thomas ever fully adopt all the conventions and styles of the *Gija/Miriwoong* painters he worked with, but instead drew on several different, even disparate, regional painting conventions to produce his unique painting style?

Anthropologist Mayke Kranenbarg claimed in 2004 that in order to become an artist in Warmun it was essential for artists to visit their ‘country’ regularly so that they could create a mental map of the places where they were allowed to paint. Connectedness to ‘country’ through regular visits enabled an artist to understand the meaning of the ancestral beings attached to this ‘country’ (Kranenbarg 2004: 61). An intriguing aspect of Thomas’s work is that he only visited his birth country in 1995, over fifty years after he moved away to the Kimberley region. He did however emphasise throughout his painting career the importance of his father’s, his mother’s and his birth ‘country’.
Thomas, distinctive in being a man with many ‘countries’ was able to depict the ‘country’ around Warmun not just because of the unique position of having been the creator of the *Kurrirr Kurrirr*, but because he was an initiated man, married to a *Gija*.

The only obvious desert conventions that Thomas used were his almost exclusive use of aerial or planar perspective. This was the only obvious link to his desert roots. Even with this apparent desert convention he showed a great degree of innovation and reinvention.

In his youth in the Great Sandy Desert in the 1930’s, Thomas may have begun creating images using a ‘sketch map’ perspective as part of the recreational and ritual activities described by Kjellgren. Thomas later transferred this early learnt knowledge in composing the spaces of his paintings (Kjellgren 1999:185). Away from the desert, in the 1980’s, Thomas freed himself from the customary constraints of ceremonial iconography. He reinterpreted or discarded many of the symbols used by desert painters such as animal tracks and the circle-line iconography. In his paintings these desert symbols took on new meanings.

8.5 **Context/Mentor**

Kranenbarg wrote that in *Gija/Miriwoong* society, a mentor such as an older relative instructed the beginning artist in the relevant stories and places through observation and imitation (Kranenbarg 2004: 61, Kjellgren 1999: 185). In Thomas’s case this was Paddy Jaminji, Thomas derived much of his style from the influence and teaching of Jaminji. It would seem illogical that he would have absorbed a strong desert style of painting from such teaching.

Fellow artist, Jock Mosquito (c.1940-) observed that Paddy Jaminji was the one with the natural talent and that Jaminji was painting ‘headboards’ (*Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremonial boards) long before Thomas himself tried them (Jock Mosquito (2008), pers.
This tradition of apprenticeship continues today as Andrew Griffiths, a young Miriwoong artist, pointed out:

I love being around my elders, learning lots of things every day. When they start painting they tell us stories about when they were young our age…my grandfather [artist Alan Griffiths] showed me a lot of things (Australia Senate 2007: 17).

Thomas’s paintings tended to have very distinct styles when representing certain subject matters. He used figurative representations when representing ancestral animal stories, usually of owls and rainbow serpents. This style of depiction is linked to the figurative representational style of painting on the large semicircular ceremonial boards (Plate 83.1 and Plate 8.32) which clearly referenced the rock art style throughout the Kimberley. The subject matter of the later period rock paintings depicted animals, reptiles and birds. This link has been more comprehensively described in Chapters 5 and 6.

The stories of the Gija/Miriwoong around Warmun and the East Kimberley which Thomas painted related to recording historical and recent events which were transmitted through oral traditions. Thomas employed a topographically configured painting style quite distinct from the desert painters of the central and western desert regions when representing these events. The painting The burning site 1990 (Plate 8.26) drew on a story of the ‘killing times’ in the 1920’s in the East Kimberley. This was an example of a topographically configured representation with the minimalism of content and limited colour range typical of the majority of his paintings. This painting showed no recognisable desert iconography.

By contrast, in an almost chameleon-like way he adopted and re-interpreted desert symbols and iconography when painting his mother’s and father’s stories. Examples of this were the paintings he produced after his journey in 1995 back to Yalda Soak. An example of this style of representation was the painting Yalda Soak 1995
(Plate 8.7) which related a story of his totemic ‘wild dog’ (dingo) and highlighted his re-interpreted desert symbolism.

8.6 Perspective

A striking feature of Thomas’s paintings was the almost exclusive use of conceptual forms of aerial perspective and a simplified depiction of landscape elements when painting features of the landscape. Examples of this were Untitled 1984 (Plate 8.8), Yilirnpirn 1983 (Plate 8.9), (a description and analysis of both Untitled 1984 and Yilirnpirn 1983 paintings were discussed in Chapter 7) and Lululmalulu at Mount House 1983 (Plate 8.10). Lululmalulu at Mount House 1983 documented a Dreaming site concerning Lululmalulu the rock dwelling Bee Man a Ngarrangkarni man. The story recounted how the hill was called Yillimbirri and was near Mount House Station. Lululmalulu sat there a long time ago watching Marlu the Kangaroo and Julan the dog near the river. The hill is now that man (Thomas et at 1994: 58).

These early paintings (1983-1984) of Thomas’s demonstrated a ‘minimalist’ approach when documenting the landscape, especially when the ‘story’ was the important element. An intimate knowledge of the story was an important factor in understanding this style of painting. As art dealer Graham Cornall wrote, ‘most white people need a guide and a translator…to be able to read Thomas’s paintings’ (Cornall 1998). Thomas revisited this pared down rendition of the landscape throughout his painting career. This was demonstrated by his late period works Koonang Hills 1992 (Plate 8.11) and Druwurl Hills 1992 (Plate 8.12).

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38 In the 1930s Thomas and his family were among the last people in the area who still followed a traditional lifestyle, and he fondly remembers camping at Yalda Soak as a young man with his father and family. This work shows his birthplace and highlights some of his memories of this place. At the lower left is his brother’s burial place. The circle on the upper left is where Thomas was born, near the soak. In the centre is the soak itself from which a small creek flows. He remembers sitting by the soak at night watching the stars reflect in the water. The stars are shown as five red circles on the surface of the still pool (Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Arts, Rover Thomas File, APO670).
Frontal perspective of the landscape was used by the Gija/Miriwoong painters: George Mung Mung, Beerbee Mungnari (Plate 8.13), Jack Britten and Hector Janda ny (Plate 8.14) almost exclusively in the early days of East Kimberley art. Conversely this type of perspective was almost entirely absent from Thomas’s paintings.

Curators have written and described Thomas’s use of aerial perspective as being an obvious link to his desert heritage and a clear sign of this desert heritage. Judith Ryan wrote:

Thomas x-rays the topography, seeing through to its skeleton and enabling it to be read as a conceptual map. His work echoes the flat, sparse expanses of desert terrain characteristic of Kukatja and Wangkajunga territory (Ryan 1992: 44).

The style of Thomas’s depiction of aerial perspective was, however, in marked contrast to the use of the circle and straight line motifs used by desert paintings to represent events or sites. Even though used by desert artists, aerial perspective was also an East Kimberley trait. Many of the early Gija/Miriwoong painters used both aerial and frontal perspective.

8.7 The Use of the Figure

The figurative39 paintings of Thomas showed evidence of a ‘two way’ system of viewing objects, aerially and frontally, which was similar to the rock art conventions of the East Kimberley. An example of a ‘two way’ painting was a depiction of a kangaroo from Martins Gap rock art site (Plate 8.15) where the animal was painted with a frontal perspective. By contrast an animal such as a crocodile from the same site was depicted (Plate 8.16) as if viewed from above in an aerial perspective. This is a logical and easily understood convention.

39 The figure: the form of a human, an animal or a thing: most often referring to human form.
An early use of the *Gija* frontal perspective by Thomas was the 1983 painting *Lake Gregory, Western Australia* 1983 (Plate 8.17). The depiction of the emu and the dingo were rendered in frontal perspective, as stylised motifs, similar to the rock art depictions in the area. Already in this painting Thomas displayed a sparsity and simplicity which set his style apart from the more complex compositions of the *Gija/Miriwoong* paintings at that time. Overall this Thomas painting emphasised condensed design elements in a defined space resulting in a strong sense of restrained power, movement and struggle.

By comparison Paddy Jaminji’s *Tumpin at Tijwarratijwurra* 1986 (Plate 8.18) and George Mung Mung’s *Jirling the Hunter* 1989 (Plate 8.19) illustrate a frontal or side view perspective more characteristic of much of the *Gija* artists. One can clearly see the *Gija* frontal perspective and stylised but recognisable depiction of humans, animals and plants.

Where Thomas diverged from the *Gija/Miriwoong* system of depiction of humans, animals and objects was primarily in his treatment of the background in his paintings. In *Lake Gregory, Western Australia* 1983 (Plate 8.17) Thomas described the hills, roads, vegetation and rivers as if viewed from a long way above, almost as if viewed from a satellite. The open areas of colour with minimal points of information did not include the infilling of dots, lines and patterns typical of desert painters such as Darby Jampijinpa Ross (Plate 8.3) and Billy Thomas (Plate 8.4).

The more representational influence of the *Gija* painters could be seen in Thomas’s paintings *Lake Gregory, Western Australia* 1983 (Plate 8.17), *Junkartal* 1985 (Plate 8.20) and *Lingurr (Bush Snake)* 1987 (Plate 8.21) which vividly showed realised depictions of animals. Unfortunately as many early paintings are in private collections and access to photos of these works is limited, I have relied on early drawings in catalogue sheets to give an idea of Thomas’s style of representing animals and his use
of a plain simplified background with strong negative shapes (Plate 8.22). His symbolic observations of animals highlighted the influence Gija/Miriwoong painters had on these three early works (1983-87).

By the late 1980’s Thomas had moved away from the figurative representational influence of the Gija/Miriwoong painters and pared down his iconography to its bare bones. The figurative elements primarily had disappeared from his work after 1987, re-emerging only in commissioned work, which were almost entirely ‘copies’ of previous earlier paintings. An example was Thomas’s *Gulgoodji (The Owl)* 1991 (Plate 8.23) which was painted for art dealer Mary Macha in Perth.

The human figure in the ‘country’ in his paintings was often only ‘implied’ and often only the features of the ‘country’ were used to convey the story. Occasionally a figurative motif was used in abstract form and this was clearly shown in his ‘massacre’ paintings; *Ruby Plains Killings 1* 1990 and *Ruby Plains Killings 2* 1990 (Plate 8.24. and Plate 8.25). In both paintings the image of the human figure was denoted by a stylized human head.

Knowledge of the actual ‘place’ of the painting in a particular ‘country’ was the only way to understand the implication of the figure within the form of landscape in a Thomas painting. This is graphically demonstrated in *The burning site* 1990 (Plate 8.26) where all elements in the composition were landscape features depicted from an aerial perspective. No figure was shown, merely implied, though the story held within this key site tells of the brutal killing of people at Bedford Downs cattle station in the mid 1920’s. For a fuller description of this painting refer back to Chapter 7 and the data sheets on this painting.

Another figurative stylistic device Thomas used was the representation of the hand and forearm, graphically displayed in the painting *Roads Meeting* 1987 (Plate
8.27) showing a direct link to the hand-stencilling on rock art galleries in the region (Plate 8.28). According to Kjellgren:

…hand stencils were created to mark an individual or family’s presence at a given [rock art] site and to implicitly or explicitly establish that individual or group as the proper “owners” of the site and its associated country (Kellgren 1999: 139).

In the case of Roads Meeting 1987 Thomas has reinvented the meaning of the iconography of the hand and forearm seen in rock art throughout the Kimberley and the desert regions to symbolize the stop signs which appear on either side of the Great Northern Highway at the Warmun community.

The Thomas painting Muriya-Ngarrkurrun 1984 (Plate 8.29) was an example of different representations of the figure. The group of seven ‘heads’ on the centre left side of the painting references the bones of old people in a cave while the use of the hand with forearm in the centre of the painting referred to the rock art that was on the wall of a cave in Texas Downs Station (Mary Macha files: catalogue No. R5. No 6).

The painting Buragu Country 1987 (Plate 8.30) again emphasised Thomas’s chameleon-like style. In this painting subject matter was drawn from his father’s ‘country’. He used re-invented desert iconography to depict a ‘map’ of where the different ceremonies and corroborees were held in his father’s ‘country’ around Lake Gregory (Buragu). The depiction of the different elements around the perimeter of the painting: the boomerang (kali), hand (marambu) hitting stick (goodooroo) (Waringarri Aboriginal Arts: Rover Thomas Catalogue File No. AP1659) were all found on rock art galleries in the Kimberley and also in the desert regions.

From these figurative style techniques one can appreciate the hybridity of his style: the absorption of features of ceremonial painting convention mixed with features of rock art painting as well as the hand-forearm stencilling to show “ownership” of ‘country’. My study has shown there was a strong link in Thomas’s painting style with the rock art style of the East Kimberley.
8.8 Ceremonial Connections

In the work of *Gija* painters there were very strong stylised representational elements which were clearly identifiable with natural features such as trees, rocks, waterholes and animals. This painting style was clearly drawn from Kimberley ceremonial headboard painting conventions. The *Wanalirri* ceremonial headboard from Mowanjum in the west of the Kimberley (Plate 8.31) and the *Tulukun* ceremonial headboard from the East Kimberley (Plate 8.32) were typical examples of headboards used in public ceremonies and showed symbolic narratives with stylised figures of ancestors and animals. The *Wanalirri* board from the western Kimberley concerned an epic battle between humans and *Wandjina*. This battle was caused by children teasing and abusing *Dumbi*, the owl who was a confidant and familiar to *Wojin*, a major *Wandjina* figure (Akerman 199:18).

The *Tulukun* board, one of two in the corroboree, depicted Jack Chowan’s son, Bruce, from Tirralintji who whilst hunting kangaroo was touched by a spirit who took him to Kalumbaru where he witnessed two large snakes and a boat sinking with a lot of people on board. His aunt saw what was happening and followed. They were taken to a cave by the spirit where they heard old people singing (Bergmann 1996:26).

In the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremonial headboards (Plate 8.33) there were several clearly defined styles of iconography depicted. The influence of Thomas was seen in the minimal nature of the iconography represented on these boards. Paddy Jaminji and George Mung Mung along with other artists were, as discussed in Chapter 4, instrumental in painting these boards but it was Thomas who directed them (Vinicombe 1997).

There were three main types of iconography used on the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* boards. The first type included symbolic representations of the spirits or *juwari* (devil devil). The second type had the figurative representational depiction of objects in the
landscape: trees, hills, waterholes. And lastly, boards represented the iconography of place: the ‘sketch or story maps’ which indicate the general area where events in the *Kurriir Kurriir* took place.

An example of this first type of stylistic motif from the *Kurriir Kurriir* boards used in Thomas’s paintings is the use of simplified facial figurative iconography to denote the whole body. This was particularly apparent in his paintings *Ruby Plains Killing I* 1990 (Plate 8.24), *Ruby Plains Killing II* 1990 (Plate 8.25) and *Mirriya/Mureeya Texas Country* 1989 (Plate 8.34).

*Mirriya/Mureeya Texas Country* 1989 (Plate 8.34) referenced an incident where people were sheltering from a storm in a cave when lightning struck, killing several people. When comparing this 1989 painting with the early ceremonial boards painted by Paddy Jaminji, *Jimpi the Devil Devil* c.1978 40(Plate 8.35) and *Manginta* 1980 (Plate 8.36), it was obvious that the model to delineate the human facial features depicted in *Mirriya/Mureeya Texas Country* 1989 was taken from the features of the *juwarri* (devil devil) (Plate 8.37). Thomas had re-interpreted *juwarri* images to indicate human figures, then even further simplified these facial features, as seen in the close-up of the bottom right corner of *Mirriya/Mureeya Texas Country* 1989 (Plate 8.38).

This characteristic simplified facial figurative iconography denoted people killed in the East Kimberley region, whether from mishap or from deliberate massacre, and was found throughout all of Thomas’s paintings when referencing the human figure.

The Jacko Dolmo ceremonial board *Warrmun Hill* c198041 (Plate 8.39) highlighted the second form of stylistic devices from the *Kurriir Kurriir* ceremonial

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40 Jimpi, the ‘devil devil’ spirit or *juwarri*, accompanies the deceased woman’s spirit on her journey home. Jimpi (who is female like the deceased) guides the woman’s spirit and teaches the names for the sites that they visit and their associated songs.

41 Original documentation for this painting said that the site depicted in the painting had “no special ritual significance but the site is associated with the mythic Eaglehawk who made spears to throw to distant hills” (Mary Macha Files accessed February 2008).
boards; that is, the depiction of aspects of the landscape such as hills, or creeks which related to the narrative imbedded in the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* using a ‘minimalist’$^{42}$ style of iconography. This painting documents a significant dreaming site at Turkey Creek. The name of the township at Turkey Creek was changed to Warmun in the 1980s by local people to reflect the significance of this site.

The simple iconography used on the ceremonial boards was reflected in many of Thomas’s paintings throughout all periods of his work and was used by him to denote important dreaming sites. Examples of this were *Lulumalu at Mount House* 1983 (Plate 8.10) from his early period, *Nungarra* 1989 (Plate 8.40) from the middle period and *Koonang Hills* 1992 (Plate 8.10) from his late period.

The painting, *Nungarra* 1989 (Plate 8.40) depicted a Dreamtime story about the blue tongue lizard from his mother’s ‘country’ south of Halls Creek. One day the blue tongue lizard, threw a boomerang with his right hand and it didn’t come back. He then threw a boomerang with his left hand and it came back cutting all the trees around Ringers Soak (*Nunugarra*) (Warringarri Catalogue No. AP1822).

The third major style device that of the ‘sketch map’ iconography on the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* boards became a compelling stylistic characteristic throughout Thomas’s works. This characteristic featured an aerial perspective. These ‘maps’ are not topographically nor dimensionally accurate and contain no Western notion of a north/south orientation. An example of this ‘sketch map’ iconography on *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremonial boards was Jaminji’s *Kammanturr (Elgee Cliff)* c.1978 (Plate 8.41). This board depicted the

$^{42}$ Minimalist: Adj. being or providing a bare minimum of what is necessary or: of, relating to, characteristic of, or in the style of Minimalism. Minimalism. n. A school of abstract painting and sculpture that emphasizes extreme simplification of form, as by the use of basic shapes and monochromatic palettes of primary colours, objectivity, and anonymity of style. Use of the fewest and barest essentials or elements, as in the arts, literature, or design (The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Retrieved May 13, 2009, from Dictionary.com website: http://dictionary1.classic.reference.com/browse/minimalism
landscape of *Kanmanturr* or Elgee Cliffs, which is southwest of Bedford Downs station in the East Kimberley and the board referenced a songline in the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* that says:

*Kularrta-urla kawurru kampani,*
Now at Elgee Cliff [Kanmanturr], the old woman ‘finds’ the half kangaroo, the legendary inhabitant of this place. She sees the metamorphosed remains and blood inside the cave (Thomas et al 1994:26).

The image on the board was then a representation of where, and how to get to Kanmanturr. To non-Aboriginal people this image appears to be a just a couple of white dotted edged black lines on a red ochre painted board. It is, however, a representation of not only an actual place but a representation of a significant Dreaming site for Gija/Minjungbal people.

The simplified ‘sketch or story map’ iconography was at the heart of all Thomas paintings. *Frog Hollow Country* 1987 (Plate 8.42) is another example. It set out a map of the area showing the major roads and hills, included in the painting is a major law site, *Lulumalulu* (Sugar Bag Hill). This painting was more fully examined in Chapter 7.

To summarise, the conventions of the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremonial boards were one of the precedents to the East Kimberley style of painting and Thomas’s ‘minimal’ style arose from these conventions..

8.9 **Subject Matter**

Anthropologist Eric Kjellgren made the point that in the East Kimberley painters from both sexes restricted their subject matter to that which was open to all to view. The ownership of subject matter was not restricted to gender but was determined by ownership rights to non-secret sites and stories (Kjellgren 2001:361). These regulations came about through negotiation and agreement because depicting many of the gender-specific ceremonies and stories to members of the opposite sex, or the uninitiated, constituted a serious breach of Aboriginal law.
Often when talking to Aboriginal artists about the subject matter of their painting they said; ‘it’s my ‘country’’, ‘it’s my mother’s ‘country’’, or ‘it’s my father’s ‘country’’ and this will be said in a manner which is incredulous, as if to say: ‘What else would it be’? The diversity of Thomas’s subject matter is what set much of his paintings apart from other East Kimberley artists. No other artist in the region painted with such diversity. What was striking was the geographic dissemination of the subject matter of his paintings which embraced a wide range of sites, including his adopted home in the East Kimberley; his father’s ‘country’, his mother’s ‘country’, and the cattle stations where he had worked as a stockman. In addition, many of Thomas’s paintings encompassed several different subjects often referring to the past and present in the same painting. *Frog Hollow Country* 1987 (Plate 8.42) is an example. For a full description refer to data sheets on this painting in Chapter 7.

According to Joel Smoker, art co-ordinator at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts in the late 1980’s, all the paintings by the Warmun *Gija/Miriwoong* artists were about ‘country’ depicting Dreaming stories and relating to a specific area. Local *Gija/Miriwoong* artists through their paintings reflected strong relationships and claims to specific ‘country’. The art co-ordinator said that Thomas’s paintings were distinctive in using a wide range of subject matter rather than just *Gija/Miriwoong* ‘country’ indicating where he had come from and the places he had visited (Smoker 1989).

Examples of subject matter in Rover Thomas paintings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Matter</th>
<th>Examples of Painting</th>
<th>Story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.<em>Kurrirr Kurrirr</em> Ceremony</td>
<td>(Plate 8.43). <em>Cyclone Tracy</em> 1991</td>
<td>Depicts Cyclone Tracy and the destruction of Darwin which took place in December 1974 – last songline of narrative in <em>Kurrirr Kurrirr</em> ceremony (refer to Chapter 7 Data sheet 7.2.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>natural pigments on canvas, 168 x 183cm, National Gallery of Australia Collection (Image:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Father’s ‘Country’</strong></td>
<td><strong>3. Mother’s ‘Country’</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns a Dreaming track story relating to the ancestral dog (dingo) and emu’s journey from Inverway (NT) to Mulan (Comet’s Bore) (WA) (refer to Chapter 7 data sheet 7.2.2).</td>
<td>Relates to a place near Looma -the Three Sisters. In the Dreamtime there were three women: one of Nyawajarri, one Nawoola (her daughter) and one Naminji. They travelled around singing women’s corroboree: from the Gooniyani country on Louisa Downs, on to Balgo back to Mulan. Then they travelled to Yagga-yagga and on to Ngaranyjany (big waterhole in the bush). Some men heard them singing and got jealous and killed them. The three mounds at the left side of the painting are the three sisters. The black background where the three sisters are lying is beside a creek. The red in the painting is the country where they travelled. The yellow circle on the bottom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Father’s ‘Country’

(Plate 8.45). *Ngamarrin (The Snake near Turkey Creek)* 1984 Shows the place where the old woman died in the car crash near Turkey Creek in 1974. The head of the snake indicates the exact place. This painting acknowledges the role of the Rainbow Serpent plays in the death of the woman (refer to Chapter 7 data sheet 7.2.3).

