Becoming art: some relationships between Pacific art and Western culture

Susan Cochrane

University of Wollongong

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses

University of Wollongong

Recommended Citation

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au
1995

Becoming art: some relationships between Pacific art and Western culture

Susan Cochrane
University of Wollongong

Recommended Citation
### UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

### COPYRIGHT WARNING

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.
BECOMING ART:
SOME RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PACIFIC ART
AND WESTERN CULTURE

by

Susan Cochrane, B.A. [Macquarie], M.A.(Hons.) [Wollongong]
This thesis is concerned with the art forms of the indigenous people of the South Pacific region and their reception in the Western art-culture system. Its particular concentration is on visual art forms produced by Papua New Guinea and Australian Aboriginal artists from the 1960s to the 1990s.

It emerges that the arts of indigenous peoples of the South Pacific region have accrued a history and place in the Western art-culture system in addition to the role they continue to play within their own societies. As well, while some art forms have maintained indigenous traditions, in many instances artists have changed their methods of production and introduced new types of art into their repertoire.

During the second half of the twentieth century there has been a profound change in Western attitudes towards the visual arts created by indigenous people of the South Pacific region. Significant shifts have occurred in the Western conceptualisation and categorisation of indigenous art. The thesis aims to explain, as far as possible, why changes have occurred in the indigenous arts of the South Pacific region and to make a contribution to the improved conceptualisation of this art.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks are due to Professor Edward Cowie for accepting the proposal of this thesis in the School of Creative Arts at Wollongong University. A particular debt of gratitude is owed to Dr Harry Beran of the Department of Philosophy, Wollongong University, for his careful guidance and constructive criticism as my Supervisor.

I am grateful for the financial assistance received through a Commonwealth Postgraduate Research Award for the first year of my candidature. Also to Wollongong University for granting research funds to enable me to attend the 18th Waigani Seminar, The State of the Arts in the Pacific, at the University of Papua New Guinea in September, 1988.

Many other people have been generous with their time, knowledge and experience and I hope I have forgotten none in these acknowledgements which show my appreciation. I thank the following persons for their personal communication on some aspect of my research:

In Australia
Dr Jim Specht, Australian Museum, 1987, 1988
Dr Michael Quinnell, Queensland Museum 1989
Dr Peter Sutton, South Australian Museum 1988
Dr Chris Anderson, South Australian Museum 1992, 1993
Dr John Stanton, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Western Australia 1992, 1993
Wally Caruana, National Art Gallery 1991, 1993
Rene Free, Art Gallery of New South Wales 1988
Bernice Murphy, Museum of Contemporary Art 1991
Dr Caroline Turner, Queensland Art Gallery, 1993
Associate Professor Terry Smith, Dept. of Fine Arts, University of Sydney, 1991, 1993
Professor Ken McKinnon, Vice Chancellor, Wollongong University, 1988
Wendy Cowling, Macquarie University 1989
Anthony Wallis, Aboriginal Arts Australia, 1987
Brenda Croft, Boomallli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, 1991, 1993
Jimmy Wululu, David Malangi, George Milpurrurrru, Djuttara, Elsie Gandaba and other artists of Bulabula Aboriginal Artists Corporation, Ramingining 1993, 1994
Margaret Tuckson; Ulli and Georgina Beier; Hugh Stevenson; Bronwyn Bancroft; Hetti Perkins.
Stalin Jawa, National Art School, 1988
Marsha Berman, 1988, 1990
Hugh Stevenson, 1989 to 1994
David Lasisi, Cultural Officer, New Ireland Province, 1988
Noah Lurang, Cultural Officer, New Ireland Province, 1992, 1993
Fiji - Professor Ron Crocombe, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1987
Fergus Clunie, Director Fiji Museum, 1987
Gladys Stephen, Director Fiji Museum, 1990
Emele Vulaca, Fiji Government Handicraft Centre, 1987
Manoa Rasigatale, Pacific Harbour Cultural Centre, 1987
Jonati, 1987

Louisa Cowan, Womens' Development Centre, 1987
Timote Turu, Te Ivi Maori, 1987
Arerangi Tongia, Cook Islands National Museum, 1992, 1993
Takiora Ingram, President, Cook Islands Museum Society, 1992
Kauraka Kauraka, anthropologist, Cook Islands Government, 1992
Professor Ron Crocombe and Marjorie Crocombe, 1992

Vanuatu - Aloi Pilioko and Nicolai Michoutouchkine, 1990
Kirk Huffman, Vanuatu Cultural Centre, 1988

