

Country into landscape: an examination of incised and painted boab nuts from the Kimberley and the development of a Western-style landscape genre through the National Museum of Australia collection.

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ABSTRACT

In comparison with other Aboriginal arts and crafts of Australia, incised and painted boab nuts from the Kimberley region of Australia have been under-researched. In the context of 'authentic' Aboriginal art practices, incised and painted boab nuts, usually sold as tourist art, have been, with notable exceptions, regarded as marginal. This view persists, despite their clear motif continuity with the rock art and tree marking of the same region. This thesis assembles scholarship from art history, the anthropology of art, geography, and Australian history, to examine stylistic change in these decorated boab nuts over the twentieth century. Using the National Museum of Australia's collection of 77 incised and painted boab nuts, accessioned or receipted in and before 2002, as well as other documentary and visual sources, this thesis investigates the development of the category of realistic Western-style landscape. Understood as a response to non-Indigenous Australian culture and as a complex site of exchange, such re-visualisation of these Aboriginal artists' profound visual narratives via their contemporaneous and historic visual images, allows for a reinterpretation of contact relations in the Kimberley. An examination of this so-called 'landscape category' is significant to the understanding of incised and painted boab nuts, not merely as tourist art, but rather as an inherent element of the continuity of Kimberley art practices, past to present and into the future. The thesis aims to position the Western-style landscapes realised on boab nuts within the Aboriginal art milieu as contributing to continuing and ongoing artistic practice. Rather than viewing these artefacts solely as evidence of assimilation and dismissing them as mere 'tourist art', they can be regarded as providing new insights into artistic practices that involve engagement between culturally diverse groups, both Indigenous and colonising. While not downplaying the undoubted assimilatory pressure that has been exerted on Aboriginal people in the Kimberley, such reconceptualisation of the Western-style landscapes on incised and painted boab nuts as contemporaneous and ongoing visual arts practice facilitates and strengthens an understanding of the more recent interpretations of contact interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people of the Kimberley, while contributing new research to and understanding of the literature on contemporary Aboriginal art practices in the region. In addition, this thesis offers a new regional study to the global literature on cross-cultural art and encounters.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed.....

Date.....

WARNING

Indigenous Australians are advised that this thesis includes images and names of people now deceased.

Quotes and concepts from older literature may include words and descriptions reflecting the historical period in which they were written and might be considered inappropriate or offensive today.

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Dedicated to my mother, Eunice 1938-2016

ABBREVIATIONS

AAB Aboriginal Arts Board
AABN Aboriginal Arts Board Newsletter
AACI Aboriginal Arts and Craft Industry
ACA Australian Council for the Arts
AIA Australian Institute of Anatomy
AGWA Art Gallery of Western Australia
AM Australian Museum
ANU Australian National University
ATSIC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
AIATSIS Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
BV Berndt Museum
DAA Department of Aboriginal Affairs
MAC Mowanjum Aboriginal Community
MAGNT Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
MASWAC Mowanjum Artists Spirit of the Wandjina Aboriginal Corporation
MV Museum Victoria
NEC National Ethnographic Collection
NGA National Gallery of Australia
NHC National Historical Collection
NMA National Museum of Australia
SAM South Australian Museum
SLWA State Library of Western Australia
SSJGHC Sisters of St John of God Heritage Centre
WAM Western Australian Museum
YWCA Young Women's Christian Association

ORTHOGRAPHY

Standardised systems or orthographies for writing specific Aboriginal languages have changed greatly over the years since first contact between Indigenous Australians and the Anglo-European newcomers. In part this results from the fact that until relatively recently all knowledge and information relating to Indigenous Australian cultures was transmitted orally, by word of mouth, and not rendered in written form (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 20 November 2015).

The spelling used for Aboriginal words has varied over time and context due to orthographic changes. Where a reference uses the old orthography it has been retained and it may also be used in the leading sentence to retain continuity; however, in general the current orthography to represent Aboriginal words is used in this text.