3. Mother’s ‘Country’

(Plate 8.47). *Three Women Dreaming* 1996

Relates to a place near Looma -the Three Sisters. In the Dreamtime there were three women: one of Nyawajarri, one Nawoola (her daughter) and one Naminji. They travelled around singing women’s corroboree: from the Gooniyani country on Louisa Downs, on to Balgo back to Mulan. Then they travelled to Yagga-yagga and on to Ngaranyjany (big waterhole in the bush). Some men heard them singing and got jealous and killed them. The three mounds at the left side of the painting are the three sisters. The black background where the three sisters are lying is beside a creek. The red in the painting is the country where they travelled. The yellow circle on the bottom.
right hand side of the painting is where the waterhole is located.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Plate 8.48). <em>Two Men Dreaming</em> c1985</th>
<th>Two Men Dreaming story is an ancestral story and relates to a man who sits beside a billabong and turns into stone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>natural pigments on canvas board, 91 x 61 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales Collection (Image: Art Gallery of New South Wales).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. <em>Gija/Miriwoong</em> Ancestral Stories</th>
<th>References the <em>Gija</em> women’s Dreaming story about <em>Dayiwal</em>, the ancestral barramundi. Lundari the emu drops the barramundi. The painting shows three hill tops surrounded by their layered sides. The central hill shows where the scales of the barramundi scraped on the side of the hill as he tries to get away from the emu. The Argyle diamond mine site is in close proximity to this Dreaming site.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Plate 8.49). <em>Barrumundi Dreaming</em> 1989</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Plate 8.50). <em>Yiliripirn</em> 1983</th>
<th>Concerns the ancestral fruit bat <em>Pangkal</em>. This painting was originally called Pompey’s <em>Pillar</em> or <em>Pangkalji</em>. The site is on Texas Downs station. The story of this painting is that after killing a freshwater crocodile at a spring at Mount Evelyn (the Evelyn Range is now the crocodile), the little fruit bat fled from the scene. Hiding in a cave on the way he eluded this pursuers. He then fled to Pompey’s Pillar before moving onto Wulangku on Bedford Downs (refer to Chapter 7 data sheet 7.2.1).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Birth Country</th>
<th>Shows the wild dog Dreaming place near Yalda Soak, Thomas’s birth place. The painting shows a series of rock holes formed by the mother wild dog and her puppies in the Dreamtime. These rock holes, found up on high ridges, were vital sources of water and were important Dreaming sites.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Plate 8.51). <em>Jaandoo – Wild Dog Dreaming</em> 1995</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>natural pigments on canvas, 100 x 140cm, Private Collection (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts: Rover Thomas file: AP0637).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.52</td>
<td>Punmu Jumpup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.53</td>
<td>Railway Bridge, Katherine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.54</td>
<td>Roads Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.55</td>
<td>Highway between Alice Downs and Springvale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.56</td>
<td>Dreamtime story of the Willy Willy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Plate 8.57) *Two Sisters 1995*  
Natural pigment and binder on canvas, 80 x 100cm  
This painting shows two Dreamtime rocks which stand on either side of the road near a place called Yoolooloo east of Fitzroy Crossing. The two rocks are a mother and daughter who were travelling from waterhole to waterhole. They heard an owl (L) and a tawney frogmouth (R) calling at night and they lay down and stayed for good. The two billabongs they were heading for are shown at the top of the painting.

8. Cattle Stations  
(Plate 8.58). *Horse Creek – Texas Downs Country 1995*  
Natural pigments and binder on canvas, 90 x 60cm (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts: Rover Thomas file: AP0692).  
Shows Horse Creek (*Nawarragin*), in black, flowing between two hills; the red section Red Butte (*Wirdim*) and the yellow section Gondoorrgy. Red Butte is associated with several important Dreaming stories.

9. Historical, Recent Events  
(Plate 8.59). *Lake Argyle 1986*  
This references an important recent event in the region, the damming of the Ord River in the 1960’s which was to create a freshwater lake for hydro-electric power and farm irrigation. Thomas’s works hints at cultural loss as this dam site was where a star fell to earth in the Dreaming. Thomas was to say of this work that it held ‘no corroboree because kartiya (white man) bin made dam’ (Thomas et al 1994:58) implying that social trauma occurred due to this development (refer to Chapter 7 data sheet 7.2.5).

(Plate 8.60). *Pilpirrji (Argyle Hill) 1984*  
The painting graphically shows the impact of flooding, caused by the building of the Argyle Dam, on the surrounding country. The white area in the painting indicates the hills that have been submerged by the flooding.

(Plate 8.61). *Desert Meeting Place 1996*  
Natural pigments on canvas, 90 x 120cm, (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts: Rover Thomas  
Concerns a ceremonial meeting south of Billiluna and one can see the influence of desert iconography as this was painted after his visit back to Yalda Soak and is about his Mother’s 'country’. The circles reference different groups of people who have gathered for the meeting and show the area from where they have travelled.
| (Plate 8.62) | Crossroads 1996  
| natural pigments on canvas, 36” x 24”cm, (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts: Rover Thomas file: AP0779). | References the intersections of roads. When asked where these crossroads were, Thomas said “it could be anywhere, Tokyo America or the East Kimberley” (Waringarri Aboriginal Arts – Rover Thomas catalogue sheet AP0779). |
| natural pigments and bush gum on plywood, 180.7 x 90.7cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales Collection (Image: Art Gallery of NSW). | In this painting Thomas documents the killing of Aboriginal people by Jack Kelly, owner of Texas Downs Station, near Black Gin Yard, by way of a ‘map’ of where the killings occurred. This occurred about 1910-15 (refer to Chapter 7 data sheet 7.2.4) |
| (Plate 8.64). The burningsite 1990  
| natural pigments on canvas, 180cm x 90cm, National Gallery of Australia Collection (Thomas et al (1994), Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas, p.56). | Depicts a ‘map’ of the major sites where the drama of the killings unfolded on Bedford Downs Station in about 1924 (refer to Chapter 7 data sheet 7.2.8). |
| (Plate 8.65). Ruby Plains Killings 1 1990  
| natural pigments on canvas, 90 x 180cm, National Gallery of Australia Collection (Image: Thomas et al (1994), Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas, p.44). | Shows a map of where the massacre of people occurred on Ruby Plains Cattle Station south of Halls Creek as well as a depiction of a decapitated head that had been placed inside of hollow log or dead tree. It is unknown when this event occurred. |
| (Plate 8.66). Ruby Plains Killings 2 1990  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>natural pigments on canvas, 90 x 110cm, National Gallery of Australia Collection (Image:</th>
<th>Depicts a more detailed ‘map’ of the overall area where, on Ruby Plains Cattle Station, the massacre of at least two and maybe four people took place. The decapitated head inside a hollow log is in the lower left corner of the painting. The date of this event is unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An interpretation of a natural phenomenon of weather is depicted in an aerial perspective. The movement of the cyclone through time is depicted. The use of a large area of black in the centre of the painting, allows the viewer to ‘feel’ the power and destructive force of a cyclone (refer to Chapter 7 data sheet 7.2.9).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12. The Sun Moon and Stars</th>
<th>(Plate 8.68). The shade from the hill comes over and talks in language 1984</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The black area in this painting references the approaching night. The crescent moon is in the centre of the painting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>![Image](Image: Belinda Carrigan (2003), Rover Thomas: I want to paint).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>earth pigments and natural binders on plywood, 90.8 x 180.8 cm, The Holmes a Court Collection (Image: Belinda Carrigan (2003), Rover Thomas: I want to paint).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(Plate 8.69). The Night Sky 1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Produced as a result of Thomas’s 1995 journey to Well 33 and Yalda Soak in his birth country. The sky is shown as red, the central circle represents the moon and the four smaller circles in each corner of the painting are the bright stars of the Milky Way (refer to Chapter 7 data sheet 7.2.10).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>![Image](Image: Produced as a result of Thomas’s 1995 journey to Well 33 and Yalda Soak in his birth country. The sky is shown as red, the central circle represents the moon and the four smaller circles in each corner of the painting are the bright stars of the Milky Way (refer to Chapter 7 data sheet 7.2.10).).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>natural pigments on canvas, 200 x 161 cm, National Gallery of Australia Collection (Image:).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8.10 Use of Colour: Meanings

Thomas’s palette was restricted to natural ochres and pigments as discussed in Chapter 6. He used particular colours to describe specific aspects of the landscape. Curator Judith Ryan stated that in Thomas’s paintings, colour was used symbolically.

As an example she referred to *Yari Country* 1989 (Plate 8.72): ‘Red represents drought; white indicates poisonous water; black, the fatal fire’ (Ryan 1994:48). This, of course, was also simple observation: the colour of the water that flowed into Lake Gregory from Sturt Creek was milky. Red ochre was the colour of the ground throughout the region and black was both the colour of charcoal and the colour of the land after burning. However in another painting of this subject matter, *Two Men Dreaming* c1985 (Plate 8.48), this ‘symbolism’ by colour was quite different. The black in this painting referred to a deep pool of water. The milky white colour in the centre of the painting referred to a deep pool of water.
represented reflected moonlight and the red referenced a large rock (AGNSW information).

So the use of colour in Thomas’s paintings was quite arbitrary and adaptable to the particular visual qualities of various subjects. Other examples of the different ‘meaning’ that certain colours represent are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PIGMENT COLOUR</th>
<th>NAME OF PAINTING</th>
<th>REPRESENTATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>(Plate 8.45). <em>Lake Gregory, Western Australia</em> 1983</td>
<td>Is the ground on which the dreaming emu and dingo fought at Lake Gregory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Plate 8.67). <strong>Ngarin Jana Country</strong> 1988</td>
<td>Relates to a sandbar (dalidali) on which people were standing, which collapsed and the people drowned in the flooded lake.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Image: Art Gallery of New South Wales).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Plate 8.73). <strong>Ord River and tributaries</strong> 1990, earth pigments on canvas board, 80 x 160cm Private Collection (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts: Rover Thomas file: AP3408).</td>
<td>References water of the Ord river from the Argyle Dam on the left to the Diversion Dam at Kununurra on the right.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red (Plate 8.74). <strong>Bungguldgee</strong> 1985</td>
<td>Relates to all the ‘country’ represented in this painting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>earth pigments and natural binders on composition board (masonite), 60.5 x 91.6cm AGWA (Image: Mary Macha files February 2008).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Plate 8.54). <strong>Roads Meeting</strong> 1987</td>
<td>References the gravel road at Warmun Community where it intersects with the Great North Highway.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Plate 8.75). <strong>Pompey’s Pillar</strong> 1990</td>
<td>Alludes to part of the Dreaming story of Pangkaliji (little fruit bat) when he flees from pursuit and hides at Pompey’ Pillar.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>natural earth pigments and bush gum on canvas, 61 x 101, Private Collection (Image: M. Macha</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
White (Plate 8.76). Bedford Downs Massacre 1985

earth pigments and natural binders on canvas 53 x 179.8, Holmes a Court Collection (Image: Belinda Carrigan (2003), Rover Thomas: I want to paint).

Shows the significant topographical sites relating to the killing of Aboriginal people that occurred in the 1920’s at Bedford Downs Station.

(Plate 8.77) Untitled (Owl) c.1988

Use of white pigment alludes to the feathers on the owl.

natural earth pigments on canvas board, 76 x 51cm, Private Collection (Image: Lot 4 Sotheby’s Auction Catalogue Melbourne 9 July 2001, p.16).

(Plate 8.78). Barragoo 1992

natural pigments on canvas, 40 x 60cm, Private Collection (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts: Rover Thomas file: AP3619).

This shows ‘country’ near Lake Gregory where the dog and the emu fought in the Dreamtime.

Thomas kept to a very restricted palette throughout his works: white, red, yellow and black. Most tonal differences in colour in his paintings were due to the normal variations of natural pigments. In most of his painting white was used as dotting, however he did occasionally use other colours for his dotting. An example of this: from his early period was Pilpirrji (Argyle Hill) 1984 (Plate 8.60) where he used a combination of red and white dotting; from his middle period Blancher Country 1987 (Plate 8.79), and from his late period Gunowaggi – The Days of Wally Dowling 1995 (Plate 8.80). Thomas used yellow and white dotting in both paintings.
Thomas periodically used other coloured pigments in his paintings. The injection of different colours to the usual black, white, yellow, red was mainly due to the influence of fellow artist Queenie McKenzie. In the early 1990’s she introduced a new way of mixing ochres and natural pigments. Queenie had introduced pink and purple pigments. These she had locally mined herself. As she became older, she often traded ochres to the artists at Warmun and (Vinnicombe 2000:21).

The painting *Punmu Salt Lake* 1995 (Plate 8.81) was an example of the use of a different colour scheme in one of Thomas’s paintings, by the application of the blue/grey shape in the centre of the painting. This painting concerned Lake Dora near the Punmu Community on the Kidson Track in the Great Sandy Desert.

In this chapter I have demonstrated that the wide variety of subject matter Thomas used, the incorporation of local rock painting motifs into his paintings, his reinvention of symbols from his desert heritage, coupled with the innovative depiction of motifs derived from the inventive *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremonial boards, all point to Thomas’s unique painting style.

In the next section I will be concluding my analysis of Thomas’s paintings by looking at other artists in the East Kimberley, and pointing out the stark differences between them, as a counterpoint to Thomas’s unique painting style. This will demonstrate conclusively what a Rover Thomas painting is and how unique his painting style was.


(Plate 8.6). Paddy Jaminji *Owl* 1976 bush pigment and natural gum on wood, 25 x10 x 9.5cm, Laverty Collection (Image: *Beyond Sacred* p.198)

(Plate 8.8). Rover Thomas *Untitled* 1984, natural pigments and bush gum on plywood, 90.7 x 180.7cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales Collection (Image: Art Gallery of New South Wales).


(The turkey spirit in human form sat on these hills. Then as a turkey he flew away. But he left the spirit of his wings in the two rocks) (Thomas et al 1994: 59).


(Porcupine [echidna] made that rock and is in it all the time. In the Dreaming they tried to pull him out but they couldn’t – he is still there) (Thomas et al, 1994:59).
(Plate 8.13). Beeribi Mungnari Gurnidudug – Blue Pidgeon Dreaming 2005, natural ochre and pigments on canvas, 80 x 60cm (Image Warmun Art Centre).


(Plate 8.18). Paddy Jaminji (1912-1996) Tumpin at Tjiwarratjiwurra 1986, natural earth pigments and natural binders on composition board, 60.5 x 95.5cm (Image: Mary Macha files February 2008).

(Plate 8.20). Rover Thomas Junkartal 1985, natural earth pigments and natural binders on composition board, 60 x 122cm, Private Collection (Image: Mary Mach files February 2008).

Lingurr: his skin is Jungurra. He travels from Turkey Creek to Alice Springs is responsible for Cyclone Tracy part of the Kurrirr Kurrirr. Ruby Plains Hill is shown at the bottom of the painting. Originally this painting was called Lingurr–Bush Snake (Mary Mach files).


(Plate 8.23). Rover Thomas Gulgoodji (The Owl) 1991, earth pigments and natural bush binders on canvas, 60.5 x 105.5cm, Private Collection. (Image: Mary Macha files February 2008).


(Plate 8.28). Hand stencil high on rock gallery Maxwell Plain rock shelter site near Kununurra (Image: Catherine Carr 26.10.2007).


Plate 8.29. Rover Thomas *Muriya-Ngarrkurrun* 1984, natural pigments and gum on board 90 x 180cm, National Gallery of Australia Collection (Image: Mary Mach files February 2008).

(Plate 8.30). Rover Thomas *Buragu Country* 1987 earth pigments and natural binder on canvas, 73 x 113cm, National Gallery of Victoria Collection (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts: Rover Thomas file AP1659).


(Plate 8.33). *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony at Turkey Creek 1979 showing close-up of painted boards used in the ceremony (Image: Kim Akerman).


(Plate 8.40). Rover Thomas *Nungarra* 1989, earth pigments on canvas board, 120 x 90cm, Private Collection. (Warringarri Aboriginal Arts: Rover Thomas file: AP1822).


(Plate 8.79) Rover Thomas *Blancher Country* 1987, earth pigments and natural binders on cotton duck, 101 x 90cm, Holmes a Court Collection (Image: Mary Macha files February 2008).

(Plate 8.80) Rover Thomas *Gunowaggi – The Days of Wally Dowling* 1995, natural pigments on canvas, 100 x 140cm, Private Collection (Image Waringarri Aboriginal Arts Files – AP0636)

(Plate 8.81). Rover Thomas *Punmu Salt Lake* 1995, natural pigments and binder on canvas, 100 x 1400cm (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts: Rover Thomas file: AP0701).
CHAPTER 9: COMPARISONS AND CONCLUSIONS.
Previous Page: (Plate 9.1) Rover Thomas Detail of *All that big rain coming down from top side* 1991, National Gallery of Australia Collection. Highlighting Thomas’s style of dotting (Image: Catherine Carr 2008 at National Gallery of Australia).
9.1 Comparison of Rover Thomas’s Painting Style Characteristics to the Artists of the East Kimberley

He says he started by helping Rover prepare his boards...[also] Jack Britten encouraged him to paint...he said that he was still working as a stockman when he started to paint – then he kept on working in cattle, normally organising musters etc...so he didn’t get to paint as much as the others, because he wasn’t retired...he now agrees he paints for money. He also says that Paddy Jaminji was the one with the natural talent and that Paddy was painting the headboards long before Rover himself tried them – Jock Mosquito (Pam Linklater (2008), pers. comm. 7 April).

It is important to compare paintings by Thomas’s to his fellow painters in Warmun, who worked with him from the early 1980’s to his death in 1998, as this comparison enhances the sense of Thomas’s compelling individuality. When Thomas commenced painting he was heavily influenced by Paddy Jaminji, George Mung Mung and Jacko Dolmo, who had all been involved in painting Thomas’s Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremonial boards. In the early years of his painting career Thomas owed an enormous debt to these painters as he drew inspiration from the creative environment which was generated by these men. In return through time, with innovation and reinvention of both Kimberley and desert iconography, he produced a truly hybrid body of work for all to enjoy.

Many of Thomas’s early paintings appropriated these artist’s styles of designs. Jacko Dolmo’s The hills of Turkey Creek c1978 (Plate 9.2) and Jaminji’s Ngarlkalin c1978 (Plate 9.3) were examples of headboards used in Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremony and were typical of the early Gija/Miriwoong genre of painting. They clearly demonstrated the stylised representations of the surrounding landscape and although the compositions were often rearranged and spatially condensed they included all the relevant information, including any pertinent geographical and/or Dreaming story. These two paintings highlight the ‘2 way’ presentation of the landscape where both frontal and aerial perspective were used in the one painting.
Thomas’s simplified painted backgrounds were paralleled in early paintings by other Warmun artists: such as Jaminji’s *Linkan* 1980 (Plate 9.4), and *Tawutji* 1980 (Plate 9.5) which featured very sparse, flat, backgrounds surrounding a dominant iconic stylised figure element. These paintings mirrored the rock art conventions in the East Kimberley discussed in Chapter 3.

Thomas’s paintings differed from these artists’ painting style in his distinctive dotting techniques. Jaminji and Dolmo’s dotting was evenly spaced and cylindrical in shape (Plate 9.6, Plate 9.7). Jack Britten’s paintings (Plate 9.8, Plate 9.9) displayed several styles of dotting with some of the dotting triangular in shape. Hector Jandany (Plate 9.10) had an individual dotting style with very widely spaced dotting. Whereas Thomas’s dotting (Plate 11, Plate 12 and Plate 13) was close together, often with merged dots, and with an obvious variability of dotting size and shape. This irregular style of dotting continued throughout Thomas’s paintings and enables one to clearly delineate between his work and other Kimberley artists who painted throughout the same period (1983-1997).

9.2 Style Variations in the East Kimberley

I have shown how the individual style of Thomas developed from close contact with Warmun artists and drew on rock art, ceremonial and design aesthetics of both the East Kimberley and the desert, evolving into his unique hybrid style. Other East Kimberley painters at Warmun moved in very different directions. Artists who continued to use both aerial and frontal perspective style, with a strong figurative component are represented by Paddy Jaminji’s *Untitled* 1984 (Plate 9.14), *Untitled* (*Tjiwurratjiwurra*) 1987 (Plate 9.15) and George Mung Mung’s *Kangaroo c.1989* (Plate 9.16).
By contrast another group of artists moved towards more symbolic representations of ‘county’ and employed a frontal rather than aerial perspective. The 1995 Queenie McKenzie (1930-1998) painting *Kija Country* 1995 (Plate 9.17), Jack Britten’s *Purnululu – Bungle Bungles* 2001 (Plate 9.18) and second generation artists Patrick Mung Mung’s (1948-) *Ngaroooroon Country* 2001 (Plate 9.19), Shirley Drill’s (1949-) *Alice Downs - Purnululu* 2007 (Plate 9.20), Betty Carrington’s (1944 -) *Dirringinji* 2008 (Plate 9.21) and Agnes Armstrong’s (1954 -) *Untitled* 2009 (Plate 9.22) illustrate this almost exclusive use of a frontal perspective which now dominates the East Kimberley approach to painting.

Throughout his middle and late periods Thomas continued to paint with a strong aerial perspective. Very few *Gija/Miriwoong* artists adopted this exclusive use of aerial perspective, simplified colour, use of outer margin dotting on the board or canvas and iconography. Freddy Timms (c.1946-) (Plate 9.23), Rusty Peters (1935-) (Plate 9.24) and Paddy Bedford (c1922-2008) (Plate 9.25) were examples of artists who continued Thomas’s style of simplified landscape iconography, aerial perspective and dotted edged paintings. The marked difference between the paintings of these artists and paintings from Thomas’s late period was in the compositional approach and use of colour. Timms especially used a variety of colours in his paintings, whereas Thomas kept fairly rigidly to red, yellow (brown), black and white with very little variation. *Jaandoo* 1996 (Plate 9.26) for instance, shows his typically restrained use of colour. Bedford’s style was very controlled with even more simplified iconography than Thomas’ giving Bedford’s work a very powerful, almost brooding aesthetic.

By 2009 nearly all East Kimberley artists had abandoned a surrounding dotted edge to their paintings. Exceptions were Beerbee Mungnari (c.1933-) and his family at Warmun and Alan Griffiths and his family at Kununurra who both employ dotted edging around the outer edge of their paintings. Their style of edging was in marked
variation to that of Thomas’s. An example of Mungnari’s method is Mount Mary - Waterloo Station 2001 (Plate 9.27). Mungnari first painted a black border around all elements in the painting including the painting’s edge he then over-painted this with dots. This style of dark edging was introduced by East Kimberley artist Hector Jandany. However Jandany did not frame his paintings with a border of dotting, as can be seen in his painting Ngarrgooroon Country 2001(Plate 9.28).

9.3 Contentious Attributions of Rover Thomas Paintings

There are few Thomas paintings positively attributed to him that show an absence of an outer margin dotted edge. One such is Dreamtime story of the willy willy 1989, in the NGV collection. It had excellent provenance and was purchased by the gallery via Waringarri Aboriginal Arts in Kununurra.

The painting The Rainbow Serpent destroyed Darwin 1983 (Plate 9.29) clearly has no outer frame of dotted edging. On close examination of this painting the dotting that completely enclosed the iconic black design in the centre of the board is quite different to the dotting techniques of other paintings executed by Thomas in the same year, such as Lake Gregory, Western Australia 1983 (see Chapter 7 data sheet 7.2.2). The dotting technique featured on the detail of The Rainbow Serpent Destroyed Darwin 1983 (Plate 9.30) is precise and not flaking and the dots are all of approximately the same size. This is in stark contrast to paintings by Thomas during the same period as I discussed in Chapter 7.