New Caledonia - Jean-Pierre Deteix, Agency for Kanak Development, 1992
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The objectives of the thesis</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure of the thesis</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminology</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art forms</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primitive art</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous art, indigenous people</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The South Pacific region</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The art-culture system</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifford's model of the 'art-culture system'</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research methods</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to understanding</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objections to projects of this nature</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: THE PARADIGM OF PRIMITIVE ART</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of paradigms in art history</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features of the paradigm of 'primitive' art</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of features of the paradigm</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumption of Western cultural superiority</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender bias</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art/artifact</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object-centred nature of the paradigm</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymity of tribal artists and the 'ethnographic present'</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Commodification 80
The romance of the primitive 84
Discussion 96

CHAPTER 3: THE CATEGORISATION OF INDIGENOUS ART IN THE PACIFIC REGION
1970s TO 1990s
Introduction 100
Structure 106

The commercial/non-commercial distinction 107
 ‘Non-commercial’ art in the South Pacific region 111
 Is ‘commercial’ art a valid term in the South Pacific region? 115

Categories devised by Graburn and Kaeppler which are not widely used in the South Pacific region 126

Categories widely used to describe indigenous art in the South Pacific region 130
 ‘Traditional’ art 131
 ‘Transitional’ art 141
 ‘Contemporary’ art 147
 ‘Fine’ art 155
 ‘Tourist’ art 162

Bark paintings: a test of categories 174

Aboriginal categories of bark painting 186
 Comments on the test of categorising bark paintings 192

Discussion 198

CHAPTER 4: ‘REGIMES OF VALUE’
Introduction 203
On the nature and operation of value systems 207
 Feather: the nature of value(s) 207
 Kopytoff: the ‘cultural biography of things’ 209
 Appadurai: ‘regimes of value’ 212
 Clifford: movement of objects within the Western art-culture system 214

The case studies:
 The kula, a ‘regime of value’ 216
 Presentation vessels from Aoriki, Solomon Islands, 223
 Transcendental value 226
 Two ‘frames’ for Aboriginal art 228
Movement through 'regimes of value' in the Western art-culture system: the art of Albert Namatjira 232
Discussion 241

CHAPTER 5: THE CONTINUITY OF TRADITIONAL FORMS OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION IN INDIGENOUS SOCIETIES

Introduction 244
The continuity of indigenous forms of artistic expression in indigenous societies 248

Carving 249
Body decoration 263
Tapa (decorated bark cloth) 274

Discussion 283

CHAPTER 6: INNOVATION IN ABORIGINAL ART

Introduction 288
Stanton's thesis about innovation 291
Tradition and Innovation 298

The toas of the Lake Eyre region 303
Acrylic painting movements in central Australia 305
The Krill Krill and paintings of Rover Thomas 311
The Aboriginal Memorial 313

(Re)viewing history 315
Individual creativity 320
Discussion 328

CHAPTER 7: PAPUA NEW GUINEA CONTEMPORARY ART: ITS DEVELOPMENT AND NATURE

Introduction 334
Precursors of change in the 1950s to 1960s 339
The emergence of contemporary literature and visual art 344
Towards a national cultural identity 361
The influence of expatriates and their perceptions of contemporary art 368
Georgina Beier's 'outsider artists' and other attempts to categorise Papua New Guinea contemporary art 378
The support of Papua New Guinea's educated elite for contemporary art 394
Innovation in Papua New Guinea contemporary art 400
Discussion 405
CHAPTER 11: MUSEUMS AND CULTURAL CENTRES IN PACIFIC ISLANDS COUNTRIES

Introduction 568
Review of the present circumstances of some museums and cultural centres in Pacific Island nations 570
Brief outline of selected museums and cultural centres in the South Pacific region 574

Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery 574
Fiji Museum 578
Vanuatu Cultural Centre 580
New Caledonia Museum 582
Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Centre, New Caledonia 583
The Cook Islands Museum (operated by the Cook Islands Museum and Library Society) 585
The Sir Geoffrey Henry Cultural Centre, Cook Islands 587
Pacific Harbour Cultural Centre and Marketplace, Fiji 589

Operational difficulties facing museums and cultural centres in the Pacific Islands 590
Whether existing institutions are considered relevant and appropriate to the cultures they represent 601

The establishment of museums in the South Pacific region 602
Precedents for museums in Pacific cultures 606
Problems with the representation of cultural heritage in some Pacific Islands museums 608
The influence of regional politics on the representation of national culture 610
Discussion 620

CHAPTER 12: CONCLUSIONS

Introduction 625
Realisation of the objectives of the thesis 625

Review of the aims of the thesis 628
Advantages and disadvantages of the present set of relationships between indigenous societies and their art and Western culture 648

BIBLIOGRAPHY 667
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my Supervisor, Harry Beran, for his constant support throughout its long development.