GLOSSARY

- Boab, baobab, boab tree,
boab nut
- The term ‘boab’ is the current term for the Australian *Adansonia gregorii*. The term ‘baobab’ was in use in the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries and is retained in some of the earlier quotes. Boab applies to the tree and the nut, which is actually a seed pod.
- Country, ‘country’
- Aboriginal English term used by Aboriginal people to refer to their affiliated territory (Choo & Owen 2003: 141). ‘Country has its own life, its own imperatives, of which humans are only one aspect’ (D. Rose 1996:10). In this thesis it is used as accepted shorthand to express an Aboriginal worldview. Country is not just the physical landscape; it is the Ancestral Past in the present day, and it includes ongoing events that shape the landscape through narratives and dreaming. It is the shaper of identity and is socially constructed. There are custodial obligations associated with location, with Country. It is politics and law. It is a moral code and regulates human relationships and their conduct.
- Decoration, decorative
- The term ‘decorated’ will be used as an alternative to ‘incised and painted’ throughout this thesis and is not to be confused with ‘decorated’ in the sense of adornment with something ornamental or beautiful only.
- Dreaming, the Dreaming,
Dreamtime, Ancestral Past,
Ancestor Beings, Creator
Beings, Lalai and Lalarn
- The term ‘Dreaming’, ‘Dreamtime’ or other variation is generally used as shorthand by scholars to facilitate discussion of a phenomenon which is part of the existence, a reality of life, as conceptualised by Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples. This is an English term and there are issues with the ‘politics of translation’ (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 30 November 2015).
- Stanner (1979) describes the Dreaming as ‘many things in one’ and a cosmogony that explains ‘how the universe became a moral system’ (Stanner 1979: 23–9). Stanner (2014) further elaborates that the Dreaming ‘corresponds to absolute or whole reality, that which comprehends everything and is adequate to everything. It is the total referent to which anything else is a relatum (Stanner 2014: 97).

Faulstich (1998) explains that the Dreaming ‘has various levels of meaning: it is the mythological realm of totemic Ancestors; it is the embodiment of metaphysical potency in the land; it is the ‘Law’ to which humans must conform; and it is the spiritual identity of the individual ... the Dreaming is a *process*, a dynamic unfolding of the universe which provides the dominant reference points for human identity, intellect, and action in relation to the land’ (Faulstich 1998: 198).

Bruno (2002) argues that ‘unlike Christian thought, the Dreaming is based on a view of the cosmos as an interrelated network without subjects or objects. This is not a world “out here”’ (Bruno 2002: 18). The Dreaming ‘conceptually signs the land by giving it a cosmogenic history and structuring law which date back to a beginning and that are passed down from generation to generation’ (Bruno 2002: 24).

Morphy (1999) notes that ‘Art in Aboriginal Australia is, in this respect, information: one of the main ways, if not the main way in which individuals are socialised into the Dreaming – the Ancestral Past – is through art. People learn about mystic events through learning meanings that are encoded in paintings and explained in song and dance’ (Morphy 1999: 13). See also the definition of *joonba/balga* below. See also Blundell and Woolagoodja (2012).

For the Worora, the Dreaming is called Lalai (Lalarn), which is ‘the beginning of time for the whole Kimberley region’; it is the ‘ancient yet ever-present era of creation that is the central feature of Aboriginal cosmologies’ (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 25).

Figurative motifs, figure,
figurative genre

Closely associated with local rock art, motifs include animals, plants, Ancestor figures and quasi-human figures. The term ‘naturalistic’ is often used interchangeably with ‘figurative’ in the early literature. Although not strictly representations of fauna, flora and humans, religious and magical beings, including Wandjina, are categorised in the figurative genre in this thesis.

Frontier, contact zone	<p>This is used as defined by Litster and Wallis (2011) as ‘any areas where colonial settlers were using the land for agricultural, mining and/or livestock, while Aboriginal people were still maintaining their traditional life-ways in the area’ (Litster & Wallis 2011: 105–6), and for the Kimberley region this included marine industries.</p> <p>Clifford (1997) commenting on museums as contact zones notes that ‘their organising structure as a <i>collection</i> becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral <i>relationship</i> – a power-charged set of exchanges of push and pull’ (Clifford 1997: 192).</p>
Genre, category, type, style	<p>Genre is ‘a way of classifying visual images into certain groups, a typology. Images that belong to the same genre share certain features’ (G. Rose 2002: 19). Category, type and style are also classificatory.</p> <p>It is important to note that the categorisation of some figurative and realistic motifs may be imprecise and is contextual within the design and through the observer’s knowledge and experience.</p>
Geometric motifs, geometric genre	<p>Non-figurative/realistic motifs related to body and weapon designs and communicate aspects of identity to other Aboriginal people. These zigzag lines forming special designs are also seen on pearl shell from the Broome area where they are called <i>ramu</i> (Akerman & Stanton 1994: 3).</p>
Gwion Gwion	<p>A figurative Kimberley rock art style pre-dating the Wandjina style (Layton 1992; Blundell & Woolagoodja 2012).</p>
Incised, carved, engraved	<p>The term ‘incised’ is used in this thesis in preference to the terms ‘engraved’ and ‘carved’, which apply to the same technique. All three terms are used in the catalogue descriptions of the National Museum of Australia.</p>
Internal innovation	<p>This is a deeply historic process of ongoing innovation, one that is inclusive of contemporary events through the reworking of ‘dreamt revelations’ (Redmond 2008: 256) and other specific types of dreaming (Glaskin 2005: 299, 305) within the <i>wunan</i> exchange processes. It is argued that these long and enduring</p>