An explanation for the marked difference in The Rainbow Serpent Destroyed Darwin 1983 (Plate 9.29) and his other paintings could be that some of the early paintings were collaborative affairs and other artists helped him with his dotted edging around the main form in these paintings. Several painters; Churchill Cann, Freddy Timms have stated that they would never collaborate with other painters but perhaps
'maybe' Thomas would. When asked this question artist Churchill Cann replied: “Could be – but not much”. Meaning …not often (Churchill Cann, 2008, pers. comm. April).

This same painting which was displayed vertically by the NGA in exhibition catalogues and in galleries is perhaps better displayed horizontally with the ‘arms’ of the motif, depicting the track of the cyclone, pointing towards the right (Plate 9.31). This would correspond with the ceremonial board painted circa 1978 by Jaminji which is entitled Cyclone Tracy c1978 (Plate 9.32). As can be seen the orientation of the painting was clearly horizontal with the direction of the ‘arms’ of the cyclone pointing right. These two paintings were used in performances of the Kurrirr Kurrirr in the early 1980’s and would have been held across the shoulders of the dancers in a horizontal orientation.

One of several early Thomas paintings that were ‘problematic’ in terms of attribution from Thomas’s early period was Thomas’s Barramundi Dreaming 1983 (Plate 9.33). In original documentation from Mary Macha files (Plate 9.34), sighted and scanned by me in February 2008, this painting was attributed to Paddy Jaminji and named as Yulumba 1983. This painting was sold shortly after it was painted to the NGA where it was somehow attributed to Rover Thomas, inverted, and renamed Barrumundi Dreaming 1983(Plate 9.35). It was purchased from Gallery admission charges in 1984.

When approached about the attribution of this painting Mary Macha says:

I doubt the painting depicted on page 15 [Barramundi Dreaming 1983] of the catalogue Roads Cross [:The Paintings of Rover Thomas 1994 exhibition catalogue 1994] was painted by Rover Thomas. He frequently painted Barramundi Dreaming showing the layered sides of the hills. But the division with images on each side of the painting is typical Paddy’s work, - he also used the layered pattern on many of his works (M.Macha (2008) pers. comm. 24 October 2008)

This painting from its inscription on the catalogue card says that:

This is a picture of Tableland or ‘Yulumba’. Two big hills where Gowalmungi lived. It’s a drawing of Junba Corroboree (Told to Don MacLeod by Paddy Tjumangee [Jaminji] 4.10.1984) (Mary Macha files February 2008).
The Paddy Jaminji painting *Jilili, big swamp near Mount House 1983* (Plate 9.36) in the NGA Collection and purchased in the same year was stylistically extremely similar to Thomas’s *Barrumundi Dreaming* 1983 (Plate 9.33). The placement of the two ‘hills’ on each side of the painting was very characteristic of a Jaminji design. But the most telling feature was the way in which the white dotting throughout both the paintings was evenly spaced and of similar size. There was no merging of dotting as typically found in Thomas’s work.

The Thomas painting *Lundari (Barramundi Dreaming)* 1986 (Plate 9.37) had a similar story to the Thomas attributed *Barramundi Dreaming* 1983, but it was very obvious, on closer examination, that the white dotting surrounding all the elements in the *Lundari (Barramundi Dreaming)* 1986 painting had been applied in a very different manner to the other two paintings; *Jilili* 1983 (Plate 9.36) and *Barrumundi Dreaming* 1983 (Plate 9.33) In the *Lundari (Barramundi)* 1986 (Plate 9.37) painting the dotting was uneven throughout the painting and there were sections where dots overlapped and blended into each other. This was a typical characteristic of Thomas’s dotting style. He was not known, by either Mary Macha or Kevin Kelly, who both observed him painting, to be particularly neat. He was known to be casual in his dotting execution and there were many areas of cracked, chipped, worn and missing dotting especially around the perimeters of the board in *Lundari*.

Another explanation for attribution ‘mix-ups’ occurred during the transportation of paintings from the East Kimberley in the early 1980’s to Macha in Perth. Macha related to me in 2008 that works often were just bundled up, put on a truck (Plate 9.38 and Plate 9.39) and sent down to her with scant information to help identify each individual painting. She said that although some boards had names on the back, those names sometimes did not correspond with the other information about who actually had
painted them. ‘All in all it was a bit of a mess’ (M. Macha (2008) pers. comm. February).

Another area with a confusion of correct attribution of paintings occurs was when artists were asked to identify their own works. They would point and say ‘Yes, that my one’ however, that did not necessarily mean the painting itself, but rather that the story contained in the painting was theirs. It was obvious that sometimes paintings were attributed incorrectly by not understanding where the importance lay for the artist: in the story rather than in the process of making the object. Such confusion could be a reason for a contested attribution of Thomas paintings.

These attribution problems occurred as early as 1983 when Will Christensen was asked by Mary Macha to record aspects of a series of paintings acquired from Warmun, on behalf of the Berndt Museum of Anthropology, of the social, mythological and cultural significance in these paintings. In a letter to Macha he said:

It appears that three pictures (2/P3; 2/P17 and 2/P18) are by another artist Jacko Dolmyu (Tawalmu), two by Hector Chunda [Jandany] (Tjantalu), and two (1/P7; 2/p11) are claimed by Rover Thomas – a claim disputed by Paddy Tjamintji [Jaminji]. I think the latter claim might have been made on the basis that Rover ‘found’ the corroboree (kirlkirl) [Kurrirr Kurrirr] of which the Darwin sequence is part. This, he believes, gives him rights in the paintings produced for kirlkirl [Kurrirr Kurrirr]. Again this claim is disputed by Paddy…Paintings were identified differently on separate occasions, even by the author himself…It is noteworthy, however, that others, including Rover Thomas himself, confidently identified paintings as depicting objects or places other than these nominated by the artist [Jaminji]…One painting originally claimed by Paddy Tjamintji [Jaminji] as his own,…subsequently and by chance [was] identified by Hector Tjantalu [Jandany] as his (Will Christensen 9 March 1983 letter to Mary Macha).

9.4 Dotting

Another characteristic of Thomas’s style was the ‘shakiness’ of the lines of dotting which surrounded design elements in his paintings. By contrast Jaminji’s and Dolmo’s paintings from early in their careers showed consistency of size, shape, and especially the spacing of their dotting as seen in details of Jaminji’s Jimpi the devil devil c1978 (Plate 9.40), Still near Yulunpu 1983 (Plate 9.41) and Dolmo’s The hills of Turkey Creek, c1978 (Plate 9.42). Jaminji uses a ‘paired’ dotting technique and this can be clearly seen in Plate 9.40 and Plate 9.41. This was where the dots were applied in an
almost paired way on opposite sides of the painted element. Each of the dots showed a consistency in size and shape with the spacing between the dots an equal distance apart. Dolmo’s technique was consistent with Jaminji’s dotting style. This was in direct contrast to Thomas’s irregular shapes, spacing and size of dotting.

9.5 Conclusion

This study has explored the pivotal historical events that shaped the East Kimberley, from European settlement and the establishment of the powerful pastoral industry through to government legislations in the 1960’s which were instrumental in shaping the life of Rover Thomas. From a thorough investigation of East Kimberley rock art aesthetics and the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* ceremony I have proved that these were crucial factors in the formation of Thomas’s individual style. The scrutiny of ten Thomas paintings led me to determine specific characteristics in these paintings, identifying elements to substantiate the details of his unique style and to establish the parameters by which a Rover Thomas painting can be identified.

The impact, reception and meteoric rise of Thomas’s paintings onto the Australian art scene from the early 1980’s was phenomenal and this, discussed in Chapter 5, was due to special exposure from art dealer Mary Macha. His status as an artist was fostered particularly by the NGA, but ultimately it was the strength of the powerful and breathtaking images of his world that conquered the art scene.

One reason for Thomas’s paintings remarkable reception when they appeared on the Australian art scene in the mid-1980s was that they dovetailed into the ‘minimalist’ modernist concepts of art which were predominant during this period. Thomas’s elevation has not only had a profound impact on the Aboriginal art of the East Kimberley in both social and economic terms, but it has forced non-Indigenous Australians to re-evaluate their own perspectives on the Australian landscape, its people and its history.
Nicholas Thomas had stated that Thomas’s works sat outside the ‘traditional’ Western art world discourse. I agree that this was true of their production in Warmun or even Melbourne or Perth, but the moment these paintings entered the Western art market they became part of it. Even Rover famously said when seeing Abstract Expressionist Mark Rotho’s paintings at the National Gallery of Australia: ‘That bugger paints like me’. Thomas’s paintings are the perspective of an individual Aboriginal man to the world around him. They are replete with innovations in style, form and especially subject matter.

A major finding of this study was that Thomas veered markedly away from his desert heritage in the abandonment of an all-over infilling with dotting, an important convention style of Western Desert artists. Thomas rarely used infill dotting in his paintings. An example of his use of infill dotting is seen in *Untitled* 1992 (Plate 9.43) however, as I have shown, his work was characterised predominantly by flat areas of colour edged with white dotting. The outer margin of his paintings was typically edged with dotting. He used a minimal palette of natural colours, preferring black, white, red and yellow ochres and pigments, only fleetingly experimenting with other colours such as in *Punmu Salt Lake* 1995 (Plate 9.44).

I consider that the iconography and use of uncluttered areas of flat colour in Thomas’s work were a direct influence from the rock art aesthetics and ceremonial board conventions of the East Kimberley and not a direct influence of his desert heritage.

The ‘circle or ‘circles connected by lines’ which denoted Dreaming tracks or journeys in desert symbolism appeared in Thomas’s paintings when he painted his father’s or mother’s ‘country’ or stories related to these areas. And he did occasionally place the ‘circle,’ typical of desert symbolism to reference a specific sacred site or place, such as a cattle station homestead, in his paintings but this was not a typical
convention. However I would argue that these symbols have been re-interpreted due to his Kimberley affinities. All his paintings, from the trip back to his birthplace at Yalda Soak in September 1995, (Plate 8.7) and in detail in Night Sky 1995 (Data Sheet 7.2.10) have clear evidence of a desert aesthetic. But again I would stress that throughout the body of his work Thomas did not stick to the rigid desert painting conventions but reinterpreted their meanings to suit his stories. As an example Thomas re-interpreted this circle symbol in The Sun – Yalda Country 1995 (Plate 9.45) to represent the sun. This painting was completed after his Yalda trip in 1995 and documents the area in late September when it was extremely hot and this painting shows the sun in the clear desert sky burning down in the heat of the day (Waringarri Aboriginal Arts Files AP0641).

I have shown how Thomas’s usual method of denoting a place was by a topographical or aerial depiction of a geographical area as in Frog Hollow 1987 (Data Sheet: 7.2.6) and The burning site 1990 (Data Sheet: 7.2.8). In this pared back approach these two paintings depicted roads and hills, to set the narrative or ‘story’ of the paintings. Inside these apparently short and truncated stories was the powerful ancestral past or Ngarrangkarni. This presence imbued his work with the strength and vitality of Aboriginal culture regardless of the trauma, dispossession and dislocation that occurred throughout this region. I explored this impact on Thomas and his extended family in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4. For Thomas the content or stories of his paintings were of paramount importance and his ‘Killing Times’ paintings such as The burning site 1990 (Data Sheet 7.2.8) and Untitled 1984 (Data Sheet 7.2.4) document much of these impacted times.

Another key finding is Thomas’s particular approach to composition and perspective. All East Kimberley artists in the Gija/Miriwoong painting school predominantly composed the landscape in frontal view. While some artists such as Betty Carrington (Plate 9.21) and Agnes Armstrong (Plate 9.22) depict these features
such as hills, trees, rivers in a recognisable way, the majority of painters rearranged and spatially condensed elements of the landscape. This ensured that all sites relevant to the particular dreaming or ‘country’ were viewed in one painting. This was in stark contrast to Thomas’s aerial compositions of ‘country’.

Researchers such as Judith Ryan and Eric Kjellgren assert that Thomas followed the Western Desert convention of depicting ‘country’ in map form (Kjellgren1999:185). My research exploring Thomas’s life has indicated that this is not correct, and has shown that he spent the majority of his life from the 1940’s till the late 1990’s in the East Kimberley. In the early days, in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, of the Gija/Miriwoong school of painting he was ‘apprenticed’ and guided in his painting practice by Paddy Jaminji, George Mung Mung and Jacko Dolmo and not by his early years in the desert.

I have demonstrated that Thomas was also influenced by the rock art conventions as well as the ceremonial and material culture practices of the East Kimberley. This research has shown that Thomas formed his style through a combination of two painting styles that dominated the East Kimberley in his time. The first was drawn from the uncluttered rock art aesthetic, and the other from the ceremonial headboards of the Kimberley which depicted symbolic ‘story boards’ where the figure predominated. My study queries Graham Cornell’s statement that Thomas emerged, as he put it as ‘a quirk of history to create a new artistic language and expression, based on no preceding tradition’ (Cornell 1998). I feel this statement diminishes all the artists who have created, over many thousands of years, powerful rock paintings at rock sites such as Martins Gap, Maxwell Plains, Nganalam and Jinumum and intricate utensils such as coolamon, boomerang, spear-throwers and incised pearl-shell pendants throughout the region. The statement also belittles the contribution of Paddy Jaminji, George Mung Mung, Jacko Dolmo and others who all
painted at Warmun prior to Thomas. Thomas owed a huge debt to the ‘apprenticeship’ that he served under Paddy Jaminji and George Mung Mung who guided and assembled his knowledge of the stories and painting conventions throughout Gija/Miriwoong country. As a ‘foreigner’ to the Gija ‘country’, Thomas, after his ‘apprenticeship’, spread his own wings and like all artists whether Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal went on to push the existing boundaries.

In summary, Thomas’s paintings can be considered truly hybrid in nature. His great originality emerged initially out of the Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremony that he ‘found’ and the rock art aesthetics in the Kimberley region. His compelling individuality derived from the incorporated aspects of the local history of interaction with non-Aboriginal people, through the impact of cattle stations into subject matter for his paintings. The landscape became an allegory for personal experiences, historical events and ancestral dramas in his great trajectory of painting. A crucial finding underlined how Thomas’s expansive subject matter was quite at odds with the strict practices of the Gija/Miriwoong painters of the region. They were restricted by convention and usually stayed well within the accepted boundaries of their allowed subject matter themes.

Through analysis of key paintings I have demonstrated that Thomas developed a very individualistic and personal style both in technique and iconography which was deeply rooted in his profound of knowledge of traditional pictorial aesthetic conventions of rock painting and ritual ceremonial conventions in the East Kimberley. To these he added his own individual trajectory moving across ‘country’, through a life of transitions to subsume and reinterpret the older traditions which gave us his unique hybrid style. Today, in the East Kimberley, new generations of East Kimberley artists continue to build upon the legacy of Thomas’s work and inspiration.
Plates – Chapter 9: Comparison and Conclusions

(Plate 9.2) Jacko Dolmo *The hills of Turkey Creek*, c1978, natural pigment on particle board 115.5 x 146cm, National Museum of Australia Collection (Image: Taylor (1999), *Painting the Land Story*, p.14)


(Plate 9.4) Paddy Jaminji *Linkan* 1980, ochre on board, 85 x 110cm, Berndt Museum of Anthropology Collection (Image: Mary Macha Files).


(Plate 9.7) Jacko Dolmo *The hills of Turkey Creek*, c1978. Detail. Lower left corner highlighting dotting style.


(Plate 9.15) Paddy Jaminji *Untitled (Tjiwurratiwurra)* 1987, earth pigments on canvas, 60 x 90cm Holmes a Court Collection (Image: Mary Macha Files).


(Plate 9.21). Betty Carrington Dirringinji 2008, natural ochre and pigments on canvas, 45 x 120 cm (Image: Warmun Art Centre).


(Plate 9.26) Rover Thomas Juandoo 1996, natural pigments on canvas, 100 x 140cm Private Collection (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts Catalogue Sheet - AP0957).

(Plate 9.27) Beerbee Mungnari Mount Mary - Waterloo Station NT 2001, natural ochres and pigments on canvas, 60 x 80cm (Image: Artplace Gallery Perth).

(Plate 9.28) Hector Jandany Ngarrgooroon Country 2001, natural ochres and pigments on canvas, 45 x 70cm (Image: Artplace Gallery Perth)


(Plate 9.31) Horizontally aligned The Rainbow Serpent Destroyed Darwin 1983

(Plate 9.33). Attributed to Rover Thomas Barramundi Dreaming 1983, natural pigments on plywood, 60 x 120cm, National Gallery of Australia Collection (Image: Thomas et al (1994), Roads Cross: The paintings of Rover Thomas, p.15). This is how painting is hung by National Gallery of Australia.


(Plate 9.35) This is a copy of the original (front and reverse) catalogue card for Barramundi Dreaming 1983 from Mary Macha Files (February 2008).


(Plate 9.37) Rover Thomas Lundari (Barrumundi Dreaming) 1986, earth pigments and natural binders on plywood, 60 x 90cm, The Holmes a Court Collection.


(Plate 9.44). *Punmu Salt Lake* 1995 natural pigments and binders on canvas 100 x 140cm (Image: Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Rover Thomas File, AP0701).

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What is a Rover Thomas Painting?

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

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Faculty of Creative Arts

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APPENDIX I – GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Ancestral Beings: Supernatural and creator beings who travelled across the unshaped world in both human and non-human form, shaping the landscape, creating people and laying down laws of social and religious behaviour.

Ancestral Realm: The dimension of existence relating to the supernatural and ancestral beings who created the universe and ordered everything in it, and whose spiritual powers continue to influence and sustain successive generations of Aboriginal people. See ‘Dreaming’.

Anthropology: Study of living human societies and the human species.

Anthropomorph: A figure of human or human-like form.

Art: Visual expression, image making, deliberate communication through visual forms.

Balga (Gija.Miriwoong): A secular corroboree style common to the East and North Kimberley.

Blackfella: A person of Aboriginal ancestry. The adjective blackfella is used to indicate that a particular activity or item is related to Aboriginal people eg. blackfella law, blackfella name. Usually relates to time before whiteman came.

Boab Tree: Bulbous trunked tree of the Kimberley region (Adonsonia gregorii).

Cattle station: Large farm on which cattle are raised for meat production.

Clan: Group of people who are descended from a common ancestor, and who share rights to land, painted designs and Dreamings. Clan membership is often but not always inherited patrilineally (through the father).

Concentric Circles: Circles within circles.

Coolaman: general term for a shallow dish or concave container made of light wood: used for carrying water, food etc. Coolamons have largely been replaced by manufactured containers and are now primarily used for sale to tourists.

Corroboree: This term was taken from a New South Wales dialect in the nineteenth century, but became a generic English word for Aboriginal dance. It is retained in some areas in current English Aboriginal. Common words used to describe a corroboree in the Kimberley are joonba, balga/palga. Corroborees range from secular stories presented largely for entertainment to secret sacred forms performed as part of religious ceremonies.

Country: Territory owned and cared for by a particular individual or group. Ownership of a particular country allows individuals to use its resources but also requires that they know the Dreamings (stories) and to perform the correct rituals to properly care for the country.
**Culture**: A commonly preferred, learned form of behaviour which has been adopted by a whole society: the distinctive and complex system of social organization, ideology and technology developed by a group of human beings to adapt to their environment.

**Dream**: Ceremonies can arise from ‘found’ or ‘dreamed’ stories which usually occur after a visitation from a recently deceased person. Information about stories, songs and dances are passed on during these ‘dreams’. The *Kurrir Kurrir* ceremony is an example of this.

**Dreaming**: An English word commonly used by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike to describe Aboriginal cosmology and the genesis of the world. The Dreaming encompasses the ancestral narratives about the supernatural and ancestral beings, and their epic deeds of creation. Each narrative is known as a ‘Dreaming’. The entire Australian continent is covered in an intricate web of Dreamings or ancestral tracks. See ‘Ancestral Realm’.

**Figurative Art**: Art motifs which resemble objects familiar to the observer: representational or naturalistic art.

**Gadjerong** (*Kadjerong*): Language of the northern coast between the Cambridge Gulf and the Keep River.

**Gija** (*Gidja, Kitja, Kija, Lungga*): Dominant language group traditionally found in the Warmun/Halls Creek area.

**Holidays**: During the time when most Aboriginals in the region worked on cattle stations, *holidays* was a term for the time during the wet season when Aboriginals were let go by the station owners to follow their pre-contact way of life. Therefore most large bush meetings and ceremonies were held during this *holiday* period. Nowadays *holidays* refers to school vacations and time off work.

**Hybrid**: Noun - a person or group of persons produced by the interaction or crossbreeding of two unlike cultures, traditions, etc.

**Iconography**: Specific motifs whose imagery is evoked and instantly understood by members of the particular culture as referents to particular, consciously held ideas.

**Jaru** (*Djaru*): Language of the Sturt Creek/Halls Creek area.

**Jila**: Underground permanent waterhole or well. During the dry season, as ephemeral waterholes dried up progressively, people congregate around the jila. A jila has to be dug out afresh when people return after a long absence.

**Joonba**: *Miriwoong* - Style of open (public) song and dance cycle, of a particular rhythm and melodic line. Common to the East and North Kimberley associated with a benevolent creative spirit usually depicted as an old man (Shaw 1983:236). Also now refers colloquially to most public ceremonial performances.

**Kartiya, gardiya, gadia** – 1. N. A person of Caucasian ancestry (white person). 2. Adj. The adjective *kartiya* is used to indicate that a particular activity or item was introduced by settlers and did not form part of pre contact Aboriginal culture: eg kartiya paint (acrylic or commercial paint).
**Killing times:** The early colonising period during which time white settlers killed Aboriginal people as retribution usually for spearing cattle. These killings were either isolated shootings or massacres.

**Kinship:** Connections between family members. Among Aboriginal groups this term covers relationships both within, and between generations, and through both mothers’ and fathers’ lines of descent across many generations. People also have kinship with certain animals and plants through common descent from or relationships to a particular Creation Ancestor.

**Kriol:** Hybrid but distinct language, widely used among Aboriginal people of Northern Australia, blending English with Aboriginal languages. Kriol has its own grammar and conventions which have been derived from local languages and English.

**Kukatja:** Language group south of Hall Creek and east of Balgo and closely allied to Wangkajunga language. This was Rover Thomas’s mother’s language group.

**Kurrirr Kurrirr:** (Krill Krill, Gurirr Gurirr, etc) Public ceremony or corroboree performed by mainly Gija people from Warmun (Turkey Creek) during the 1970s and 1980s. This ceremony was ‘found’ or ‘dreamt’ by Rover Thomas in the mid 1970s.

**Land rights:** The rights Aboriginal people enjoy to their ancestrally inherited land under Australian law. These rights were not recognised when the first British settlers declared Australia *terra nullius*, that is, the ‘uninhabited land’. Since the 1960s Aboriginal people have worked to have these rights recognised in courts of law. The most significant judgements which allow Aboriginal people to claim these rights today are the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*, 1976, and the Mabo judgement of the High Court of Australia in 1992 which acknowledged Aboriginal people’s ownership of the land prior to European settlement.

**Language group:** Language is one common form of establishing people’s identity. At the time of European colonisation, some 200 distinct languages and up to 600 dialects were spoken across the continent. Many of these languages survive today.