forms of internal innovation in relation to Kimberley art practices is demonstrated through stylistic change in decorated boab nuts.

Joonba, balga

Public performance of dancing and singing; also known as corroboree in English (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 264). *Balga* is the East Kimberley name for a type of public performance and *joonba* is used at Mowanjum.

Landscape, landscape painting, Western-style landscape, see also perspective, realistic genre

Landscape encompasses both the conceptual and the physical. ‘Discussion of the historical use of the work often begins with the link between landscape and perspective in Renaissance painting’ (Cosgrove & Daniels in Gosden & Head 1994: 113), and the Western-style landscape style was considered by some to ‘be the artistic creation of the nineteenth century’ (Clark 1949: xvii).

The depiction of landscape was a significant art genre of the nineteenth century, showing the ‘natural’ world; however, it was tied to the social and political and scientific European (Western) worldview.

Ngarinyin

The Ngarinyin came from an area in the north-east of the Kimberley towards the King Leopold Ranges. Many of the Ngarinyin speakers were settled firstly at Kunmunya, then Wotjulum, Mowanjum and finally at New Site Mowanjum.

Ngarinyin is the current spelling used in Mowanjum today (Akerman 2015: 1). Ngarinyin is used in this thesis as it is the current spelling used by AIATSIS. Other spellings are used as cited. These people, along with the Worora and Wunambal, are the custodians of the Wandjina.

Perspective, Western linear perspective, linear geometry, see also planar view, frontal/profile elevation and flattened perspective, lateral motifs

Perspective is a Western art term for the use of linear geometry in depiction and became the foundation of realism in Western European visual arts. It is a way of portraying three dimensions on a flat surface by suggesting depth or distance through, for example, smaller objects in the distance on a horizon line from the observer’s point of view, juxtaposition, changes in hue in distant objects etc. It is important to note that the boab nut itself is three dimensional with the imperfections of a natural object; however

this is different to the manufactured three dimensional depiction using linear perspective.

Alternatives to linear perspectives include for example, planar (or bird's-eye or aerial) view, and flattened perspective, which do not show depth or distance from what appears in the front plane.

While boab nuts are three-dimensional in shape, however the section of a boab nut surface viewed in focus at any one time functions more like a two-dimensional plane as the edges are at an angle to the observer (Rajpoot 2015). While incising and painting are the dominant visual contribution to the three-dimensionality of the Western-style landscapes depicted, the actual boab nut itself as well as the depth of the incising of the boab nuts are also less obvious factors.

Realistic genre, Western-style realism, Western realism

The artist uses perspective and other ways to portray three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface. Motifs such as weapons, fauna and flora are portrayed in a three-dimensional way through shading and overlapping, for example, the legs of a bullock will be overlapped rather than all four legs being shown separately or in plan view, or the soles of the hooves being shown frontally or in profile rather than from underneath to show the tracks the animal makes.

The realistic genre also includes landscapes, seascapes, hunting scenes, faunal and floral figures, and other images from contemporary life or history. Akerman also calls this genre 'advanced naturalistic' (Akerman 2003: 70-1).

As noted later in the thesis, there may be continuity between figurative/naturalistic and realistic representation and both can appear on the same boab nut.

Tradition, traditional

The term 'traditional' has been used in 'European and Western society in general which while promoting and rewarding change in its own arts and sciences, project onto "folk" and "primitive" peoples a scheme of eternal stability, as though they were a kind

of natural phenomenon out of which myths are constructed’
(Graburn 1976: 13).

More recently ‘tradition’ has been used to describe societal characteristics pre-colonisation/settlement, in this case before Western European peoples, and as contrast to post-settlement changes in both the material and ontological aspects of that society.

‘Traditional’ objects and images from non-Western societies are often embedded within rituals and used in conjunction with oral and gestural performances.

Visual text, cultural text

To use an image as ‘text’, is a way of looking at the social construction of the visual and, in conjunction with ‘references in books, archival notes’, can be translated into a powerful sense of place (Taylor in Bonyhady & Griffiths 2002: 10).

‘Like the rock art sites/sights in their homeland, contemporary works on paper and canvas are legitimate cultural texts that enter into contemporary processes of Aboriginal cultural and identity politics by promoting a distinct way of apprehending the natural world’ (Blundell 2003: 174).

Objects represent events and ‘influence ideas, change values, and build relationships across cultures’ (Jebb 2008: n.p.).

Wandjina, Wanjina, Wunjina

See also Ancestral snake

Wunggurr (Rainbow Serpent), Ungud, Ungudd, Unggud

Wandjina figures are believed to represent within the traditional religious context the impression of the Wandjina spirit as it “became” the rock, beneath the surface of which it still lives (Stanton 1986a: 24) and are responsible for the fertility of the land.

The Wandjina provided the Law, the correct way to live, and introduced initiation ceremonies to the north-western Kimberley. The Ungud has a similar function in the East Kimberley.

Western, Western pictorial representation, Western landscape style

The term ‘Western’, is used as the accepted shorthand to denote the cultural-political-philosophical framework that emerged from Europe and the United Kingdom post-Enlightenment and which is

the basis of the dominant Australian culture today.

In this thesis Western landscape refers to the predominant landscape art that emerged from the nineteenth-century Victorian period at the time of settlement of the Kimberley.

Western pictorial representation fixes the viewer's distance from the object of their gaze and uses linear perspective to suggest depth on a two-dimensional surface.

Worora, Worrora, Worrorra The Worora came from the coast and offshore islands 200 kilometres north of Derby. Many of the Worora speakers were settled firstly at Kunmunya, then Wotjulum, Mowanjum and finally at New Site Mowanjum.

Worora is used in this thesis as it is the current spelling used by AIATSIS. Other spellings are used as quoted. These people, along with the Ngarinyin and Wunambul, are the custodians of the Wandjina.

Wunambul, Ungarinyin The Wunambul speakers came from north of the Prince Regent River. Many of the Wunambul speakers were settled firstly at Kunmunya, then Wotjulum, Mowanjum and finally at New Site Mowanjum.

Wunambul is used in this thesis as it is the current spelling used by AIATSIS. Other spellings are used as quoted. These people, along with the Ngarinyin and Worora, are the custodians of the Wandjina.

Wunan, wunin, wunun Blundell (1980) details the *wunan* in its broadest sense of a cognitive model which is also geographically expressed, and part of this are exchange processes (Blundell 1980: 109–15).

It 'decrees that nothing is withheld, that men and women now how to relate to one another, who they will marry and

who their children will marry' (Jebb 2008: 8).

In the Kimberley this exchange system operates within family, local groups and between separate language groups and includes men and women (Akerman 1979a: 247–50).

The most common spelling is *wunan* (for example, Blundell 1980: 111–14; Akerman, Fullagar & Van Gijn 2002; Kaberry 2004 [1939]; Glaskin 2005: 299) but can be *wurnam* (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 266).

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FRAMING THE THESIS

This thesis addresses questions of cross-cultural influences that have contributed to the historical development of Western-style landscape incised and painted on boab nuts by Aboriginal artists in the Kimberley region during the twentieth century. It is argued that this stylistic change arises from a realistic genre which developed mid-twentieth century in response to both internal and external influences on and within Kimberley Aboriginal groups, and that this change in art style is part of a much longer structure of continuity and innovation in Kimberley art practices. This raises the question of whether such Western-landscape imagery is interpretable as indicative of continuity and persistence in terms of image-making, or, rather, does this change represent a rupture with tradition?

The creation of artwork is not a passive process but rather, interactive in nature. Inevitably this is mediated by inter- and intra-group experience, and by group and individual decision-making. This is especially relevant in the case of historical circumstances in which cross-cultural encounters take place (Jules-Rosette 1984, Sculthorpe 1996, Phillips & Steiner 1999, Blundell 2003, Taçon, South & Hooper 2003). For Aboriginal people producing artwork, connection to Country is the link between the long-run structures of artistic production. This significant continuing connection to Country is demonstrable in the contemporary production of decorated boab nuts, often labelled or even sometimes derided as ‘tourist art’ and sold as such.