**La, longa** – N. Prep (Kriol). A preposition indicating association. *La/longa* translates as ‘to’, ‘in’ or ‘at’ depending on the context: eg We bin go *la* Warmun, Too many children *la* my house, We bin swimming *la* waterhole.

**Law:** Scheme of customary behaviour, embracing both religious and mundane aspects of life, a key concept in Aboriginal philosophy. Male or female secret/sacred business: young men undergoing their period of initiation are said to be going through Law.

**Mowuntum:** Gija name for white clay used for white paint collected from the side of certain creeks and rivers in the East Kimberley

**Material Culture:** The term refers both to the psychological role, the meaning, that all physical objects in the environment have to mean something to people in a particular culture and to the
range of manufactured objects that are typical within a culture and form an essential part of cultural identity.

**Miriwoong:** (Miriwong, Miriwung): The main language group which traditionally held territory centring on the Ord River Valley, Argyle Downs Station and Newry and Ivanhoe Stations. The spelling, Miriwoong, is preferred by Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre, Kununurra W.A. (Tindale preferred spelling-Miriung).

**Moiety:** A basic form of Aboriginal social structure. Most Aboriginal societies are divided into two halves. One aspect of this structure is that this indicates who can marry whom. Moiety membership extends to all things in the spiritual and physical world.

**Motif:** A repeated form or visual image which has a particular arrangement of components.

**Ngarrangkarni/Tjukurrpa:** Ngarrangkarni or The Dreaming is the foundation of Gija law and religious activity. It describes the origins of the people and the activities of the ancestors who emerged from the land and who created its feature, including the songs and events that are preserved in the law and the landscape to this day. Tjukurrpa is the name used, by Aboriginal peoples of the Desert regions to the south of the Kimberley, for the Dreaming.

**Nyigina:** language group related to the Bardi language group North-west Kimberley – Derby, Long Arm Point.

**Ngarinyin:** language group: Ngarinyin, Ungarinyin, Ungarinjin – related to Worora language – Derby to King River in the Western Kimberley.

**Ochre:** A clay - deeply coloured by red, brown or yellow iron oxides. Used as a paint.

**Outstation:** Camps or settlements established by Aboriginal people on their ancestral lands (such as Jack Britten’s camp at Frog Hollow), away from the government townships or missions.

**Panaramittee Style** (Oceanic Style): One of the earliest known styles of painting is the Panaramittee. It was widespread, mainly through southern Australia, central Australia, and Tasmania, and dates from about 30,000 BP onward. It is characterized by small pecked designs, both figurative and non-figurative, on rock surfaces. The non-figurative designs include circles, crescents, and radiating lines.

**Postcolonial:** It means a time after the colonial governments have left, leaving systems of government, law, culture and language that overlay and interact with the culture of the original inhabitants. Culture is no longer a source of certainty but the place where diaspora, displacement and hybridity are key factors of contemporary everyday life. Postcolonialism is associated with ideas of multiplicity and irreconcilable, irreducible differences in human experience and culture, rather than a coherent and universal idea of human nature.
**Settlers**: The first Europeans (the British) and their descendants who, from 1788, settled in Australia.

**Skin** – N. Generic term for the eight male/female hereditary subsections or ‘clans’ found in East Kimberley Aboriginal societies. One’s skin affiliations (e.g. Jawayi and Jakarra) determines both eligible and ineligible marriage partners as well as one’s classificatory kinship relations to all other members of the Aboriginal community.

**Soak**: Temporary source of underground water, which fills up during the wet season but gradually dries out during the course of the dry season (jumu).

**Songlines**: Series of songs sung during ceremonies, recounting the journeys of Creation Ancestors from place to place.

**Stockman**: Man who tends cattle, a cowboy.

**Style**: The sum total of the technique, form, motif, size and character of a painting; the combination of distinctive features of artistic expression or execution peculiar to a particular person, people or school; characterized by the range of subjects it depicts, by the regular shapes to which elements of these subjects are reduced, and by the manner that components of the art work are organised into a composition.

**Totem**: An animal, plant or other natural object used as an emblem or token of an individual or group, in a system of relationships providing spiritual linkages between people and the natural universe.

**Wangkajunga or Wankatjungka** is a language group east of Balgo and south of Fitzroy Crossing. Rover Thomas’ father’s language.

**Waterhole**: Source of fresh water essential to life in all of Australia’s varied environments. In spiritual terms particular waterholes are often regarded as the repositories of the souls of members of a clan or of a social group.

**Worla**: (Wola, Wuladjau) Language group south of Forrest River Mission.

**Wunambul**: Language group – traditional owners of the land in the Mitchell Plateau and Kalumburu regions in the central northern area of the Kimberley.

**Zoomorph**: A figure of animal form
**APPENDIX II – SKIN NAMES**

This system combines some of the principles of patrilineal and matrilineal moieties and generation levels. There are eight subsections with names differing according to region. In the diagram the labels A1, A2 etc indicate that each section is divided into two subsections. Subsection names have male and female forms unlike the simpler section system. Arrows in the diagram come from females, indicating sons and daughters. The particular subsection names in this diagram came from Wave Hill, west-central Northern Territory.

The skin group classification is cyclical in nature, changing with each generation. Non-Aboriginal people are often confounded to hear Aborigines refer to their great-grandmother as their daughter, or their great-grand-daughter as their mother. They are actually referring to the fact that those relatives are in the same skin group, as well as acknowledging the cyclical nature of the system.

For traditional Aborigines, this system is a major foundation of their existence and way of viewing the world. As such, if a non-Aboriginal person is around their culture for any extended
period, they must be adopted so they may be assigned a skin name and interact in the "proper way" with the group, knowing whom to avoid, whom to call sister, etc.

**Gija Skin Names**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Totem</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Totem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jagada</td>
<td>Kangaroo</td>
<td>Nagada</td>
<td>White-tailed Kangaroo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janama</td>
<td>Hill Python</td>
<td>Nyawana</td>
<td>Water Monitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jambiyin</td>
<td>Hawk</td>
<td>Nambiyin</td>
<td>Black-headed Snake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jungada</td>
<td>Frill-necked Lizard</td>
<td>Naminjilli</td>
<td>Magpie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jawalyi</td>
<td>Dingo</td>
<td>Nyajadi</td>
<td>Australian bustard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jangala</td>
<td>Goanna</td>
<td>Nangala</td>
<td>Brolga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jangari</td>
<td>Eagle</td>
<td>Nangari</td>
<td>Crow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juwudu</td>
<td>Crocodile</td>
<td>Nyawudu</td>
<td>Emu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Miriwoong Skin Names**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Moiety** I- Eagle Hawk (Wedge-Tailed Eagle)</th>
<th>Moiety II–White Crane (Egret)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Janama</td>
<td>Nanagu</td>
<td>II*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jabada</td>
<td>Namira</td>
<td>II*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimidj</td>
<td>Namidj</td>
<td>II*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jambin</td>
<td>Nambidjina</td>
<td>II*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Julama (Joolama)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julama</td>
<td>Naula</td>
<td>I*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalyiri</td>
<td>Nalyiri</td>
<td>I*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jangala</td>
<td>Nangala</td>
<td>I*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jangari</td>
<td>Nangari</td>
<td>I*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Miriwoong have two moieties Eagle Hawk (Wedge Tail Eagle) and White Crane (egret).

*Information from (Shaw 1983:242) with correction by Koford (Shaw 1986: 310) noted.

**Moiety: In some regions people divide their whole world into two categories. Everyone, and almost everything, in that world belongs to one or the other. Where they are patrilineal in descent, you follow your father (and his father) and have the same moiety label as he does. Conversely, if the descent is matrilineal then the choice of moiety follows the mother's line. Moieties are exogamous: you must not marry someone in the same moiety as yourself (Bourke et al 1994: 92).

Pintupi and Walpiri subsection constructions are similar to Kukutja and Wangk junga (Rover Thomas's language groups) skin names. They are quite different to the Kimberley skin name constructions and moiety. All are Western Desert Language groups.

### Pintupi Skin Names (the Walpiri system is almost the same)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Skin Name</th>
<th>First Marriage Preference</th>
<th>Children will be</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Tjapaltjarri (D2)+</td>
<td>Nakamarra</td>
<td>Tjungurrayi, Nungurrayi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Napaltjarri (D2)+</td>
<td>Tjakamarra</td>
<td>Tjupurrula, Napurrula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Tjapangati (B2)+</td>
<td>Nampitjinpa</td>
<td>Tjapanangka, Napanangka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Napangati (B2)+</td>
<td>Tjampitjinpa</td>
<td>Tjangala, Nangala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Tjakamarra (C1) *</td>
<td>Napaltjarri</td>
<td>Tjupurrula, Napurrula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Nakamarra (C1) *</td>
<td>Tjapaltjarri</td>
<td>Tjungurrayi, Nungurrayi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Tjampitjinpa (A1) *</td>
<td>Napangati</td>
<td>Tjangala, Nangala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Nampitjinpa (A1) *</td>
<td>Tjapangati</td>
<td>Tjapanangka, Napanangka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Tjapanangka (B1)+</td>
<td>Napurrula</td>
<td>Tjapangati, Napangati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Napanangka (B1)+</td>
<td>Tjupurrula</td>
<td>Tjakamarra, Nakamarra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Tjungurrayi (D1)+</td>
<td>Nangala</td>
<td>Tjalaltjarri, Napaltjarri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Nungurrayi (D1)+</td>
<td>Tjangala</td>
<td>Tjampitjinpa, Nampitjinpa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Munn (Munn 1986: 17) A and C groups and B and D groups are patrimoieties. A and C are one patrimoiety, B and D the opposite. 1 and 2 are matrimoieties. A1, B1, C1, D1 is one matrimoiety, A2, B2, C2, D2 is the opposite. A2, D1, C2, B1 is one generation moiety; A2, D2, C1, B2 is the opposite.

Walbiri (Walpiri) Skin Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Djangala (A2)</td>
<td>Nangala (A2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djambidjimba (A1)</td>
<td>Nambidjimba (A1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djabanangga (B1)</td>
<td>Nabangari (B1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djabangari (B2)</td>
<td>Nabangari (B2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djagamara (C1)</td>
<td>Nagamara (C1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djuburula (C2)</td>
<td>Nabarula (C2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djungarai (D1)</td>
<td>Nungarai (D1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djabaldjari (D2)</td>
<td>Nabaldjari (D2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kukutja Skin Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tjampitjn (A1)</td>
<td>Napitjn (A1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjangala (A2)</td>
<td>Nangala (A2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjapananka (B1)</td>
<td>Napanangka (B1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some common kinship terms

- *Aunty* and *uncle* are used as terms of address for older people, to whom the speaker may not be related.
- *Brother* and *sister* include close relatives of the same generation, not just siblings.
- *Cousin* includes any relative of one's own generation.
- The combinations *cousin-brother* and *cousin-sister* are used to refer to biological cousins.
- *Father* and *mother* include any relative of one's parents' generation, such as uncles, aunts, and in-laws.
- *Grandfather* and *grandmother* can refer to anyone of one's grandparents' generation. *Grandfather* can also refer to any respected elderly man, to whom the speaker may not be related.
- *Poison* refers to a relation one is obligated to avoid.
- The term *second*, or *little bit* in northern Australia, is used with a distant relative who is described using a close kinship term. For example, one's *second fathers* or *little bit fathers* are men of one's father's generation not closely related to the speaker. It is contrasted with *close*, *near* or *true*.
- *Son* can refer to any male of the next generation, such as nephews.

In traditional Aboriginal society there are certain people required to avoid others in their family or clan. These customs are still active in many parts of Australia, to a greater or lesser extent. Avoidance relationships are a mark of respect. There are also strong protocols around avoiding, or averting, eye contact, as well as around speaking the name of the dead.

Avoidance of eye contact

In general, eye contact is averted as a mark of respect; a young person should not look an older person in the eye. At initiation, the boy will keep his eyes downcast. It is also considered extremely impolite to look someone directly in the eye whom one does not know.

Avoidance of family members

In general, across most language groups, the two most common avoidance relationships are: *Son-in-law—mother-in-law*: the relationship is one of respect, but avoidance. The two will still communicate via the daughter/wife, who remains the conduit for communication in this
relationship. Often there are surrounding these relationships. This relationship extends to avoiding all women of the same skin group as the mother-in-law, and, for the mother-in-law, men of the same skin group as the son-in-law. Brother—sister: this usually takes place after initiation. Prior to this, brothers and sisters play together freely. Both these avoidance relationships have their grounding in the Australian Aboriginal kinship system, and so are ways of avoiding incest in small bands of closely-related people. There may be other avoidance relationships, including same-sex relationships, but these are the main two.

Avoidance of naming the dead

Traditionally, this meant avoiding referring to the dead person by name directly after their death as a mark of respect. Today the practice continues in many communities, but has also come to encompass avoiding the publication or dissemination of photographs or film footage of the deceased person as well. The avoidance period may last anywhere from 12 months to several years. The person can still be referred to in a roundabout way, such as, “that old man”, but not by first name. Even if the person has the same first name as others those others first name is to be avoided. This presents some challenges to Indigenous people. In traditional society, people lived together in small bands of extended family. Name duplication was extremely rare. Today, as people have moved into larger towns or centres, with 300 to 600 people, the logistics of name avoidance have become increasingly challenging. Exotic and rare names have therefore become very common, particularly in Central Australia, to deal with this new challenge (AusAnthrop n.d.).

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APPENDIX III – ROVER THOMAS AND ‘FINDING’ THE KURRIRR

KURRIRR


The Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremony was revealed to Thomas in 1975 in a series of ‘visitations’ he received from the spirit of his recently deceased classificatory mother Yawayimya Nakarra, a Gija/Worla woman. The spirit tells of her travels across the Kimberley region and back to her place of birth. The spirit visited many sites throughout the Kimberley in company with juari (devil devil), initially with Jimpi and then later with Manginta.

This account by Thomas of the origins of the Kurrirr Kurrirr was recorded in Canberra prior to Thomas travelling to the Venice Biennale in 1990.

[Before coming to Turkey Creek]

I bin drovin’ cattle first, from Texas, Lissadell, Argyle all about some place.
I’ve ben working all that part [eastern Kimberley pastoral country].

When I bin come to Turkey Creek from Texas

Well I bin know something about [the accident].

All ‘em come for holiday from Texas and further down.

That old woman him get accident in Turkey Creek.

All that manager bin saying from Mabel Downs

‘Oh that river, big rain bin front of you, biggest rain, front part, front you know, in the road. I don’t think you’ll go through.’

-‘Oh’ someone bin day ‘we’ll make it, make it to Turkey Creek.’

That’s why that thing bin happen then, that, right along at Turkey Creek, now.

And biggest mob bin there, biggest mob y’know, from Halls Creek, they bin want to go back to Turkey Creek.

Ah, wrong time. That thing bin Rainbow ‘m bin gone up la Turkey Creek River from hill way, y’know.

Gone down.

That’s why they bin made, might be Rainbow part, Rainbow y’know, Serpent.
That motor car bin go – one, two, three, three roll – kill one person.

That old woman now,

The one that give me the Kurrirr Kurrrirr now.

That why bin give me that corroboree now.

‘Im bin want to go to Wyndham especially and I went to look all this afternoon part or whatever.

This old man [woman] bin get accident, y’know, in Turkey Creek and ah, they bin pick it up and fly ‘im to Wyndham, by plane to Wyndham.

I bin had ‘em up in tight, they bin good

He could not make it from there – car, the motor car y’know – so they bin flying in that Flying Doctor plane, Flying Doctor plane to Perth.

Nearly ’bout in Derby, Broome, that old woman bin passed away right there – couldn’t make it, couldn’t make it to Perth.

Only the spirit bin come all the way, all the way down to me, Turkey Creek, where he bin fell over from that car, truck.

Him bin ask me but like this time not dinner time.

‘What d’you like, Wonga [ceremonial dance]?

‘You want that Jarakul [another ceremonial dance]?, im bin say, ‘that Kurrrirr Kurrrrr now’ him bin say.

And I’ve got to follow the track for that old woman, y’know who’d bin got accident.

In the middle of the sea him pass away, near Broome and Derby. Whirlpool, take that over, whirlpool.

He can find him boat, anything, in the whirlpool near Derby. That’s where him pass away.

From there [the spirit] ome along all the way, all the way to Turkey Creek, y’know.

Come to me.

‘What you like Wonga or you want a Jarakul?’

Then, from there im bin callin’.

‘I bin get accident by nggud [Wungkul], Unggud store, Unggud store, Warmun.

Him bin say ‘Look that enough’.

Him get the name of Warmun.

That old woman bin callin’ that country now.
'Warmun, Warmun – where I bin get an accident'.

That's wife for old Damien, wife for Damien now, and I find 'im that corroboree now me, him bin give it to me.

From there, where I go anywhere, he always be there, all with me, for old woman, for one of them corroboree, Dunham River [station], Doon Doon, y'know.

He come from there now properly, workin'girl, but he bin go have holiday in Halls Creek.

Also didn't come back for work, old lady bin have accident half way.

Couldn't make it.

Him, that's why, couldn't make it to Doon Doon, Doon Doon Staton.

All his family, in Doon Doon, all the crowd, y'know, they couldn't make it there.

And his husband one bin go to Doon Doon, husband one y’know? 'Im bin go to Doon Doon –

‘Oh what happened to my wife?’

‘Poor fella' and some bin bloke tell 'im 'Oh, he fly to Perth, I thought he got save life a little bit, y’know'.

Too late, couldn't make it.

Couldn't make it, from Wyndham.

Got a doctor plane, doctor plane.

Couldn't make it, between Broome and Derby.

Near whirlpool now him bin pass away.

That’s why we got that corroboree new, biggest culture.

I can go anywhere, take this corroboree, Kurrrirr Kurrrirr, I can go to Perth, from there to Melbourne, anywhere. Darwin

I bin take im to Darwin last year, oh that year before, year before, y'know.

Yirrkala Maningrita and us mob, maybe bin go to Hookers Creek long way, Northern Territory, Northern Territory, other side of Victoria [River Downs].

Oh! Wattie Creek, other side Wattie Creek I bin go there now. Hookers Creek.

Oh plenty, plenty there.

All the policemen blackfella y’know oh too much!

No grog can go there. Nothing.
All the policemen there, and anyway we bin have a good dance in Hookers Creek come back all the way along, all the way along to Wattie Creek. From there right back to Turkey Creek.

And next time I bin take ‘im to Perth all over the place, dancing there all over the city,

Dancing there, school, on the side of that big city, and anyhow ll mix, we bin down hillside, gonna get a bus all day go down to town, city, y’know.

Go down to city all the time, every every day, dancin’ here all over. Big city!

I only bin have ‘em Ray, Patrick, Ted[?] and Ken, that’s all, dancing all over this city. Second time, no first one, we bin go to Ken Colbung’s place, we bin dancin’, long there we bin Wonga, mix up.

This time I got to make it, this for my corroboree that’s all.

Turkey Creek one
APPENDIX IV – KURRIRR KURRIRR CEREMONY SONGLINES


The travels of the old woman’s spirit are recorded in the brief verses which are sung during performances of the Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremony. The number and combination of songs presented in each performance may vary depending on the nature of the venue and the audience. On occasion, new verses have been introduced as they were revealed to Thomas. In each performance, however, the sequence of movement across the landscape is maintained even though the whole performance may be telescoped. Similarly, the presentation of the painted boards either singly or together may vary. The thirty one verses below were recorded in local languages and interpreted by Dr Will Christensen in 1983. These verses record the return of the spirit (old woman) from the west, where the old woman died, to the scene of the accident near Warmun (Turkey Creek) to Kununurra where the destruction of Darwin was observed. These songlines recorded here are copied from Roads Cross: The Paintings of Rover Thomas exhibition catalogue, pp.25-27.

1. Kunnyang ningumara anjaku nyinkula Tawurrkurima.
   The old woman’s spirit comes in a dream to Rover. She tells him ‘I died at Tawurrkurima. I’ve come back’

2. Kuriyil Kuriyil nalili una Warrmun kuwariya.
   I’ll give you the word for that corroboree [Kurrirr Kurrirr] for Turkey Creek [Warmun]

3. Wungkul warawara litawunkanyi Wungkul.
   Wungkul [Wungurr] is the name of that Snake

4. Tawurrkurima yikayi pupali.
   The old woman looks at the whirlpool

5. Kawullari jitajita yamayarra jitajita.
   A Devil Devil [spirit] comes out of that whirlpool. She says she can’t walk. She carries a walking stick. She would guide the old woman. As they travel, they variously talk Ungarinyin, Gija, Worla and Miriwoong.
6. **Kawularri partuti kurra jitajita. Kawularri nyamayarra kawularri tikira.**
   Here they change positions; now the old woman leads.

7. **Jita purinnyin Yilimpirrina jita purinyima.**
   Here, at Yillimbirri, the Devil Devil and the old woman look at a big hill. There is a big cave there. The old woman says that they are near her country.

8. **Kurnkukurnku juwantayi una Yilimpirrina Kurnkukurnku.**
   Nearby they see Goanna Fat.

9. **Jilili kama-ul nanga jilili.**
   Near Mount House, they approach a big swamp [jilili]

10. **Yulunpu kawarriwarri yulunpu kanayi.**
    At Tablelands, she says ‘this is my country now’

11. **Yulunpunkuni kawarriwarri yulunpulkuni.**
    Still near Yulunpu

12. **Wuntarriya ngaya niya purrpaniya.**
    Still near Tablelands

13. **Nyaya Dreaming-ayi kawurri kampani.**
    Here the old woman dreams about that country. She meets a man there and says she has lost her husband.

14. **Kularrta-ura kawurra kampani.**
    Now at Elgee Cliff [Kanmanturr], the old woman ‘finds’ the half kangaroo, the legendary inhabitant of this place. She sees the metamorphosed remains and blood inside the cave.

15. **Numpi-rrina kunya nyarima munga lurrpungu.**
    The shade from the hill comes over and talks in language: ‘mung lurrpngu’. The Devil Devil and old woman look around and see the shadow [spirits] of people killed by Kartiya [white people]. They see where the bodies had been burned. They make a song about those people.
16. **Jawarriya puta kanyi ngamala palampiya kawarn kanyi.**

The old woman calls out to the spirits. They don't answer. They go up the hill and continue away.

17. **Yawaluna ngiya mangi ngaya mangi mangi. Juwarriya juwarriya yawulum ngiya mangi mangi.**

The Devil Devil accidently kicks a Dreaming stone, the metamorphosed remains of the legendary Possum.

18. **Kalakalaya munga lurrpunju pipi ngayuru yurung-nga.**

The shadow moves over the hill. The shade comes over again. Jimpi [Devil Devil] says that it might be sunset. They are near Bedford Downs.

19. **Jimpi ngaarangara kaawarn kanga.**

They look around Mount Bedford. The people are lost and the two can't find them. They are confused.

20. **Lurinjipungu kalumpi warra ngutungurruwa.**

They are now at Mijarrma [Clara Springs, Ida Vale Station]. Jimpi talks about the corroborree from the old woman. The two argu. Eventually Jimpi sings it.

21. **Manjaliwarra kuntukuntuwa wirriwirriwa manjaliwarra.**

They are now at Rugan [Crocodile Hole]. Jimpi warns the old woman not to jump into the water. The Rainbow Serpent is there. An old man had nearly drowned there before.