In this thesis both theory and argument are integrated cumulatively through a historical perspective in combination with visual analysis and a contextual approach. The complex processes entailed in cross-cultural exchange between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Kimberley can be examined through the lens of the decorated boab nut. The images embedded in this thesis are an important means of visual affirmation of the thesis’s argument that Western-style landscapes depicted on decorated boab nuts are part of an authentic historic and ongoing art practice in the Kimberley, connected to Country and responsive to cultural changes.

Questions pertaining to authenticity in artworks including their commodification, the politics of representation in visual texts, and other ‘entangled’ notions are all canvassed in this thesis. By this means, support for the argument of the embedded or entwined relationships between the decorated boab nuts and the history of the lived experiences of

the Kimberley people is demonstrated.¹ Such re-visualisation of Aboriginal artwork reaches beyond Kimberley art production, extending into the possibility of elucidation of other Aboriginal art forms, thereby potentially influencing the wider communities of Australia and globally. Since the latter part of the twentieth century there have been significant changes in Western² views of indigenous art and associated changes in museum practices (Cochrane 1995, Kaus 2004a), both of which have led to ongoing reassessment of Aboriginal art.

This thesis aims to identify concepts central to the understanding of the role of the incised and painted boab nuts produced by Aboriginal people in the Kimberley region. Tracing the history of this art form and the changing artefact/art production through both internal and external innovations have been vitally important elements of this thesis. Of equal importance are the related discussions about the development of a Western realistic genre³, and the provision of evidence of Westernised landscape⁴ imagery within the milieu of a colonised-settler society. Significantly, objects are an underutilised resource that can illuminate relationships between makers, collectors and the broader socio-visual environment. The examination of the National Museum of Australia's (NMA) boab nut collections, as well as relationships that exist/existed between the production of decorated boab nuts and the collection practices of the associated settler society are important to this thesis. This integrated approach also provides a space for observations of relevant socio-political and economic interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups. The rationale for examining the National Museum of Australia Collection of boab nuts collected before 2002 is detailed in Chapter 2. With a few early exceptions, this is an

¹ There are numerous precedents in the academic literature to the approach that has been taken in this thesis, for example the work of Thomas (1999). Scholarship that employs historical perspectives in combination with artefact analysis as a means of identifying and describing patterns of continuity and innovation include, for example, Vastokas (1994); Lang (1999); Taçon, South & Hooper (2003); and Carr (2010). Lilje (2013) in examining fibre skirts in Papua New Guinean museums states that by using object analysis and written and oral sources a more comprehensive and 'fruitful' view of 'negotiations and actions in response to changing circumstance' (Lilje 2013: 2) is made, and demonstrates 'how aspects of peoples' lives and practices can be linked to changes in the material properties of objects' (Lilje 2013: 3).

² The term 'Western' is used as the accepted shorthand to denote the cultural-political-philosophical framework that arose from Europe and the United Kingdom post-Enlightenment and which is the basis of the dominant Australian culture today.

³ The 'realistic genre', in which artists use elements of Western perspective and alternate ways of portraying three dimensions on a two-dimensional surfaces, is defined and contextualised in Chapters 1, 3, 4 and 5. Although the boab nut itself is a three dimensional object, the view being observed at any one time resembles a two dimensional plane. See Glossary.

⁴ Landscape encompasses both the conceptual and the physical. Discussion of the historical use of the word often begins with 'the link between landscape and perspective in Renaissance painting' (Cosgrove & Daniels in Gosden & Head 1994: 113). With topographical landscape and its recording (Harley 1994), realistic landscape arguably became 'the chief artistic creation of the nineteenth century' (Clark 1949: xvii) at the time when the Kimberley was first being settled. See Mitchell (2002: 10) for the relationship between this chief 'artistic creation' and European imperialism. For further discussion see Chapters 4 and 5.

examination of the first century of boab nut collection that appears in Australian museums and galleries today, and chronologically coincides with the first 100 years of increasingly systemic cross-cultural encounters and engagement in the Kimberley.