22. **Pangkalji warra ngaya ngiya warra wulangkuwa.**

They are now at Pangkalji [Pompeuy's Pillar], home of the legendary Bat (Pangkalji) and Blue-tongued Lizard (Lumuku)

Lumuku looks at the bats flying in, out and around the pillar.

23. **Juwarri juwarri Kaman kalmia.**

They are now near the Lissadell turn-off. There is a big rock there. Jimpi gives the name for that place. She calls out 'Juwarri Juwarri'. They cook meat. It is too raw to eat.

24. **Lulumalulu pangi jangi ngirima lulumalulu.**
They come to a hill near the Bow River bridge. Jimpi gives the name for that place. It is Lulumalulu. Lulumalulu is a Dreaming (Narungani) man. He sat there a long time ago watching the Kangaroo (Marlu) and Dog (Julan) near the River. The stone is that man now.

25. **Wulangkuya pirripirrij ngaya niya Wulangkuya.**

They move southwards. They come to Wungkul (Wangkul), the junction at Turkey Creek where the old woman had her accident. She finds the Snake there. They come to that place where the boy from Derby had been initiated at Turkey Creek. That place is called Wulangkuya.

26. **Pirri nangku pirri tarraru waya Mangin Fawurru pirri nangku pirri.**

At Manginta [Mount Cockburn, ner Wyndham] they meet another tribe. Here they meet Manginta, another Devil Devil. Jimpi looks back and says that she will have to go back from where she has come. She departs. Manginta now follows the old woman.

27. **Tarruru waya pulmani way pirru nangku pirri.**

They go to Nine Mile, near Wyndham. Hey see the Dreaming Kangaroo. They make a song about it.

28. **Jukulmirri ngalirr kumpani Pukulmirri**

They pass near Pukulmirri [False House Roof Hill] and Jukulmirri [House Roof Hill], large Dreaming hills on Carlton and Ivanhoe Stations. They continue making songs as they go. [Jululmirri is False House Roof Hill, Pukulmirri is House Roof Hill].

29. **Kununuru mirrimu Kununurra kirnta kirnta Kununurra.**

They come to Kununurra ridge, They are in Miriwoong country. The old woman gives the name for that place.

30. **Kali naya paparr karrinya**

The two look around. They see Kellys Knob above Kununurra Reserve. That is a place for the legendary Louse. Yiwin.

31. **Ngumuli warra tawun pirringa.**

Looking across from Kununurra they see that Tawun [Darwin] has been flattened by the cyclone. The Rainbow Serpent destroyed Darwin.
Anthropologist Ian Kirby did fieldwork in the East Kimberley in the early 1980s. In his unpublished notes he disputes the reference of a whirlpool called *Tawurrkurima* as being the place where the old women died, referred to in Will Christensen’s translation of the *Kurrirr Kurrirr* songlines. He notes that he had collected no songs that refer to a whirlpool and says that in 1981 he was shown a cave with a painting of the top half of a kangaroo at Elgee Cliff on Bedford Downs Station and was told that this cave was referred to in Song 4 of the *Kurrirr Kurrirr*. This half kangaroo was referred to as *Tawurr*. However he does concede that the songs are composed in various languages and that exact translations are quite difficult to obtain (Kirkby 1982).

Kirkby also states that that the ordering of songs as recorded by Christensen differs significantly from performances that he recorded in the early 1980s. He gives an example of a performance in May 1982 and the order of songs – numbers refer to Christensen's list. (NR denotes – not recorded by Christensen)

NR, 4, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, NR, 24, NR, 3, 2, NR, 26, 27, 28, 30, 29, NR

He says that no two performances are ever strictly the same, however there appears a general ordering of songs, and whilst songs may be omitted or created, there is a geographical ordering (Kirkby 1982).
## APPENDIX V – EXHIBITION LIST: ROVER THOMAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>ExhibitionTitle</th>
<th>VenueDetails</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>The Third National Aboriginal Art Award Exhibition</td>
<td>Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Aboriginal Art from the Kimberley</td>
<td>Goolarabooloo Gallery, Broome</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Art of the East Kimberley</em></td>
<td>Birrukmarri Gallery, Fremantle, WA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recent Aboriginal Art from Western Australia</td>
<td>National Gallery of Australia, Canberra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>ANCAA and Boomali</td>
<td>Boomali Aboriginal Artists Ko-Operative, Sydney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Art from the Kimberley</em></td>
<td>Aboriginal Artists Gallery, Sydney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aboriginal Art of the East Kimberley</td>
<td>Aboriginal Arts Australia for Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Western Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Innovative Aboriginal Art of Western Australia</em></td>
<td>Crafts Council Gallery, Sydney, October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recent Aboriginal Painting</td>
<td>Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Creating Australia: 200 Years of Art 1788-1988</em></td>
<td>International Cultural Corporation of Australia, Touring Exhibition</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Australian Art Post 1960</em></td>
<td>Deutscher Gertrude Street Gallery, Fitzroy, Vic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td><em>Turkey Creek: Recent Work</em></td>
<td>Deutscher Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, Vic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On the Edge: Five Contemporary Aboriginal Artists, Art Gallery of Western Australia

L’ete Australien a’ Montpellier, Musee Fabre Gallery, Montpellier

A Myriad of Dreaming: Twentieth Century Aboriginal Art, Westpac Gallery, Melbourne; Design Warehouse, Sydney [through Lauraine Diggins Fine Art]

Aboriginal Art: The Continuing Tradition, National Gallery of Australia

Windows on the Dreaming: Aboriginal Paintings in the National Gallery, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Masterpiece Fine Art Gallery, Hobart

Magiciens de la Terre, Musee National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

1990 Tangari Lia: My Family - Contemporary Aboriginal Art 1990: From Australia, Touring exhibition, Third Eye Centre, Glasgow, Scotland; Glynn Vivian Centre and Museum, Swansea, Wales; Cornerhouse, Manchester, England

Anatjari Tjampitjinpa, Dini Campbell and Rover Thomas, John Weber Gallery, New York, United States of America

La Bienale di Venezia, XLIV esposizione d’arte, Venice, Italy. (Venice Biennale: Australian Representative with Trevor Nickolls)

1990 Venice Biennale Australia: Rover Thomas & Trevor Nicholls Exhibition, Museum of Art, Melbourne University

1990 Venice Biennale Australia: Rover Thomas & Trevor Nicholls Exhibition, Art Gallery of Western Australia.
The Seventh National Aboriginal Art Award Exhibition, Museum and Art Gallery of Northern Territory, Darwin

Adelaide Biennale of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia, 2 March – 22 April, Adelaide

Balance 1990: views, visions, influences, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

L’été Australien a’ Montpellier, Musee Fabre Gallery, Montpellier

Contemporary Aboriginal Art from the Robert Holmes a’ Court Collection: Carpenter Centre for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, 22 February – 25 March; James Ford Bell Museum, University of Minnesota 20 April – 2 June; Lakewood Centre for the Arts, Lake Oswego, 15 June – 19 July.

Landmass. Vancouver Arts Centre, Albany 13 May – 27 May, Karratha College Library, 20 August - 31 August.  

Innovations in Aboriginal Art, Hogarth Galleries, Sydney

The Singing Earth, Chapman Gallery, Canberra

Abstraction, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Turkey Creek Artists, Dreamtime Gallery, Perth, 22 July - 19 August.

1991

Aboriginal Art and Spirituality, High Court of Australia, Canberra

Walkabout in the Dreamtime, Virginia Miller Gallery, Miami, Florida, United States of America

Landmass, Bunbury Art Galleries 12 Jan - 3 February
Lindsay Street Gallery, Darwin

Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne

Chapman Street Gallery, Canberra

Hogarth Gallery, Sydney

*Western Australian Painting*, Gallery Sanyo, Tokyo, Japan July 1991

1991/2

*Flash Pictures by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

1992

*Crossroads - Towards a New Reality: Aboriginal Art from Australia*, National Museums of Modern Art in Kyoto and Tokyo

*Broome Fringe Festival*, Broome, Western Australia

Kimberley Art, Melbourne

1993

*Trevor Nickolls and Painting by Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Ginger Riley Manduwalawala and Rover Thomas*, Hogarth Galleries, Sydney

*Desert Dreaming*, London

*The Tenth National Aboriginal Art Award Exhibition*, Museum and Art Gallery of Northern Territory, Darwin

*Images of Power: Aboriginal Art of the Kimberley*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

*Contemporary Aboriginal Art from the Robert Holmes a Court Collection*, Moree
Plains Gallery, Moree.

On Our Selection: Recent Acquisitions of Contemporary Australian Painting and Sculpture from the Robert Holmes a Court Collection, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Perth

Inner Land, Lunami Art Gallery, Tokyo (Nov 9 –Nov 27)

Aratjara: Art of the First Australians, Touring, Kunstmmlung Nordrheim-Westfalen, Dusseldorf Germany; Hayward Gallery London United Kingdom (July – October 1993); Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek, Denmark

1993/4

1994

Power of the Land: Masterpieces of Aboriginal Art, 13 October – 5 December, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Identities: Art from Australia, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan; Wollongong City Gallery

Australian Heritage Commission National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award Exhibition, Old Parliament House, Canberra

Roads Cross,: The Paintings of Rover Thomas, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (solo exhibition)

Rover Thomas New Paintings, Utopia Art Sydney, Stanmore (solo)

This Land: A Celebration, Utopia Art Sydney, Stanmore

Yiribana: An Introduction to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collection from the Art Gallery of New South Wales, The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Rover Thomas: An Artist from Turkey Creek, Hogarth Galleries Sydney (solo)

Stories, Eine Reise zu den grossen Dingen, Elf Kunstler der australischen Aborigines touring, Sprengel Museum Hannover; Museum fur Volkerkunde, Leipzig; Haus der Kulteren der Welt, Berlin; Ludwig-Forum fur Internationale Kunst, Aachen

The Twelfth National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin


Works on Paper, Utopia Art Sydney.


Painting up the Country: Aboriginal Art from the Kimberley WA, Coo-ee Aboriginal Art, Sydney

The Festival of Darwin Art Exhibition: Kimberley Printmakers, Darwin

Offset and Intaglio, Fremantle Arts Centre, Fremantle

Made in the Kimberley, Moores Building, Fremantle

Northwest and Kimberley Artists, Durack Gallery, Kimberley Fine Art, Broome

Art from the East Kimberley, Savode Gallery, Newstead, Queensland

Latest Landscapes, Utopia Art, Sydney
1995/6  

1996  
*The Eye of the Storm*: Eight Contemporary Indigenous Australian Artists, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, India.


Dobbelhoef Gallery 18 May – 10 June Kessel, Netherlands

*Figures in the Land*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

*Art from the Kimberley: Old ways – New Beginnings: Paddy Tjamitji and Rover Thomas*, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth

*Abstraction: Signs, Marks, Symbols*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

*Old Boards 1996*, Utopia Art Sydney July-August.

*This is my country, this is me*, Seattle Art Museum Downtown, Seattle, USA

*Aboriginal Australian Art*, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, USA

*Contemporary Abstract Aboriginal Art*, Utopia Art Sydney in association with Sherman Galleries Hargrave, Sydney

*Spirit and Place: Art in Australia 1861-1996*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

*Nangara: Australian Aboriginal Art*: Ebes Collection, Sichting Sint-Jan, Brugges, Belgium

*Contemporary Australian Abstraction*, Niagara Galleries Melbourne.
Flagging the Republic, Sherman Galleries, Paddington

Flagging the Republic, Sherman Galleries touring exhibition, New England regional gallery, Grafton Regional Gallery, Orange Regional Gallery, Wollongong City Gallery, Devonport Regional Gallery, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery Launceston and Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery Hobart.

1997

Rover Thomas: A Survey, Utopia Art Sydney in association with Sherman Galleries Hargrave, Sydney (individual)

Kimberley Art, MuseeClemont-Ferrand, France

Contemporary Australian Aboriginal Paintings, Songlines Aboriginal Art Gallery, Amsterdam, Netherlands and San Francisco

What is Aboriginal Art, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney

From the Kimberley, Utopia Art Sydney

Silent Rhythm, Sherman Gallery, Sydney

Nineteen ninetyseven, Utopia Art Sydney.

Languages of Time, John Davis Mooney Foundation, Chicago.

Imaging the Land, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Rover Thomas: Paintings from the Homes a Court Collection,

Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of Western Australia (individual)
1998/9  *A Material Thing – Objects from the Collection*, Art Gallery of New South Wales

1999  *Masterworks by Contemporary Aboriginal Artists*, Touring Exhibition, National Gallery of Australia

*Kimberley Art*, Australian Exhibition Centre, Chicago

Myer Gatner Collection, Los Angeles, United States of America

*Spirit Country: Contemporary Australian Aboriginal Art*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, United States of America


*Aboriginal Art in Modern Worlds*, 8 September – 19 November, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

*Rover Thomas*, Holmes a Court Gallery, Perth (solo)

*Sitelines: Contemporary masterworks from Arnhem Land and the Kimberley*, Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville.

*From Appropriation to Appreciation: Indigenous Influences and Images in Australian Visual Art*, Flinders University Art Museum, Adelaide

*Rover and Queenie*, National Gallery of Victoria

*Crossing Cultures: Art from the Boxer Collection*, Drill Hall Gallery, Australian
National University, Canberra


*Images of the Land*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

*Garma Festival Art Exhibition* (1 September – 15 November 2000) (per National Gallery of Australia information)

**2001**

*Federation: Australian Art and Society 1901-2001*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra


**2001/2002**


*Annual Collectors Exhibition*, Lauraine Diggins Fine Art (20 September to 14 December) Melbourne

**2002**

*Rover Thomas: Cyclone*, Utopia Art, Sydney, 12 to 30 October, 2002 (solo)


*Sublime: 25 Years of the Westfarmers Collection*, 1 October – 24 November, Art Gallery of Western Australia.

2002/3
True Stories: Art of the East Kimberley, 1 November 2002 – 27 April 2003, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

2004
Blue Chip VI: The Collectors Exhibition: Niagara Galleries, Richmond Victoria


2003/5
Rover Thomas: I want to Paint, Touring, National Gallery of Victoria 2003; Bendigo Gallery 2003-04; Art Gallery of New South Wales 2004; Art Gallery of South Australia 2004; Art Gallery of Western Australia 2005 (solo)

2005
Wright Exhibition Space (April) Seattle, Washington, USA.

2005/6

2006
'Drommetid' Aboriginal kunst fra Ebes Samling (Dreamtime Aboriginal art from the Ebes Collection), Arken Museum for Moderne Kunst, 11th February to 13th August, Copenhagen, Denmark

Prism: Contemporary Australian Art, Bridgestone Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan
2007  
William Mora Galleries, Richmond, Victoria

*Red Hot Ochre: Waringarri Paintings and Prints from the Kimberley,* January to April  
The Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, USA

2008  
*From the air* Fireworks Gallery Brisbane

*Blue Chip X: The Collectors Exhibition:* Niagara Galleries, Richmond Victoria.

2009  
*Blue Chip XI: The Collectors Exhibition:* Niagara Galleries, Richmond Victoria.

*Abstraction* 25 April – 16 May, Utopia Arts Sydney

2009/10  
*Summer Sojourn,* Art Atrium, 14 December 2009 – 27 February 2010, Bondi Junction NSW.

**Prizes/Grants /Commissions**

1990  
*La Bienale di Venezia,* XLIV esposizione d’arte, Venice, Italy (Venice Biennale:  
Australian Representative with Trevor Nickolls)

The John McCaughey Prize for the best painting, *Blancher Country 1987,* displayed  
during the year at the Art Gallery of New South Wales

1993  
Australia Post: Dreamings Series, for International Year of the World’s Indigenous,  
*Kalumpiwarra-Ngulalinji* (1984) was reproduced on $1 postage stamp. Issued on 4  
February 1993.

**Collections:**

AIATSIS Art Collection

Allen, Allen and Hemsley, Sydney
Artbank, Sydney
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
Australian National University Art Collection
Berndt Museum of Anthropology, University of Western Australia, Perth
Covers Design Collection
Dean Management Collection
Edith Cowan University Art Collection, Perth Flinders University Art Museum, Adelaide
Grant Samuel Art Collection
Juerg Daehler Collection, Switzerland
Kelton Foundation, Santa Monica, USA
Kerry Stokes Collection, Perth
Laverty Collection
Museum and Art Gallery of Northern Territory, Darwin
Myer Gatner Collection, Los Angeles, USA
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Oodgeroo Collection, Queensland University of Technology Collection
Parliament House Collection, Canberra
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
The Holmes a Court Collection, Perth
The Kelton Foundation, Santa Monica, USA
Thomas Vroom Collection, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
APPENDIX VI – CATALOGUE OF ROVER THOMAS PAINTINGS

This catalogue of Rover Thomas's paintings contains as complete as possible, in chronological order, Rover Thomas’s paintings. Information and images for this Catalogue was gathered from exhibition catalogues, articles in books and magazines and from the catalogue sheets of Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, Kununurra and catalogue cards from art dealer Mary Macha, Perth. Information was also used from auction catalogues of Sotheby’s, Lawson and Menzies, Shapiro, Mossgreen, Bonham and Goodman, Deutscher-Menzies, Deutscher-Hackett, Menzies Brands and Christie's auction houses. Valuable information was also gained from the NGA, AGNSW, AGSA, QAG, AGWA, NGV, AIATSIS and various university collections and private collections. Also images and data were also found from an assortment of commercial art gallery websites.

This is in no way a definitive listing of all Rover Thomas’ paintings. More research is needed to make a proper assessment and listing of all Rover Thomas paintings.

This catalogue is set out as follows:

- Title (where known) and Date Image of painting
- Where painted
- Dimensions (in centimeters) - for works on paper the dimensions may include image size and paper size
- Materials used
- Provenance: the names of former owners, dealers and auction houses who were involved in the sale of the piece. This may give some credibility to the authenticity of the work.
- Disputed, questionable and spurious works
- Set out in three parts: paintings, works on paper and works attributed to Rover Thomas but with little information (date or name)

Abbreviations:

<table>
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Note: The description of the Mount House (Kril Kril Series) 1986 painting has been inverted. On AGWA collection site mixed up with Old Dreamtime Story 1986 (1987/0097)
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<td>40 x 30</td>
<td>earth pigments on hardboard</td>
<td>Waringarri P573 S-546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown 1986</td>
<td>No image</td>
<td>Warmun, Turkey Creek</td>
<td>14&quot; x 18&quot;</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board</td>
<td>Waringarri P574 S-305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar Bag Hill (Ilununja) c1986</td>
<td>Warmun, Turkey Creek</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>earth pigments on hardboard &amp; frame</td>
<td>PC NSW, Sotheby's Aboriginal Art July 2001 Lot 69. PC, Qld., WAA on reverse P575ACJ S-498. (In WAA files as Kelly's Knob no date)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown 1986</td>
<td>No image</td>
<td>Warmun, Turkey Creek</td>
<td></td>
<td>earth pigments on hardboard &amp; frame</td>
<td>Waringarri P576 S-499</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown 1986</td>
<td>No image</td>
<td>Warmun, Turkey Creek</td>
<td></td>
<td>earth pigments on hardboard</td>
<td>Waringarri P153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown 1986</td>
<td>No image</td>
<td>Warmun, Turkey Creek</td>
<td></td>
<td>earth pigments on hardboard</td>
<td>Waringarri AP938 S-489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goanna Hole on Lissadell Station 1986</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
<td>natural pigments and bush gum on plywood</td>
<td>MM notation No.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunuga Bunuga Country 1986</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>70 x 110</td>
<td>earth pigments and bush gum on composition board</td>
<td>PC, Sotheby's Important Aboriginal Art June 1997 Melbourne, lot 51 (sold $11,500). PC.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lissadell Station 1986</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on board</td>
<td>MM.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mistake Creek 1986</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>45 x 57</td>
<td>ochre and binders on tea chest lid (plywood)</td>
<td>MM Collection</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wolf Creek Crater 1986</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>90 x 60</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and natural binder on plywood</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's Important Aboriginal Art June 1999, Lot 31. HaCC 1342. MM RT4486 and No.114</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meree 1986</td>
<td></td>
<td>46 x 61</td>
<td>natural pigments on plywood</td>
<td>PC. MM. (painting more likely to be Paddy Jaminji – dotting wrong - no board edged dotting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Lumulu – Blue Tongue Lizard Dreaming 1986</em></td>
<td>?</td>
<td>natural pigments on plywood</td>
<td>MM No 152</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Kununurra Bridge 1986</em></td>
<td>Turkey Creek</td>
<td>90 x 180</td>
<td>natural gum and pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. MM RT11086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Roads Meeting c1986</em></td>
<td>Watmun</td>
<td>92 x 87</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC, Melbourne. Sotheby’s <em>Aboriginal Art</em> July 2001 Lot 50. PC, WA. Acquired directly from Artist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Untitled (Rainbow Serpent)</em> c1986</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>92 x 87</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Bohnams <em>Aboriginal Art</em> 28 June 2011. PC. Sotheby's <em>Aboriginal Art</em> July 2001 Lot 51. PC, WA. The Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Wolf Crater</em> 1986</td>
<td></td>
<td>122 x 183</td>
<td>earth pigments and natural binder on plywood</td>
<td>P.C. Hank Ebes (problematic date and background treatment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td><em>Frog Hollow Country</em> 1987</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>90 x 180</td>
<td>natural pigments on canvas</td>
<td>NGA 88.2396. MM Files No.1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gundimulul 1987</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>69.7 x 109.7</td>
<td>earth pigments and natural binders on plywood</td>
<td>HaCC 1958</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wundundu 1987</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>89.5 x 121</td>
<td>earth pigments and natural binders on plywood</td>
<td>HaCC 1960</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roads Meeting 1987</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>90 x 180 cm</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>NGA 88.1539., MM RT31087 ($1400)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nardihyilli 1987</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>90 x 180 cm</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>NGA 88.2396. MM Files No.2987</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blancher Country 1987</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>101 x 90</td>
<td>earth pigments and natural binders on cotton duck</td>
<td>HaCC 2293. MM. RT.31287</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedford Downs Massacre 1987</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>90 x 180.2</td>
<td>earth pigments and natural binders on cotton duck</td>
<td>HaCC 2379 (Previously known as Kununungah Bedford Downs), MM File No. RT11287</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Untitled (Water at Bililuna Station)</td>
<td></td>
<td>89.9 x 180</td>
<td>earth pigments and natural binders on canvas</td>
<td>HaCC 1621, MM No. RT3487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Moon and Shadow</td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>61.2 x 107</td>
<td>ochre and vegetable gum on canvas</td>
<td>AGWA 1988/0172, MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Mount House Country (Yillinbirri)</td>
<td></td>
<td>60 x 120</td>
<td>earth pigments on plywood</td>
<td>AGWA 1987/0109. MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Turkey Creek Country (from the Kril Kril series)</td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>61.5 x 84</td>
<td>natural gum and pigment on canvas</td>
<td>AGWA 1987/0111. MM RT3587.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Windjina Gorge</td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>91.5 x 91</td>
<td>earth pigments on plywood</td>
<td>AGWA 1987/0112. MM RT2587.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balgo Country(Baragaj) Dog/Emu Dreaming 1987</td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>91.5 x 91.5</td>
<td>earth pigments on plywood</td>
<td>AGWA 1987/0113. MM RT1587.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goolgool the owl with four young 1987</td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>61.5 x 107</td>
<td>earth pigments and natural binders on canvas</td>
<td>AGWA 1988/0061, MM RT42187.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildjamarl – Clara Springs 1987</td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>60 x 106.5</td>
<td>earth pigments and natural binders on canvas</td>
<td>AGWA 1988/0062. MM File No. RT71287.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yullunbull tableland 1987</td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>61 x 106.5</td>
<td>earth pigments and natural binders on canvas</td>
<td>AGWA 1988/0063. MM RT61287.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elgee Cliffs 1987</td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>90 x 180</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and natural binder (bush gum) on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's Aboriginal Art June 2000, Lot 42. PC. MM RT21287.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lureendjeruburu 1987</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>90 x 60</td>
<td>natural gum and pigments on plywood</td>
<td>PC. MM RT7487.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gool Gool the Owl 1987</td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>90 x 100</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and natural binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby’s Aboriginal Art at MCA October 2008, Lot 56 (sold $46,800). Sir John and Elaine Cruthers Collection, Perth., MM RT81287 (unusual composition)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untitled 1987</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>90 x180</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and bush gum on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby’s Aboriginal and Oceanic Art 24 November 2009, Lot 67. PC. Niagara Galleries, Melbourne. PC. MM RT1787</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey Creek 1987</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>Robert Bleakley Collection.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey Creek 1987</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>Robert Bleakley Collection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown 1987</td>
<td>No image</td>
<td>Warmun,</td>
<td></td>
<td>earth pigments on hardboard</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP974.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown 1987</td>
<td>No image</td>
<td>Warmun,</td>
<td></td>
<td>earth pigments on hardboard</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP975.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story of the Owl Guddgull 1987</td>
<td>Frog Hollow</td>
<td>139 x 99</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board</td>
<td>AGSA 8811p77. Deutscher Fine Art ($640). Waringarri AP1302</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Story of Lake Gregory (Guragu)1987</td>
<td>Frog Hollow</td>
<td>120 x 160</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board</td>
<td>PC. Aboriginal Arts Australia, ($1900) Waringarri AP1303</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The journey of Malu the kangaroo 1987</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>120 x 160</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>AGSA 8812p105, ($2,500) Waringarri AP1382 S-1296</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Junction of the Ord River 1987</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>90 x 120</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and bush gums on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's Aboriginal Art July 2003, Lot 126. PC, Sydney (Had been on loan to AGNSW since 1999). Aboriginal Arts Australia ($1620) Waringarri AP1383 S-1288</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ceremonies from a long time ago 1987</td>
<td>Drawing</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>90 x 120</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board</td>
<td>PC. Aboriginal Arts Australia ($1,000). Waringarri AP1384 S-1287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lingurr – the serpent at Halls Creek (Langkur) 1987</td>
<td></td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>89 x 179.5</td>
<td>natural gum and ochre on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby’s Aboriginal Art at MCA October 2008, Lot 280. PC. MM Private collection, until 2000. MM RT1487.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guda Guda Country 1987</td>
<td></td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>60.5 x 105.5</td>
<td>natural pigments and natural binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby’s MCA October 2008, Lot 155. PC. The Artist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td><em>Two Sisters at Fitzroy Crossing</em> 1987</td>
<td>Frog Hollow</td>
<td>60 x 90</td>
<td>natural ochre and gum on plywood</td>
<td>PC. MM RT6487.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td><em>Narmaran: Serpent</em> Travelled from Turkey Creek to Alice Springs 1987</td>
<td></td>
<td>61 x 90.5</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on board</td>
<td>PC. Goodman’s Aboriginal and Oceanic Fine Art, 26 September, 2000, Lot 19. PC, Melbourne. Gary Anderson Gallery Sydney, MM RT5487.</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td><em>Place Star Fell from Sky (Wolf Creek Crater)</em> 1987</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>60 x 60 cm</td>
<td>natural pigments on plywood</td>
<td>PC. Shapiro Auctions March 2005 (sold $85,000). PC. The Artist.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td><em>Ludunyae (Spring Creek)</em> 1987</td>
<td></td>
<td>35.5 x 45.5</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and bush gum on composition board</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's Melbourne 25 July 2004 (sold $12,000).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ord River Country 1987</td>
<td><strong>Ord River Country 1987</strong></td>
<td>Turkey Creek</td>
<td>100 x 90</td>
<td>natural gum and pigment on canvas</td>
<td>PC. MM RT21087.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>![Image](Ord River Country 1987)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>![Image](Barragoo (Lake Gregory) 1987)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>![Image](Kununurra Bridge 1987)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Untitled – Map of Turkey Creek and Surrounds c.1987</td>
<td><strong>Untitled – Map of Turkey Creek and Surrounds c.1987</strong></td>
<td>Turkey Creek</td>
<td>97 by 122 (irregular)</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and natural binders on composition board</td>
<td>PC. Duncan Kentish, Adelaide (purchased from artist in 1987 – painting had been displayed at Turkey Creek Roadhouse for unknown time) possibly painted earlier - ?1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>![Image](Untitled – Map of Turkey Creek and Surrounds c.1987)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>![Image](Cross Roads c.1987)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land Around Turkey Creek 1987</td>
<td>Turkey Creek</td>
<td>61 x 91 cm</td>
<td>natural pigments and bush gum on composition board</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's Aboriginal, African &amp; Oceanic Art November 1998, Lot 148 (sold $18,400). Direct from artist by P. Barry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numaruny Rainbow Snake – The Rainbow from the Sea c1987</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>90 by 251.5 (irregular)</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and natural binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC, Adelaide, Lord McAlpine Collection, bears No.55 and A123 on stretcher on the reverse. ?MM (problematic ? collaborative or wrong attribution)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree c.1987</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>60 x 101</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and natural binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's Aboriginal and Tribal Art November 1997, Lot 174. PC Melbourne. Acquired directly from Artist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolf Creek Crater c1987/88</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>91 x 152</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Deutscher Menzies Fine Aboriginal Art, 31 May 2005, Lot 51 (sold $144,000). The Artist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<td><em>Kananganja (Mount King) 1988</em></td>
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<td>180 x 90</td>
<td>earth pigments and natural binders on canvas</td>
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<td><em>Pompey’s Pillar (from the Kril Kril series) 1988</em></td>
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<td>61.2 x 106.8</td>
<td>earth pigments and natural binders on canvas</td>
<td>AGWA 1988/0170, MM</td>
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<td><em>Sugar Bag Hill (From Kril Kril series) 1988</em></td>
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<td>60 x 105</td>
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<td>AGWA 1988/0171. MM RT15588.</td>
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<td><em>Bungulgee- Camel Creek (from the Kril Kril series)1988</em></td>
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<td>earth pigments and natural binders on canvas</td>
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<td><em>Wangkul Junction – Wulangkuya 1988</em></td>
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<td>89.9 x 180.2</td>
<td>ochre and gum on canvas on canvas</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td><em>Dreamtime story Country around Mt King (Wadi and Nuba)</em></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>80 x 100</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board</td>
<td>PC. AAA, Sydney ($1500). Waringarri AP1446 S-1343.</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td><em>Buruga (Lake Gregory)</em></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>70 x 110</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board</td>
<td>PC. (Susan Bradley) ($520). Waringarri AP1600 S-1344</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td><em>Wadigujara (Lawmen) and their travels</em></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td><em>Bush Turkey at Frog Hollow</em></td>
<td>Frog Hollow, Turkey Creek</td>
<td>90.5 x 120</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board</td>
<td>PC. Premier Peter Dowding ($600). Waringarri AP1660 S-1418</td>
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<td><em>Yilimbiddi Country</em></td>
<td>100 x 140</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Deutscher and Hackett, <em>Important Aboriginal Art</em> October 14 2009, Lot 26. PC, NSW. Sotheby's,</td>
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<td>Guning-ngada Dreaming 1988</td>
<td>Frog Hollow, Turkey Creek</td>
<td>50 x 70</td>
<td>Earth pigments on canvas board</td>
<td>PC. AAA Sydney ($750). Waringarri AP1717 S1591</td>
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<td>Nguda Ngali-bunga Country 1988</td>
<td>Frog Hollow, Turkey Creek</td>
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<td>PC. AAA Sydney ($950). Waringarri AP1718 S1589</td>
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<td>Buragu (Lake Gregory) 1988</td>
<td>Frog Hollow, Turkey Creek</td>
<td>121 x 162</td>
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<td>PC. Sotheby's Aboriginal Art Sydney July 2003. AAA Sydney ($2500). Waringarri AP1719 S-1582.</td>
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<td>Dreamtime story of creation of Erskine Range 1988</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
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<td>Earth pigments on canvas board</td>
<td>PC. Boomali Aboriginal Artist Ko-Op ($480). (Waringarri AP1753 S-1603).</td>
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<td>Yillinburri-Mount House 1988</td>
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<td>90 x 60</td>
<td>natural gum and pigments on masonite</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's Aboriginal Art: 10th Anniversary Melbourne 31 July 2006, Lot 94 (sold $96,000) MM File No. RT3687</td>
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<td>Owl 1988</td>
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<td>50 x 40.5</td>
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<td>Kununurra Bridge 1988</td>
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<td>90 x 180</td>
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<td>MM File No.RT11088</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td><em>Kankamkankami Country</em></td>
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<td>60 x 100</td>
<td>natural pigments and bush gums on canvas</td>
<td>Commissioned by Joel Smoker WA, WAA. PC. MM No. 4 Texas Downs Collection.</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td><em>Turkey Creek Turnoff</em></td>
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<td>100 x 90</td>
<td>natural gum and pigment on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Lauraine Diggins Exhib Cat 1989.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c.1988</td>
<td><em>Galgoodji</em></td>
<td>?</td>
<td>60.5 x 105.5</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and bush gum on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby’s <em>Important Aboriginal Art</em> June 1998, Lot 16 (sold $35,600). PC, Alice Springs. MM</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td><em>Owl</em></td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>76 x 51</td>
<td>natural pigments and natural binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby’s <em>Aboriginal Art</em> July 2001 Lot 4. PC, Victoria. (Given to owner who had worked in the Warmun community by Artist)</td>
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<td>HaCC 2942. MM</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Mirriya (Mureeya) Texas Downs Country 1989</em></td>
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<td>92.7 x 182.7</td>
<td>natural pigments ad bush gum on canvas</td>
<td>AGWA 2002/1, MM No. 10 Texas Downs Collection</td>
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<td><em>Gula Gula (Manking) 1989</em></td>
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<td><em>Barramundi Dreaming 1989</em></td>
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<td>90 x 199.7</td>
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<td>76.5 x 107.5</td>
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<td>PC. Lawson Menzies <em>Aboriginal Art</em>, Sydney 9 Nov 2005, Lot 77. PC, Sydney. Aboriginal and South Pacific Gallery, Sydney. MM.</td>
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| **Yillimbiddi Country (Saddlers Jump) 1989** | Warmun Turkey Creek                                    | 120 x 90         | earth pigments on canvas board | PC. Moss Green Auctions 31 August 2009 Lot 26 (misdated in catalogue as 1994).  
PC. Dean Management Collection: Deutscher Brunswick St ($3500).  
Waringarri AP1823 S-1815. |
| Dreamtime travels of Two Aboriginal Lawmen Kuningada Country 1989 | Warmun Turkey Creek                                    | 120 x 160        | earth pigments on canvas board | PC. Deutscher Brunswick St ($5000).  
Waringarri AP1824 S-1583. |
| Dreamtime travels of Two Aboriginal Lawmen Kuningada Country 1989 | Warmun Turkey Creek                                    | 100 x 140        | earth pigments on canvas board | PC. Sir Lady and Lady Carruthers: Deutscher Brunswick St ($4500)  
Waringarri AP1851 S-1829. |
| **Yillimbiddi Country (Wunda Wunda & Bunungar) 1989** | Warmun Turkey Creek                                    | 100 x 140        | earth pigments on canvas board | Laverty Collection: Deutscher Brunswick St ($4000) 1990.  
Waringarri AP1852 S-1831. |
PC, Sydney.  
Sotheby's Aboriginal Art July 2003, Lot |
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<td><em>Balabudd Country 1989</em></td>
<td>Warmun Creek</td>
<td>50 x 70</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and natural binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's <em>Aboriginal Art</em> July 2003, Lot 125. (Had been on loan to AGNSW since 1999) PC. Deutscher Brunswick St ($3000).</td>
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<td><em>Lung-guda - Looma Lizard 1989</em></td>
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<td>PC. Dean Management Collection: Deutscher Gertrude St ($5000). Waringarri AP2028 S-2038.</td>
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<td><em>Yari Country 1989</em></td>
<td>Frog Hollow</td>
<td>160 x 200.2</td>
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<td>NGV 0.7-1990: Deutscher Brunswick St, Melbourne ($6500). Waringarri AP3091 S-2201</td>
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<td><em>Gulabal (Snake) 1989</em></td>
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<td>120 x 160</td>
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<td>PC. Mr and Mrs J Kohane: Deutsher Gertrude St ($5000). Waringarri AP3052 S-2037</td>
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<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
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<td>PC. Hogarth Galleries ($4950) Waringarri AP3117 S-2040</td>
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<td>Nyila Country Canning Stock Route WA 1989</td>
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<td><strong>Lumburun (watersnake) and Nyamaran (Rock Snake) 1989</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Jailhouse Creek Country 1989</strong></td>
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<td>PC, (Robert Bleakley). MM</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>Balya Balya (Big Spring near Osmond Valley)</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>Mirrilie (Texas Downs)1989</td>
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<td>60 x 90, 60 x 90</td>
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<td>PC. MM W O'B.1</td>
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<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
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<td>Kanamkankami 1990</td>
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<td>PC. MM, No 5 Texas Downs Collection.</td>
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<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>NGA 90.1729. MM RT2290.</td>
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<td>Ruby Plains Killing #1 1990</td>
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<td>NGA 90.1755. MM.</td>
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<td>NGA 90.1754. MM RT1290.</td>
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<td>Lake Gregory 1990</td>
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<td>NGV 0.37-1991. MM RTq1190.</td>
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<td>Lake Argyle (Ord River Dam) 1990</td>
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<td>Kimberley Crossroads 1990</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>160 x 200</td>
<td>Earth pigments and natural binders on cotton duck</td>
<td>HaCC 3398. Hogarth Galleries ($8500). Waringarri AP3348 S-2799.</td>
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<td>Baragoo Country 1990</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
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<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Deutscher Brunswick St ($3000). Waringarri AP3278 S-2649.</td>
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<td>Kangaroo Travels 1990</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>80 x 160</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's Aboriginal Art at MCA October 2008, Lot 57. NGV: Dreamtime Gallery, Perth ($4500) Waringarri AP3279 S-2643</td>
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<td>PC. Dr Jack Vercoe ($2300). Waringarri AP3280 S-2689</td>
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<td>Loomoogool (Little Blue Tongue) 1990</td>
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<td>70 x 50</td>
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<td>Looma- Three Sisters 1990</td>
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<td>PC. Chapman Gallery ACT ($4000). Waringarri AP3284 S-2692</td>
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<td>Jimbilan and Balaborr Country 1990</td>
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<td>120 x 160</td>
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<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
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<td>PC. Hogarth Gallery ($6500). Waringarri AP3408 S-2920</td>
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<td>PC. Vivien Anderson ($875). Waringarri AP3436 S-3043</td>
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<td>Baragoo Country 1990</td>
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<td>80 x 100</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
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*Also called Willy Willy 1989.*
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<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
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<td>Camel Creek (Bangalgi) 1990</td>
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<td><em>Barramundi Dreaming Site 1990</em></td>
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<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
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<td><em>Crossroads 1990</em></td>
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<td><strong>Gladys Spring near Bedford 1990</strong></td>
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<td>PC. Sotheby's Aboriginal Art October 2006, Lot 101 (sold $13,200). PC, Perth.</td>
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<td><em>Pompey's Pillar(Pangkalij) 1990</em></td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>61 x 101</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and bush gum on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's Important Aboriginal Art, 30 June 1997, Melbourne, Lot 176 (sold $12,650) PC. MM.</td>
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<td><em>Ord River Country 1990</em></td>
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<td><em>All that big rain coming down from top side</em></td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>180 x 120cm</td>
<td>natural pigments and bush gum on canvas</td>
<td>NGA, 2001.128. Sotheby's Aboriginal Art July 2001 Lot 66. MM No. 6 Texas Downs Collection previously called Miningurri Texas Downs 1991 and Waterfall 1991 (sold at auction for $780,000 in 2001) (last work RT painted for MM).</td>
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<td><em>Swan River 1991</em></td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>152.7 x 101.5cm</td>
<td>earth pigments and natural binders on canvas</td>
<td>HaCC 3411. MM (sold in 1991 $4,500).</td>
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<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
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<td>Lake Paruku 1991</td>
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<td>Perth</td>
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<td>One hid under the bullock's hide 1991</td>
<td><em>One hid under the bullock's hide</em> 1991</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>90 x 180</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>NGA 91.741. MM.</td>
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<td><em>Jailhouse Creek</em> 1991</td>
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<td>100 x 60</td>
<td>earth pigments and natural binders on canvas</td>
<td>AGNSW 96.1995. MM. (Note that this about Broome).</td>
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<td>70 x 120</td>
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<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<td><em>Lissadell Country</em></td>
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<td>45.5 x 60.8</td>
<td>ochres on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Christie’s Contemporary Sydney 13.8.2000, Lot 113. PC. UA</td>
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<td><em>Djugamerri and Bolgumerri 1991</em></td>
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<td>110 x 90</td>
<td>ochre and bush gum on canvas</td>
<td>Laverty Collection acquired 2003, MM</td>
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<td>Year</td>
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<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<td>Crocodile</td>
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<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<td>Langurr(The Rainbow Serpent) making the river 1991</td>
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<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. MM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lightning Strike at Rosewood Station 1991</td>
<td></td>
<td>60 x 100</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. MM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Druwurl Hill (White dots on black background) 1992</td>
<td></td>
<td>38. x 54.2</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>NGA 93.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kulunbun Hill 1992</td>
<td>Kulunbun Hill 1992</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>45.7 x 55.9</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>NGA 93.159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Biliuna in the Desert 1992</td>
<td>Lake Biliuna in the Desert 1992</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>37.2 x 53.9</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>NGA 93.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koonang Hills 1992</td>
<td>Koonang Hills 1992</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>37.5 x 54</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>NGA 93.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown 1992</td>
<td>Unknown 1992</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>B/W</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC, Jean Pierre Vernet ($1000). Waringarri AP3583 S-3528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td><em>Baragoo Country</em></td>
<td>Warmun, Turkey Creek</td>
<td>60 x 40</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3619 S-3405</td>
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<td>(inverted in Sotheby’s Auction catalogue)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(inverted in Sotheby's Auction catalogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td><em>Untitled (Barramundi Dreaming)</em> 1992</td>
<td>Warmun, Turkey Creek</td>
<td>60 x 80</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Chapman Gallery ACT ($3000). Waringarri AP3625 S-3613</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td><em>Unknown 1992</em></td>
<td>Warmun, Turkey Creek</td>
<td>60 x 40</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board</td>
<td>PC, Susan Bradley ($500). Waringarri AP3640</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td><em>Unknown 1992</em></td>
<td>Warmun, Turkey Creek</td>
<td>60 x 40</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board</td>
<td>PC, Don Williams ($500) Waringarri AP3661</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td><em>Unknown 1992</em></td>
<td>Warmun, Turkey Creek</td>
<td>60 x 40</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board</td>
<td>PC, Ron Ramsey ($500) Waringarri AP3662.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<td>Wolf Creek crater 1992</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>80 x 100</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Shapiro Aboriginal Art 28 June 2009, Lot 166. PC. Waringarri AP3685 S-3391</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown 1992</td>
<td>No image</td>
<td>60 x 45</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3686.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nilya, Well 33, Canning Stock Route 1992</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>46 x 61</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and natural binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC, Switzerland. Sotheby's Aboriginal Art June 2000, Lot 189. PC, Melbourne. Waringarri AP3697. (This painting looks more like a Queenie McKenzie).</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bamarr Country - Blue Tongue Dreaming Assisted by Rusty Peters 1992</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>90 x 120</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3702.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown 1992</td>
<td>No image</td>
<td>60 x 45</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3706 S-3919.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unknown 1992</strong></td>
<td>No image</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td></td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3707.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Untitled (Crossroads) 1992</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>160 x 200</td>
<td>ochres on linen</td>
<td>PC. Gold Coast City Gallery Conrad Jupiters Art Prize 1993 sold $1950 Waringarri AP3722 S-3203.</td>
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<td><strong>Ruby Plains Station 1992</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>80 x 100</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3730 S-3973.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mawoorn Country</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>90 x 120</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3731.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barramundi Dreaming 1992</strong></td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td></td>
<td>60 x100</td>
<td>ochre and bush gum on canvas</td>
<td>Laverty Collection (acquired 1992). MM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Texas Downs Country 1992</strong></td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td></td>
<td>104 x 138</td>
<td>ochre and bush gum on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's <em>Aboriginal Art</em> June 2000, Lot 249. PC, WA. Acquired directly from Artist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td><em>Canning Stock Route – Long Long Way 1993</em></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>80 x 100</td>
<td>ochre on canvas</td>
<td>PC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Unknown 1993</em></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>70 x 50</td>
<td>ochre on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3774 S-4263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Loomookool -Blue Tongue Country 1993</em></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>40 x 50</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3752 S-3961</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Cockatoo Dreaming 1993</em></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>40 x 50</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3771 S-3962.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Ngarrkoon Country 1993</em></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>60 x 80</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3775</td>
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<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Road near Turkey Creek (Kurrirr Kurrirr story) 1993</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>80 x 100</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3776</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Unknown 1993</td>
<td>No image</td>
<td></td>
<td>40 x 50</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3777.</td>
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<td>Garloomboon 1993</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>40 x 50</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3778.</td>
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<td>Goordoo 1993</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>40 x 50</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3779.</td>
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<td>Blue Tongue Lizard Dreaming 1993</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>152 x 212</td>
<td>earth pigments and natural binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Goodmans Aboriginal and Oceanic Fine Art 2000, April Sydney, Lot 75. Pirra Fine Arts KA122RTJ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lolly Creek – Gawoorrngaandi 1993</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>40 x 50</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3780.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cave near Garloomboon Hill 1993</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>40 x 50</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3781.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown 1993</td>
<td>No image</td>
<td>40 x 50</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3782.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown 1993</td>
<td>No image</td>
<td>40 x 50</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP3783.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown 1993</td>
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<td>80 x 110</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0005.</td>
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<td>Unknown 1993</td>
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<td>70 x 110</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0011.</td>
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<td>80 x 160</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0013.</td>
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<td>50 x 70</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0015.</td>
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<td>No image</td>
<td>80 x 160</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0096.</td>
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<td>Untitled 1993</td>
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<td>80 x 160</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>Lawson Menzies 19 June 2008, Lot 260 (sold $18,000). Private company collection,</td>
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<td>Year</td>
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<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown 1993</td>
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<td>18 x 24</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
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<td>Warmun</td>
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<td>45.5 x 61</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's Aboriginal and Tribal Art November 1997, Lot 177. The Artist. (WAA No. S-142 on back of painting signed Rover Thomas on reverse) (problematic attribution - dotting).</td>
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<tr>
<td>?One hid under the bullock hide c.1993/4</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
<td>90 x 180</td>
<td>earth pigments and natural binder on linen</td>
<td>Unknown (image sent to MM for verification)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td><em>Burradoo (Meeting Place)</em> 1994</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>110 x 90</td>
<td>ochre on canvas</td>
<td>PC. KAA Melbourne.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
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<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Desert Meeting Place 1994</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>90 x 120</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0140.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Barramundi Dreaming Gooroony Country 1994</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>90 x 60</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0141.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stockmen's Meeting Place on the Bow River 1994</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>60 x 45</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0146.</td>
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<td>Nyile -Red Rock near Looma 1994</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>80 x 60</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0149.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crossroads 1994</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>100 x 80</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0150.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
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<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td><em>Cyclone Tracy</em></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>100 x 140</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0151.</td>
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<td><a href="B/W">Image</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td><em>Hill Kangaroo Dreaming</em></td>
<td>Turkey Creek Warmun</td>
<td>80 x 160</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas board (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0152.</td>
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<td>![Image](Hill Kangaroo Dreaming 1994)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td><em>Bankoobirdi Country in the Leopold Ranges</em></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>80 x 160</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0153</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td><em>Unknown</em></td>
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<td>40 x 60</td>
<td>ochre on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0161.</td>
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<td>![Image](Untitled 1994)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td><em>Unknown</em></td>
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<td>80 x 60</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0168.</td>
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<td>![Image](Unknown (Rover &amp; Paddy BBC) 1994)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td><em>Unknown</em></td>
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<td>80 x 60</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0170.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td><em>Unknown</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>70 x 100</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas (ochre)</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0170.</td>
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<td>![Image](Unknown 1994)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown 1994</td>
<td></td>
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<td>80 x 100</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas (ochre)</td>
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<td>Lake Argyle 1994</td>
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<td></td>
<td>90 x 120</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0182.</td>
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<td>Wyndham Road 1994</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>80 x 100</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
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<td>Jalyirr Country 1994</td>
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<td>Unknown 1994</td>
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<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0262.</td>
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<td>Ceremony Ground (Barewoorroo) at Turkey Creek 1994</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Ceremony Ground (Barewoorroo) at Turkey Creek 1994" /></td>
<td>100 x 70</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0340.</td>
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<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>60 x 80</td>
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<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td><em>Sunrise</em></td>
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<td>60 x 80</td>
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<td><em>Traveller who dies at La Grange</em></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
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<td>Cross Roads 1994</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
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<td>natural earth pigments and synthetic binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's Aboriginal and Tribal Art November 1997, Lot 180. PC, Qld. Waringarri AP0396</td>
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<td>Killarney Country (assisted by Sandra Malas) 1994</td>
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<td>PC. Waringarri AP0405. (collaboration)</td>
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<td>Gawoorngandin Country (assisted by Sandra Malas) 1994</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>45 x 60</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0406. (appears collaboration little RT imput)</td>
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<td>Nargoroon (Hills) Texas Downs Country 1994</td>
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<td>90 x 110</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Image: Shapiro Auctioneers (problematic composition)</td>
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<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
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<td><strong>Cyclone Tracy 1994</strong></td>
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<td>PC. Gow Langsford Gallery</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Ungoll Turkey Creek near Crossing</strong></td>
<td>Turkey Creek</td>
<td>100.5 x 182</td>
<td>natural pigments and synthetic binder on linen</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's <em>Aboriginal Art</em> July 2001 Lot 217. PC, Queensland Art Gallery Schubert, Qld. Niagara Galleries Melbourne. The Artist</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Blue Tongue Lizard 1994</strong></td>
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<td>198 x 104</td>
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<td>Road to Kukatja Wangkajunga 1994</td>
<td>79.5 x 120</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and synthetic binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's Fine Australian, Aboriginal and International Art November 1999, Lot 405. PC, Sydney. KAA Melbourne</td>
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<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>Ngarin Janu (Cyclone Tracy 1995</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>183.0 x 101.0 cm</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on linen</td>
<td>PC. Lawson Menzies Aboriginal Fine Art, 14 November 2007, Lot 39. PC, Vic. NMFA.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Mook Mook Owls 1995</strong></td>
<td>B/W</td>
<td>77 x 56</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Goodmans Aboriginal &amp; Oceanic Fine Art Sept 2000 Sydney, Lot 85. PC. Outback Alive Private Collection, Canberra No OA793.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Mook Mook the Owl at Tunnel Creek 1995</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>102 x 81</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and bush gum on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's Important Aboriginal Art June 1998, Lot 206. Outback Alive Gallery Qld. Cat No. OA746/44972</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Mook Mook Owls 1995</strong></td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>71 x 55cm</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC, Melbourne, Commissioned by Pirra Fine Arts, Melbourne.</td>
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<td>Where painted</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Road to Wyndham to See Paddy Jaminji 1995</strong></td>
<td>Dandenongs</td>
<td>92 x 117</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on Belgium linen</td>
<td>PC. Lawson Menzies Aboriginal Art Sydney Nov 2005, Lot 146. PC Melbourne. Flinders Lane Gallery. NMFA</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Cyclone Tracy – Willy Willy 1995</strong></td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>181.0 x 180.0 cm</td>
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<td>PC. Lawson Menzies Aboriginal Fine Art March 2009 (sold $204,000). PC, Private Investment Partnership Melbourne. Lawson Menzies Aboriginal Fine Art 14 November 2007, Lot 50 (sold $204,000). Neil McLeod Fine Art: Cat. no. KA/RTJ 118</td>
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<td>Warmun</td>
<td>51 x 71 cm</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on linen</td>
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<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(sold $14,400). Art Galleries Schubert. PC. Commissioned by Helen Loveridge at Warmun</td>
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<td>Cyclone Tracy c1995</td>
<td></td>
<td>99.5 x 182</td>
<td>ochre on linen</td>
<td>PC. Bonhams and Goodman Australian, Aboriginal and International Art November 2005, Lot 75 (sold $15,000). PC, NSW. UA Sydney. KAA Melbourne</td>
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<td>Materials used</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Mount House, Station Homestead 1995</em></td>
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<td>101 x 183</td>
<td>Natural pigment on canvas with synthetic polymer</td>
<td>PC. Marlene Antico Fine Art, Sydney.</td>
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<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>182.5 x 180.5</td>
<td>natural pigments on linen</td>
<td>PC. Lawson Menzies <em>Aboriginal Art Auction</em> 23-24 November 2004, Sydney, Lot 45 (sold $240,000) KAA PC. N MFA KA RTJ118</td>
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<td><strong>Lake Gregory 1995</strong></td>
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<td>99 x 179</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on linen</td>
<td>PC. Lawson Menzies Aboriginal Art Sydney May 2004, Lot 36 (sold $83,000). PC, Melbourne. Direct from Artist.</td>
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<td>180 x 100</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on linen</td>
<td>PC. Lawson Menzies Fine Aboriginal Art 23 November 2006, Lot 89 (sold $69,000). PC, SA.</td>
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<td><strong>Milky Way 1995</strong></td>
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<td>183 x 102</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on linen cm</td>
<td>PC. Lawson Menzies Fine Aboriginal Art 23 November 2006, Lot 14 (sold $72,000). PC. NSW. UA Sydney</td>
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<td><strong>Barawooban-Texas Downs 1995</strong></td>
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<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
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<td><strong>Marnjul Hills 1995</strong></td>
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<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>45 x 60</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
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<td><strong>Hills at Bottle Tree Creek 1995</strong></td>
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<td>45 x 60</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
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<td><strong>Unknown 1995</strong></td>
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<td>60 x 80</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
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<td><strong>Bow River Country 1995</strong></td>
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<td>60 x 80</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0439.</td>
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<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>40 x 50</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0440.</td>
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<td><strong>Wolf Creek Crater 1995</strong></td>
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<td>80 x 100</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0453.</td>
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*Drawing*
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<td><strong>Gamangger 1995</strong></td>
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<td>100 x 140</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0513.</td>
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<td><strong>Wolf Creek Crater Ngoorriny 1995</strong></td>
<td><strong>Warmun Turkey Creek</strong></td>
<td>45 x 60</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0532.</td>
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<td><strong>Dunham River Bridge 1995</strong></td>
<td><strong>Warmun Turkey Creek</strong></td>
<td>24” x 30”</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0533.</td>
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<td>20” x 24”</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0534.</td>
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<td><strong>Highway between Alice Downs and Springvale 1995</strong></td>
<td><strong>Warmun Turkey Creek</strong></td>
<td>80 x 110</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0548.</td>
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<td>Nyaama- Dingo Hole 1995</td>
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<td>B /W</td>
<td>120 x 90 140 x 100?</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Savode Gallery Brisbane. Waringarri AP0552</td>
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<td>Victoria Highway out of Kununurra 1995</td>
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<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>80 x 160</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0562.</td>
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<td>Yarlda Country near Yuendemu and Papunya 1995</td>
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<td>70 x 110</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0565.</td>
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<td>Two Sisters 1995</td>
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<td>80 x 100</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0570.</td>
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<td>Telegraph Creek Country 1995</td>
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<td>80 x 160</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0571.</td>
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<td>Hills near Telegraph Creek 1995</td>
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<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>40 x 60</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0572.</td>
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<td>Road to Violet Valley 1995</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>40 x 60</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>AIATSIS Collection, Canberra. Waringarri AP0573.</td>
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<td>Mt Newman Mine 1995</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>80 x 100</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
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<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0612. (problematic)</td>
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<td>Wurritji – Wild Dog Dreaming 1995</td>
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<td>140 x 100</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. (sold $8500) Waringarri AP0635.</td>
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<td>Gunowaggi – The Days of Wally Dowling 1995</td>
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<td>100 x 140</td>
<td>natural pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. (sold $8,500) Waringarri AP0636.</td>
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<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Jaandoo – Wild Dog Dreaming 1995</em></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>100 x 140</td>
<td>natural pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. (Sold $8,500) Waringarri AP0637.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Night Sky 1995</em></td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>200 x 160</td>
<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>NGA 96.2. (sold $11,000) Waringarri AP0638.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Gunowaggi Country 1995</em></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>80 x 100</td>
<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. (sold $4,200) Waringarri AP0639.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Three Women Dreaming 1995</em></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>80 x 100</td>
<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0640.</td>
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<td>Year</td>
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<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jaandoo – Wild Dog Dreaming 1995</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>70 x 110</td>
<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0642</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yalda Soak – The Artist’s Birthplace 1995</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>80 x 160</td>
<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. (sold $7,800) Waringarri AP0670.</td>
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<td>Punmu Salt Lake 1995</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>18” x 24”</td>
<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0671.</td>
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<td>Telephone Box - Gunowaggi 1995</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>65 x 40</td>
<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. (sold $1,000) Waringarri AP0672.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Texas Station Road 1995</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>70 x 110</td>
<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0673.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Punmu Salt Lake 1995</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>100 x 140</td>
<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0680.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
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<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown 1995</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18” x 24”</td>
<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0685.</td>
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<td>Well 35 on the Canning Stock Route 1995</td>
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<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>18” x 24”</td>
<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0686.</td>
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<td>Wadabol – Bow River Country 1995</td>
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<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>24” x 35”</td>
<td>natural pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0689.</td>
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<td>Barragoo – Lake Gregory 1995</td>
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<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Indigenart Subiaco ($1500) Waringarri AP0690.</td>
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<td>Punmu Jump Up 1995</td>
<td></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>70 x 110</td>
<td>natural pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0691.</td>
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<td>Horse Creek – Texas Downs Country 1995</td>
<td></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>90 x 60</td>
<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0692.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Year</td>
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<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
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<td><strong>Warramarn – Turkey Creek Country 1995</strong></td>
<td>Warrum Turkey Creek</td>
<td>110 x 70</td>
<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Indigenart Subiaco ($2400) Waringarri AP0693.</td>
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<td><strong>Mt Newman Mine 1995</strong></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>90 x 70</td>
<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Indigenart Subiaco ($1,800) Waringarri AP0694.</td>
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<td><strong>Mainburrum – Texas Downs Country 1995</strong></td>
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<td>70 x 90</td>
<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Indigenart Subiaco ($3,000) Waringarri AP0695</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Punmu Salt Lake 1995</strong></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>100 x 140</td>
<td>natural pigments and binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0701</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dahlu Dahlu 1995</strong></td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>51 x 60</td>
<td>ochre and natural pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Unknown (Image: National Gallery Firenze)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dila (Sun)1995</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>60.5 x 76.0</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and synthetic binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Deutscher and Hackett Important Aboriginal Art, 25 March 2009, Lot 35. PC. Melbourne. Warmun Traditional Artists No. RT0165.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
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<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
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<td>Untitled 1995</td>
<td>61 x 76.5</td>
<td>Natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Christie's Fine Aboriginal Art 12 October 2004, Lot 79 (sold $35,850). PC, Qld. RR KP102 WAA S712</td>
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<tr>
<td>Love Magic at Papunya 1995</td>
<td>198 x 244</td>
<td>natural pigment on linen</td>
<td>PC. Lawson Menzies Fine Aboriginal Art May 2006, Lot 141 (sold $204,000). PC, Melbourne. KAA.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wolf Crater 1995</td>
<td>120 x 202</td>
<td>acrylic on linen</td>
<td>UNSW Art Collection 1996/0732</td>
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<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Wolf Crater 1995</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>102 x 81.5</td>
<td>Earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Niagara Galleries Melbourne. (problematic)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Great Sandy Desert 1995</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>195 x 103</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on belgium linen</td>
<td>PC. Lawson Menzies <em>Fine Aboriginal Arts</em> May 2006, Lot 81 (sold $72,000). NMFA. The Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Great Sandy Desert 1995</em></td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>195 x 112</td>
<td>ochre and synthetic polymer on linen</td>
<td>PC. ROVER/KA/RT/June 1995 NMFA, UA (problematic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
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<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>126 x 90</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on Belgian linen</td>
<td>PC. Lawson Menzies <em>Aboriginal Art</em> November 2005, Lot 179 (sold $25,200). PC, NSW. UA, Sydney (looks more like a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Wati Kutjarra Area 1995</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>180 x 100</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on linen</td>
<td>PC. PC, Vic. Flinders Lane Gallery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Turkey Creek</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>185 x 104</td>
<td>ochre and acrylic binder on linen</td>
<td>PC. UA, Sydney.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desert Oaks 1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>60 x 90</td>
<td>synthetic polymer paint on linen</td>
<td>PC. Lawson Menzies <em>Aboriginal Art</em> Sydney 9 Nov 2005, Lot 10 (sold $28,800). Narangunny Art Traders, WA NAT-0292</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Marumaru (Black One) 1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>60 x 90</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Moss Green <em>Important Contemporary Aboriginal Art</em>, 8 April 2008, Lot 121 (sold $32,862.50) PC. Melbourne Warmun Traditional Artists. No: RT0060.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Papunya Country 1996</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>160 x 200</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0738.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
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<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mt Newman Mine 1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>100 x 140</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0739.</td>
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<td>The Moon 1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>60 x 80</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0740.</td>
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<td>Jaandoo – Wild Dog Dreaming 1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>24” x 36”</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP07772.</td>
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<td>Crossroads 1996</td>
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<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>24” x 36”</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0779.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
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<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
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<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Punmu Salt Lake 1996</td>
<td>Punmu Salt Lake</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>80 x 160</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0782.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mt Newman and Mooring Country 1996</td>
<td>Mt Newman and Mooring Country 1996</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
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<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0783.</td>
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<td>Barragoo – Lake Gregory 1996</td>
<td>Barragoo – Lake Gregory 1996</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>160 x 200</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0785.</td>
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<td>Unknown 1996</td>
<td>Unknown 1996</td>
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<td>20” x 24”</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0893.</td>
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<td>Unknown 1996</td>
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<td>Warmun</td>
<td>20” x 24”</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0894.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
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<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown 1996</td>
<td>Warmun 1996</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>80 x 100</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0895.</td>
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<td>Desert Meeting Place 1996</td>
<td>Desert Meeting Place 1996</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>90 x 120</td>
<td>natural pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0920.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Women Dreaming 1996</td>
<td>Three Women Dreaming 1996</td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>140 x 180 100 x 140?</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0952.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown 1996</td>
<td>Warmun 1996</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>60 x 80</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0955.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>The World and the Evening Star 1996</em></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>100 x 140</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0956.</td>
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<td><em>Jaandoo 1996</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Warmun Turkey Creek</td>
<td>100 x 140</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's <em>Aboriginal and Tribal Art</em> November 1997, Lot 232. PC, Queensland. William Mora Galleries, Melbourne. Waringarri AP0957</td>
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<td><em>Unknown 1996</em></td>
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<td>No image</td>
<td>90 x 120</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0965</td>
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<td><em>Unknown 1996 (Judith)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>No image</td>
<td>100 x 140</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0966</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown 1996</td>
<td>No image</td>
<td></td>
<td>60 x 80</td>
<td>natural earth pigments and binders on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Waringarri AP0967</td>
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<td>Lake Kudu(Bililuna)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>90 x 120</td>
<td>ochre on linen</td>
<td>PC. Japingka Gallery, Fremantle. ?Waringarri (problematic – dotting)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Red Rock Yards (Bow River Station) 1996</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td></td>
<td>50 x 70</td>
<td>natural pigment and synthetic binder on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's Fine Australian, Aboriginal and International Art November 1999, Lot 400. Warmun Traditional Artists (10.3.96) RT0014.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Untitled 1996</td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td></td>
<td>51 x 71</td>
<td>natural pigments and synthetic binder on linen</td>
<td>PC. Sotheby's Aboriginal Art July 2003, Lot 414. PC, Barry Stern Gallery. Commissioned by KAA, Melbourne. Cat No. 27 and 81</td>
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<td>Year</td>
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<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Unknown 1996</em></td>
<td>?</td>
<td>earth pigments on canvas</td>
<td>PC. Exhibited at Dobbelhoef Gallery, Netherlands, WAA.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
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<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Cyclone 1996</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>78 x 57</td>
<td>ochre and synthetic polymer on linen</td>
<td>PC. UA, Sydney.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Cyclone Tracy/Lightening 1996</strong></td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>92 x 60</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on linen</td>
<td>PC. Lawson Menzies Aboriginal Art 25 May 2004, Sydney, Lot 152 (sold $13,200). PC, Melbourne. PC Canberra. The Artist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warraman 1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>20.5 x 150.5</td>
<td>natural ochres and binders on canvas</td>
<td>Commissioned by KAA Melbourne, RT0032 - Warramun (Warmun) - 1.5.96.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barramundi Dreaming 1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>46 x 62</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Gecko Gallery Broome RTO89912 (Not a RT painting probably Queenie McKenzie)</td>
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## Works on Paper