In terms of scholarship, this thesis contributes to the body of research into art objects at a regional level in Australia, for example Akerman & Stanton 1994; Kleinert 1994; Sculthorpe 1996; Hamby & Young 2001; Taçon, South & Hooper 2003; Carr 2010; and internationally, for example Blundell 1994; Vastokas 1994; Thomas 1999; Smith & Stevenson 2010; Lilje 2013. The importance of this research is in providing an examination of individual and group experiences in art practices at a regional level, and providing a discussion on cross-cultural interaction in a way that is useful for investigation of Aboriginal arts labelled as 'tourist' or 'assimilated' art. The results of this examination and analysis of the incised and painted boab nuts held in the National Museum of Australia suggest the desirability of other Aboriginal 'tourist arts' being re-viewed, thereby, one would hope contributing new insights into the complex sites of exchange and engagement between culturally diverse groups.

Chapter outlines

Chapter 1 introduces the environment, roles and themes of incised and painted boab nuts. It also outlines the aims and limitations of the thesis and reviews the primary areas of scholarship and research into decorated boab nuts. This chapter begins the discussion of the associated academic literature which is integrated throughout the thesis.

Chapter 2 extends the discussion of the approach of this thesis while also canvassing the complementary methodology used to examine incised and painted boab nuts in the National Museum of Australia collections. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches are used to analyse the collection of 77 boab nuts accessioned or receipted in or before 2002. A description of the photographic methods used to provide evidence that a new genre developed in the twentieth century is detailed. Further rationale for the use of a narrative-descriptive case study is also presented.

Chapter 3 builds upon the previous chapter by including descriptions of decorated boab nuts and their genres, techniques used in the making, and their functions. This chapter demonstrates the various genres associated with decorated boab nuts and details the incising styles and painting styles, providing the necessary context for a discussion of

Kimberley art practice in Chapter 5. The relationship of boab nut motifs to the motifs found in Kimberley rock art, tree marking and body painting designs are also investigated.

An overview of the history of scholarship and observations about the boab tree in the landscape, in the Ancestral Past, and in visual art, are also provided here and integrated into the overall argument.

Chapter 4 consolidates and expands on the earlier chapters by addressing key concepts in the ongoing debate about the authenticity of this art form, the development of a Western realistic genre, and finally, by addressing the issue of ‘authenticity’ in relation to the ‘Western-style’ landscape category. The respective roles of innovation and exchange, the function of images as visual texts, questions relating to the introduction of Western perspective and landscape art are examined here. The resilient idea of visual art as an identity marker, and the continuing overarching significance of an affiliation with Country are also discussed in this chapter. These concepts are examined in general terms, but also in relation to specific Kimberley practices and history.

Chapter 5 expands this further by discussing cross-cultural influences in the Kimberley region historically and how these have been embraced (or otherwise) and in some cases integrated into ongoing art practice. Non-Western contact, including interaction with other Aboriginal groups, is briefly examined as part of the historic Kimberley background. The pastoral, pearling and mining industries, and missionary activity beginning from settlement and continuing into the later twentieth century, and their impact on Kimberley Aboriginal populations are examined. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the establishment of prisons and hospitals, as well as restrictive changes to legislation affecting Aboriginal lives. The Second World War, the growth of town infrastructure, and the mobility of Aboriginal people and tourists will be examined. The establishment of an art industry, initially through missionary enterprise, will be investigated; and the development of art centres⁵ in the late 1970s and 1980s will be considered. These multiple influences,

⁵ The establishment of art centres in the Kimberley and their effect on the art industry and economic development in remote Australia is in itself a substantial research area. As the NMA collections under discussion contain only boab nuts that were collected as late as the mid-1970s any reference to art centres established after 1980 will be brief. For further details on art centres and the economy in the then contemporary context see publications by Jon Altman (for example, Altman 2004).

sometimes competing, are presented as constituting a nexus in which no individual part can be entirely disentangled from the whole. Although the Kimberley as a whole will be examined, the major focus is on the north-west region.

Chapter 6 moves from the general to the specific by examining in detail a community of boab nut artists and their relationship to the non-Indigenous influences during the 1960s-70s outlined in the previous chapter. The boab nut-producing community of Mowanjum is located close to the township of Derby and cross-cultural interactions in that arena are investigated. Contemporary art production and cultural performances will be contextualised in the light of the historical exemplars provided by the decorated boab nuts from Mowanjum and Derby that are held in the National Museum of Australia collections. The cumulative nature of the argument presented in this thesis becomes evident in this chapter in that stylistic change is not conceptualised as constituting a major rupture with past practice. Rather, it is argued that present practice constitutes evidence of the adaptive ability of these Kimberley artists to contemporary circumstances, indicated by their integration of present-day events and influence into a much older world view and belief system, which remains founded on the centrality of Country at the epistemic level.