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>Where painted</th>
<th>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</th>
<th>Materials used</th>
<th>Collection and Provenance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td><em>Spiders Web in Yari Country near Wati Kujarra 1994</em></td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>79.5 x 120</td>
<td>Pasted on paper</td>
<td>PC.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Milky Way 1994</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>33 x 49.3</td>
<td>Etching on Arches Vellin</td>
<td>WAA PM8</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Tokyo Crossroads 1994</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>60 x 80 (Image: 49 x 49)</td>
<td>Etching edition of 20</td>
<td>Leon Stainer Collection Vic, WAA NTU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Crossroads 1994</td>
<td></td>
<td>49 x 49</td>
<td>etching</td>
<td>WAA PM36b&amp;w AP4/5</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>Meeting Place 1994</td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>Image 35 x 32</td>
<td>lithograph</td>
<td>WAA Pm7, Northern Editions (printer)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Paper Size 76 x 112</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B/W</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Punmu – The Universe 1995</td>
<td></td>
<td>print size 55 by 68</td>
<td>serigraph</td>
<td>Signed Rover on front</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>paper size 77 by 112</td>
<td>print. edition 50</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mook Mook Owl 1995</td>
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<td>102 x 76</td>
<td>natural earth pigments on paper</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lawson Menzies Aboriginal Art November 2005, Lot 166 (sold $15,600).</td>
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<td>PC, Victoria. NMFA.</td>
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<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td><em>Billuna 1995</em></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>Image 65.4 x 103.3 Paper Size 76.3 x 113.2</td>
<td>lithograph</td>
<td>NGA 2007.444.  WAA Pm25 Northern Editions (Printer)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Jaandoo – Wild Dog Dreaming 1996</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>49 x 61</td>
<td>colour lithograph</td>
<td>WAA PM47</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Mt Newman 1996</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>64.5 x 49 (image) 78.7 x 69.7 (sheet)</td>
<td>etching Edition 50</td>
<td>PC and AGWA 1997/0033 Lawson Menzies Fine Aboriginal Art 23 November 2006, Lot 320 (sold $4,560) (Bonhams &amp; Goodman Auction Lot 149 calls this <em>Daytime Moon</em> – screenprint 64 x 49 (sheet size)).</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Also referred to as Mt Newman State II 1996 and Daytime Moon 1996</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Mt Newman c.1996</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>79 x 70</td>
<td>etching on paper</td>
<td>P.C. Printed by Basil Hall and Barbara McConchie – Studio One, Canberra</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Durba Gorge 1996</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Image 63 x 83 Paper Size 100 x 70</td>
<td>screenprint - limited print edition 99</td>
<td>Studio One and Megalo, Canberra AAPN Id RT011</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Rainbow Serpent Country 1996</strong></td>
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<td>screenprint, edition of 49 signed lower right</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Artwork, framed design for Australian Flag 1996</strong></td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>45.3 x 88.6</td>
<td>natural ochre with acrylic binder on paper</td>
<td>Powerhouse Museum 98/101/10, UA, Sydney.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>WurritjiCountry 1996</strong></td>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>Image 49.1 x 64.4 Sheet 60.2 x 79.8</td>
<td>colour lithograph</td>
<td>WAA PM75.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Unknown 1996</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>65 x 104</td>
<td>ochre and acrylic binder on paper</td>
<td>PC, UA, Sydney. 1996 exhibition (white centre, pale brown ochre - white dotting)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title of painting</td>
<td>Where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions (H x W) in cm</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection and Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td><em>Daytime Moon</em></td>
<td>Warmun</td>
<td>67 x 90 (image)</td>
<td>Serigraph</td>
<td>Works created at Warmun 1996, printed by Stuart Blannin Furguson in Sydney then returned for signature by artist in 1997</td>
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<td>105.7 x 75.1 (sheet)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Lake Tobin 1999</em></td>
<td>Image</td>
<td>45 x 65</td>
<td>Screenprint</td>
<td>Studio One and Megalo, Canberra, AAPN ld. RT012</td>
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<td>Paper Size 60 x 80</td>
<td>Edition 99</td>
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</table>
**Attributed to Rover Thomas (images not dated and/or not named - ? symbol denotes unknown information)**

<table>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>where painted</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Materials used</th>
<th>Collection/Provenance</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wolf Creek - unknown date</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>earth pigments and natural pigment on plywood</td>
<td>Hank Ebes</td>
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<td>Unknown name and date</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
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<td>Hank Ebes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown name/date</td>
<td></td>
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<td>earth pigments and natural pigment on plywood</td>
<td>Hank Ebes</td>
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<td>Jilili (unknown date)</td>
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<td>earth pigments and natural pigment on plywood</td>
<td>Hank Ebes</td>
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<td>Hank Ebes</td>
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<td>Hank Ebes</td>
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<td>Kimberley Gallery</td>
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<td>M.M. File</td>
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<td>(February 2008).</td>
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<td>Dimensions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Nyuk Nyuk the Owl</em></td>
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<td>P.C. Kimberley Fine Arts.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Bedford Downs</strong></td>
<td>?</td>
<td>122 x 240</td>
<td>ochre on plywood.</td>
<td>P.C. Sotheby's Australia Fine Tribal Art 38 November 1993 Lot 337. Artist’s name and title on reverse</td>
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<td><em>Wangkul Wulangkuya</em></td>
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<td>120 x 180</td>
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<td>Lot 338 Sotheby’s Aust Fine Tribal Art 28 November 1993. Artist’s name and title inscribed on reverse</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b/w</td>
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<td>ochre on canvas</td>
<td>Rover Thomas working on unknown painting at Frog Hollow. (Image: Barlow &amp; Hill (1997): 37</td>
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<td>Dimensions</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Railway Bridge Unknown Date</td>
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<td>(Asking $3000,000 April 2009).</td>
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<td>Ladner + Fell Gallery, Victoria</td>
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<td>Berramndi Dreaming Unknown date</td>
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<td>122 x 200</td>
<td>earth pigments on board</td>
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<td>90 x 110</td>
<td>ochre and pigment on canvas</td>
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<td>Windjina Gorge Unknown date</td>
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<td>100 x 60</td>
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<td>where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions</td>
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<td>Collection/Provenance</td>
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<td><em>Desert Country</em> Unknown date</td>
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<td>MM</td>
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<td><em>Yululu Country (Margaret River: Margaret Station)</em> Unknown date</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>natural pigment and bush gum on canvas</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Karlbadoo</em> Unknown date</td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>102 x 153</td>
<td>natural pigments and bush gum on canvas</td>
<td>MM commissioned by MM</td>
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<td>60 x 106</td>
<td>natural pigments and bush gum on canvas</td>
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<td><em>Ringers Soak</em> Unknown date</td>
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<td>60 x 40</td>
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<td>Name</td>
<td>where painted</td>
<td>Dimensions</td>
<td>Materials used</td>
<td>Collection/Provenance</td>
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</table>
| **Kintore Country**  
Unknown date | ![Image](image1.png) | ?             | ?          | natural pigments and bush gum on canvas | MM                            |
| **Flying Fox Hole**  
Unknown date | ![Image](image2.png) | ?             | ?          | natural pigments and bush gum on canvas | MM                            |
| **Unknown name/date** | ![Image](image3.png) | ?             | ?          | natural pigments and bush gum on canvas | MM                            |
| **Unknown name/date** | ![Image](image4.png) | ?             | ?          | natural pigments and bush gum on canvas | MM                            |
| **Unknown name/date** | ![Image](image5.png) | ?             | ?          | ?                                        | Aranda Aboriginal Art Gallery, Melbourne  
www.arandaart.com.au          |
| **Rainbow Serpent //date** | ![Image](image6.png) | ?             | 62 x 208   | natural pigments on canvas              | Artistry Gallery, Victoria.  
www.artistrygalleries.com.au    |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>where painted</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Materials used</th>
<th>Collection/Provenance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown name/date</td>
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<td>Aranda Aboriginal Art Gallery, Melbourne</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.arandaart.com">www.arandaart.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX VII – FIELD TRIPS AND RESEARCH LOG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diana Wood-Conroy – DW-C</th>
<th>Aboriginal artist(s) – Ab Art</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda Lawson – AL</td>
<td>Curatorial staff – cura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garry Jones – GJ</td>
<td>Art Historian - AHist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email – (E)</td>
<td>Conservator – Con</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthropologist – anthro</td>
<td>Collection Study Room NGA - CSR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Art Dealer – AD         | Art Adviser - AA             |
| RT – Rover Thomas       |                               |
| Phone – (P)             |                               |

### 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jan/Feb/March/April</th>
<th>May/June/July/August</th>
<th>Sept/Oct/Nov/Dec</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.4 Martin Wardrop AD (E) – Aboriginal Art on Line – re ceremonial boards</td>
<td>2.5 Reply Anne Meredith Wylic Manager, The Holmes à Court Collection reply to query about RT – told to contact Kim Akerman (anthro), Will Christensen (anthro), &amp; Mary Macha (AD)</td>
<td>4.9 Kim Akerman anthro rang re Honours draft – talked about RT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.4 Attended Beyond the Frontier Exhibition – Sherman Galleries in assoc with Jirrawun Arts (Warmun) at Paddington talked with Gallery curator</td>
<td>3.5 Will Christensen – Curtin Uni WA anthro (E) re ceremonial boards – Kurrirr Kurrirr</td>
<td>6.9 Kim Akerman anthro sent back draft honours thesis – with edits and information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-26.6 Trip to NT and East Kimberley. Art Centres and Rock art sites in NT; Art Centres in East Kimberley (Kununurra &amp; Warmun) – creative works produced from trip – creative component to Honours.</td>
<td>22.8 Sent (E) Honours Thesis Draft to Kim Akerman (anthro) to look over.</td>
<td>7.9 Contact from Megan Buckley AA Warmun Art Centre – regret but no to volunteering at centre – too busy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-14.11 Honours Exhibition FCA Gallery UOW ‘Shadows and Perspectives’ series of works on paper – imaging the East Kimberley landscape.</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.12 Kim Akerman (anthro) – phone call P congrats for my result – copy of Honours thesis sent as requested – talked about PhD proposal and RT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>February</td>
<td>March</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.2 Contact from Cathy Cummins AA (E) Waringarri Aboriginal Arts – Kununurra -with information on what documents they hold on RT</td>
<td>1.3 Meeting - DW-C</td>
<td>3.3 Reply from Euan Hills AD (E) Hobart – suggested people to contact re RT – Neil McLeod AD – Neil McLeod Fine Art Melb; Peter Harrison – Kimberley Art Melb, &amp; Mary Macha AD, Perth Janet Holmes a Court, Collector – Perth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2 Megan Buckley AA (E) Warmun Art Centre -Answer to query on what documents held relating to RT</td>
<td>10.3 Kim Akerman (anthro) (E) sent me a description of RT as requested. Also sent me the phone No. of Mary Macha</td>
<td>14.3 Meeting Vicki Dodd – Librarian UOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.2 Contact Christopher Hodges AD (E) Utopia Arts Sydney -re RT biographical information – confirmed</td>
<td>15.3 Meeting – GJ</td>
<td>15.3 Meeting – Gj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.2 Orientation for Post grad</td>
<td>18.3 Meeting Peter Tozer – Bathurst ex-Executive Officer of Waringarri Aboriginal Corp – Kununurra in the early 1990s – knew RT.</td>
<td>21.3 Meeting DW-C &amp; Gj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.2 Kevin Kelly AD (E) happy to talk about RT – advises he is administrator of RT estate- copyright is with Warmun Art Centre- he help as much as he can- organise visit for later in year.</td>
<td>25.3 Peter Tozer – Bathurst sent me some info as to some people to contact – new - Ian Kirkby NT – he has expertise in knowledge of the Kurrirr Kurrirr ceremony.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April</td>
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<td>June</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.4 contact with Dom Sweeney (P) ANU PhD re protocols in the Kimberley.</td>
<td>5.4 Talk Dom Sweeney – Bondi – ANU PhD student working in Kimberley. Re approach and who to see in Kununurra.</td>
<td>15.6 Report from Jenny Watson (England) (E) re exhibition of <em>Kurrirr Kurrirr</em> Boards at Salisbury International Arts Festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6.4 Canberra AIATSIS Library – research documents held. Spent 2 days looking through documents</td>
<td>9.5 Meeting DW-C</td>
<td>24.6 Talk Mary Macha (P) re time as Art Adviser in Perth – also about RT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.4 Meeting GL</td>
<td>10.5 Meeting GJ</td>
<td>26.6 Appointment (E) made Alex James AIATSIS Audio Visual to view material held.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.4 Talk Mary Macha (P) – Perth - AA and friend of RT</td>
<td>11.5 Contact with Cathy Cummins AA (P) - Waringarri Aboriginal Art – Kununurra re visit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.4 Talk Sue Stanton – Historian UOW – re protocols</td>
<td>12.5 Attended lecture (6pm) by Garry Darby, Art Historian, USyd at Mary Place Gallery <em>Paddington</em> – in conjunct with East Kimberley Art Exhibition. Met some Ab Art from Warmun</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22.5 Megan Buckley AA Warmun Art Centre (P) re visiting Art Centre</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23.5 Meeting DW-C</td>
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<td></td>
<td>25.5 Gave Guest Lecture – VISA 331 – re further research and honours.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>29.5- 22.6  - Contributor - Exhibition – <em>Works on Paper</em> – Long Gallery UOW</td>
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<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>August</td>
<td>September</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.7 Meeting DW-C</td>
<td>1.8 Meeting GJ</td>
<td>7.9 Contact AA (E) Warmun Art Centre re talking to Jane Yalunga -RT daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-11.7 Canberra AIATSIS Audio Visual – viewed material held concerning East Kimberley and Warmun</td>
<td>3.8 Kim Akerman (anthro) (E) – answer to queries re languages RT spoke.</td>
<td>8.9 Kim Akerman (anthro) (E) – gave contact no. for people to see in Kununurra: Bob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.7 John Stanton (anthro)</td>
<td>8.8 Meeting DW-C</td>
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<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>November</td>
<td>December</td>
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<td>-------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Met:</td>
<td>15.11 Meeting AL</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Kevin &amp; Jenny Kelly [AD] Red Rock Art Kununurra (admin. of RT estate) talked about RT and paintings - met [AD] Alan Griffiths</td>
<td>14.11 Phone Call Mary Macha [AD] re RT grave site etc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Aboriginal Arts – Kununurra – did volunteer work – filing in return for looking at RT documents - met several Minnie Lumai, Phyllis Ningamara, Peggy Griffiths, Mignonette Jamin, Ronnie Yundun, Alan Griffiths, Nancy Dilyai

- Pam Linklater AD
  Our Land Gallery Kununurra- met Mark Noodea, Churchill Cann talked about RT

- Ab writers – Boori Pryor & Ambrose Charlimeri (Kalumbaru) at book launch at Kununurra Library

27.10 Went to Chamberlain River gorge (El Questro) – viewed rock art

28.10 Pam Linklater AD
  (E) re info from Mark Noodea re RT and Churchill Cann

31.10 Meeting D W-C

2007

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>January</th>
<th>February</th>
<th>March</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15.1 Dr K J Olawsky (Linguist) (E) Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre – Kununurra – re skin names in</td>
<td>1. Jo Lancaster Exhib/Collect Officer, Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville (E) reply to info on 2000 exhibit.</td>
<td>1. letters sent to NGV, AGWA, NGA Directors re viewing RT paintings in collections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Kim Akerman (anthro) - (E) re queries on language</td>
<td>1.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gija/Miriwoong</strong></td>
<td><strong>April</strong></td>
<td><strong>May</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.5 Request sent (E) re viewing RT paintings at NGV – Stephen Gilchrist (cura)</td>
<td>2.5 Tina Baum (cura) (E) NGA suggest to contact Liz Campbell at Collections Study Room (CSR) to view RT paintings</td>
<td>4. Gave lecture for Aboriginal Art &amp; Culture VISA 123 Meeting AI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.1 Sydney AGNSW Meeting with Cara Pinchbeck (cura) and Jonathon Jones re viewing RT paintings in collection</td>
<td>3.5 Contact from Tina Baum (cura) (E) re viewing RT paintings – unable to do so until June sometime</td>
<td>5. Applied for Using Lives Workshop (Sept)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1 contact made to Tina Baum (cura) NGA (E) re viewing RT paintings. Unable to help at present</td>
<td>10.1 Judith Ryan (cura) (E) sent request for further info re viewing RT paintings at NGV</td>
<td>15.3 Kim Akerman (anthro) (E) replies to request on info about RT gravesite and epitaph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.3 Kim Akerman (anthro) sent back edits and suggestions (E)</td>
<td>17.3 Kim Akerman (anthro) sent back edits and suggestions (E)</td>
<td>16.1 List and images of RT paintings in AGWA from Micaela Pereira (Assistant Registrar) (E) – Clotilde Bullen (cura) and Chad Creighton (cura) Indigenous Art</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**April**
- 2.5 Tina Baum (cura) (E) NGA suggest to contact Liz Campbell at Collections Study Room (CSR) to view RT paintings
- 3.5 Contact from Tina Baum (cura) (E) re viewing RT paintings – unable to do so until June sometime
- 4. Gave lecture for Aboriginal Art & Culture VISA 123 Meeting AI
- 5. Applied for Using Lives Workshop (Sept)
- 6. Meeting G

**May**
- 15.3 Kim Akerman (anthro) (E) replies to request on info about RT gravesite and epitaph.
- 6. Contact with Leon Stainer CDU – Darwin – who accompanied RT on trip to birth country in 1995.- he has photos slides – me in

**June**
- 1.6 Christina Davidson Exec Officer ANKAA Darwin re talking about RT whom she had interviewed – to met in October
- 6. Contact with Leon Stainer CDU – Darwin – who accompanied RT on trip to birth country in 1995.- he has photos slides – me in
viewed and examined 3 x RT paintings in storage area – making maps of dotting, painting techniques etc – contact Cara Pinchbeck (cura)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paintings viewed at AGNSW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23.5 Contacted Wally Caruana (cura) who may help with getting to see RT paintings NGA – via Kim Ackerman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>27-29.5 Canberra Attended</th>
<th>Drawn Together: The Production and Collection of Indigenous Drawing Symposium, Ursula Frederick (Convener) ANU, Centre for Cross-cultural Research (CCR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Met and talked with Mary Eagle (AHist), Kim Akerman (anthro), Wally Caruana (cura), Luke Taylor (anthro &amp; cura), Mary Anne Jebb (historian), Andrew Sayer (AHist). Also John Carty – Balgo (anthro), Liam Brady (Torres St Is) (anthro).</td>
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<tr>
<td>31.5 Presenter in Discussion Panel UOW VISA 321 – Research Methods – with Djon Mundine, Derek Kreckler</td>
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<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>September</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9-12.7</td>
<td>Canberra Attended Indigenous Biography and Autobiography Conference held at NMA Canberra – Research School of Humanities ANU – met Pat Lowe – talked Ab Art and desert life</td>
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<tr>
<td>9-23.7</td>
<td>Contributor Exhibition – FCA Gallery</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>Organised visit to Darwin – Leon Stainer CDU (17.10).</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>Organised visit with Pam Linklater AD in Kununurra 18.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>Canberra Presented paper at Using Lives: A Postgraduate Workshop in Biography held at NMA in assoc with ANU</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>Nowra - Presentation to Y11 students at Christian College – about RT paintings</td>
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</table>
‘Wonder Caught the Attention; Curiosity Riveted It’— What is a Beach? 20-8 x12 digital prints.

12.7 Canberra Meeting with David Wise Senior Cons NGA - to view RT paintings – paintings had been moved – other arrangements to be made through CSR

25.7 Kim Akerman (anthro) (E) answers to queries about specific paintings and transcript of RT gravesite.

25.7 Contact from art collector Colin Laverty to look at RT paintings he has – via Pam Linklater AD

27.7 Contact (E) Kevin Kelly AD re visit in October and query about gravesite

30.7 Meeting DW-C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
<th>December</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.10 Contact from Ian Kirkby – information re skin names and language</td>
<td>11 Meeting DW-C</td>
<td>21-22 Canberra NGA to view RT paintings. <em>Cyclone Tracy 1991, Night Sky 1995 &amp; Ngamarrin 1984(The snake near Turkey Creek)</em> - Rose Montebello CSR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.10 Contact – Kevin Kelly AD re visit – rock art</td>
<td>11 Completed Annual Progress Report</td>
<td>11-31 Worked on notes from visit – mud maps, graphics etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.10 Meeting GJ</td>
<td>12 Contact with archaeologist Lee Scott Virtue re rock art sites – Bungle Bungles (Malcolm Edwards contact)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.10 Contact with archaeologist Lee Scott Virtue re rock art sites – Bungle Bungles (Malcolm Edwards contact)</td>
<td>12-13 <em>Compiled field notes from Kununurra visit. chapter</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.10 Darwin – Leon Stainer (CDU – lecturer/printer) –</td>
<td>12-13 <em>Catalogued all the documents scanned from Waringarri Aboriginal Art Centre and all the photographs from viewing rock art.</em></td>
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<td>13-14 *Worked on Biographical</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
meeting re RT, Christina Davidson (EO ANKAAA) – unable to meet

17.10 -31.10 Kununurra, Met: Kevin & Jenny Kelly AD (Red Rock Art), Pam Linklater AD (Our Land Gallery), Cathy Cummins AA (Waringarri Ab Arts) – volunteer at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts.

17-30.10 Met and talked to Aboriginal artists Nancy Nodea, Lily Karedada, Madigan Thomas, Tommy Carroll, and Rover Thomas’ daughter Jane Yalunga about RT and his art practice.

25.10 with Aboriginal artist Ju Ju Wilson visit rock art sites in Miriwoong area – Martin’s Gap and Maxwell Plains (photos).

26.10 visited Keep River National Park – Nganalam and Jinumum rock art sites (photos).

2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>January</th>
<th>February</th>
<th>March</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Working on submission for AHA/CAL Postgraduate History Prize – 6000 word.</td>
<td>1.2 Commencing a Family Tree of Rover Thomas</td>
<td>3.3 Email from Pam Linklater AD re painters in Kununurra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copy to D W-C for edit (17.1)</td>
<td>2.2 Talked to Mary Macha (Perth) AD – re records on early paintings.</td>
<td>11.3 Meeting D W-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10.1 Correspondence with Ron Barton ex supervisor of Walumba Pensioner Hostel Warmun – from Australian article. - biographical</td>
<td>5.2 Meeting with Supervisor D W-G</td>
<td>Spent month collating information collected from Mary Macha.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Correspondence with Pam Linklater AD re biographical details and art techniques and practice**

**Perth** – Stayed with Mary Macha AD in Perth – met Carly Lane of AGWA - researched catalogue sheets and documents in Macha’s files invaluable information – early RT / Paddy Jaminji paintings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 &amp; 7. 4 Correspondence (E) from Pam Linklater AD - artists comments about why they paint.</td>
<td>8.5 Canberra - View RT paintings NGA – <em>The burning site 1990 &amp; Frog Hollow Country 1987</em> - Rose Montebello CSR and Photograph all other works sighted at NGA</td>
<td>25.6 Informal meeting with Penny Harris (Head of Post Grad – Creative Arts) re progress and ethics requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5 Meeting <strong>AD</strong> (handed in Chapter 5 (E) Painting Material and Techniques and example of data sheets)</td>
<td><strong>28.5</strong> Meeting <strong>DW-C</strong> (handed in Intro Chapter)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.4. Talked <strong>AD</strong> to Mary Macha AD re several wrongly attributed RT paintings.</td>
<td>28.5 Query (E) from P Linklater AD re RT painting in upcoming Menzies Lawson Auction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.4. Talked to Dom Sweeney (PhD ANU) re Kurrrirr Kurrrirr and difficulties accessing material in institutions.</td>
<td>29.5 Gave lecture Visa332 - Research Strategies - R128 UOW 10.30am.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.4 Meeting with <strong>DW-C</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>August</td>
<td>September</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>4-5.9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Prof. Stephen Stanner re ethics</td>
<td>Meeting DWC re ethics application</td>
<td>Attended Academic Career Workshop at UOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>19.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Pam Linklater AD – re permission for information – sent form – all artists I talked with willing to sign.</td>
<td>Meeting DWC</td>
<td>Meeting Head of School Brogan Bunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14.7 – 8.8.08</strong></td>
<td><strong>19.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo Exhibition in Long Gallery – ‘Between the Tides: the marks of movement’</td>
<td>Meeting DWC</td>
<td>Submitted Ethics forms (15) for review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.11</strong></td>
<td><strong>16.11</strong></td>
<td><strong>8.9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canberra – AIATSIS Library – auction catalogues</td>
<td>Email from AD Pam Linklater re death of Daisy Biting – also about Churchill Cann illness.</td>
<td>Received Permission Form from Waringarri Aboriginal Arts – Cathy Cummins – too late for ethics application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>23.10</strong></td>
<td><strong>21.11</strong></td>
<td><strong>10.9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenter at <em>Life After Theory</em> - Discussion Panel VISA 322 with Jacky Redgate, Louise (curator at Wollongong City Gallery)</td>
<td>Inaugural RSPCA Art Exhibition – Edmund Rice College Wollongong – exhibited 3 works.</td>
<td>Presented at Faculty of Creative Arts Post Grad Week - “Research Strategies” 20min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>25.11</strong></td>
<td><strong>29.9 –17.10</strong></td>
<td><strong>24.9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting DW-C – handed in Chapter 7 Style for editing</td>
<td>Curated ‘Kimberley Ink and Ochre’ Exhibition - Waringarri Aboriginal Arts Kununurra at FCA Gallery</td>
<td>Meeting AI – handed in Chapter 7 Style for editing</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
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<td><strong>14.10</strong></td>
<td><strong>7.11</strong></td>
<td><strong>11.12</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>23.10</strong></td>
<td><strong>16.11</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.12</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenter at <em>Life After Theory</em> - Discussion Panel VISA 322 with Jacky Redgate, Louise (curator at Wollongong City Gallery)</td>
<td>Email from AD Pam Linklater re death of Daisy Biting – also about Churchill Cann illness.</td>
<td>Chapter 3 – returned – edited DW-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>25.11</strong></td>
<td><strong>21.11</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting DW-C – hand</td>
<td>Inaugural RSPCA Art Exhibition – Edmund Rice College Wollongong – exhibited 3 works.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
for handing in in Chapter 3 & 4 for editing.

### 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>January</th>
<th>February</th>
<th>March</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>6.1</strong> Canberra AIATSIS Library – check info.</td>
<td><strong>25.2</strong> Meeting D W-C handed in Chapter 1 and Intro. Worked on Style Chapters</td>
<td><strong>19.3</strong> Gave Lecture Aboriginal Art/Achaeology/History VIS321 10.30-12.30am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>28.1</strong> Edited Chapter 7 returned AL Worked on Chapter 3 &amp; 4</td>
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<td><strong>19.3</strong> Talk to GJ</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>20.4 – 10.5</strong> May Trip to East Kimberley via Qld and NT – photographed different Rock Art sites in NSW, Qld and NT...Spent 27-30.4 Waringarri Aboriginal Arts Kununurra:- talked to Cathy Cummins about art practice – looked through boxes of records relating to Thomas. Talked with artists Peggy and Alan Griffiths re painting influences – they confirmed link to rock art.</td>
<td><strong>21.5</strong> Meeting D W-C</td>
<td><strong>4.6</strong> Discussion Panel VISA 321 10.30-12.30am</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>4.6</strong> Meeting DW-C</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>July</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>September</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refined Chapters</td>
<td><strong>21.3</strong> DWC - Meeting worked on Catalogue of RT paintings</td>
<td>Worked on Catalogue of RT paintings</td>
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<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>November</td>
<td>December</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.10 <strong>DWC</strong> - Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>22.10 Final Draft submitted for checking</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2010</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
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