Chapter 7 changes focus from makers to specific collectors and collections, examining the National Museum of Australia as an institution with particular collection practices, providing the context for its boab collections and collectors. The colonial views that shaped the museum pre-NMA as an institution and its infrastructure in Australia will be briefly investigated. The collectors and collection practices are placed into the broader context of the NMA collections, as a means of integrating all of the elements that comprise this cumulative narrative. The NMA boab nuts with non-Western-style and Western-style landscapes are examined and linked to the particular historical circumstances co-existing in the Kimberley.

Chapter 8 discusses the impact of Western realism on Aboriginal art practices, and examines incised and painted boab nuts with planar view, frontal/profile elevated landscapes with lateral elements, flattened perspective, and scale variations, as well as the Western-style landscape designs and motifs. It maintains and extends the principal argument of the thesis, which is that while superficially much of this change may appear to be assimilatory in nature, at the deepest structural level the centrality of Country and

identity lodged in Country has remained unchanged. It is inarguable that this stylistic change has occurred in part as a response to cross cultural contact; however, the epistemological content of the incised and painted boab nuts under discussion in the later twentieth century remains embedded in what is important to the Aboriginal people of the Kimberley.

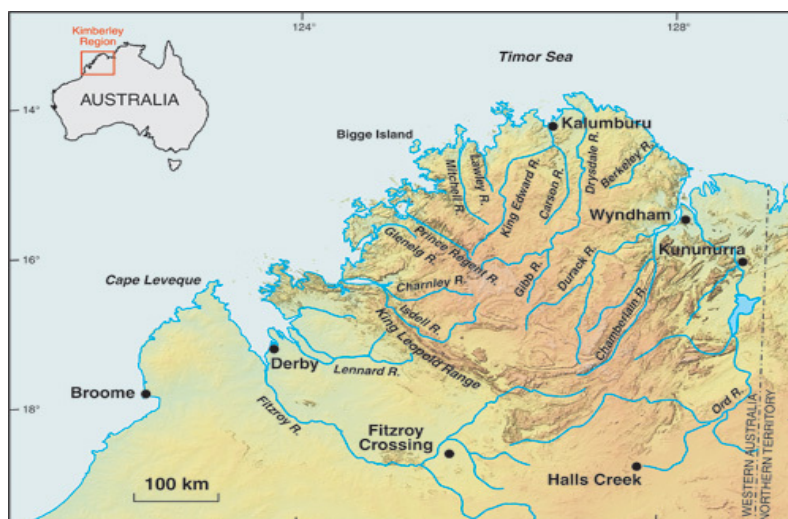
Chapter 9 summarises the conclusions made by the cumulative argument presented in this thesis, augmented by images of incised and painted boab nuts and other Kimberley imagery.

CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO INCISED AND PAINTED BOAB NUTS

This chapter introduces decorated boab nuts within their environmental contexts and commences the discussion of the literature. Areas of research that have proved successful as means of understanding and providing evidence that decorated boab nuts should be considered as an integral part of ‘authentic’ historical and ongoing artistic practice will be identified.

Decorated boab nuts as artworks: roles and themes

Depicted in journals of exploration, anthropological field notes, in reminiscences of pastoral life in the early twentieth century, in more recent scholarly books and in art, the boab or baobab tree has been an icon of increasing significance in Australian culture since the later twentieth century. The term ‘boab’ is the current term for the Australian tree, *Adansonia gregorii*. ‘Baobab’ was in use in the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries. The boab tree has a number of different Aboriginal names depending on the language group, for example at Kalumburu it is called *djungeri* (Crawford 1982: 58). The boab tree, often described as having a gouty or grotesque shape, occurs naturally in the Kimberley region of Western Australia (Map 1.1), in the north-west between Broome and just past Kununurra into the borderland of the Northern Territory (Figs 1.1 & 1.2).⁶



Map 1.1: The Kimberley region⁷ (Kimberley Society n.d.)

⁶ For a comprehensive description of boab trees see *The Boab Tree* (Lowe 1998) and Lang (1999).

⁷ The Kimberley region is approximately 423,500 square kilometres from Broome in the west, to the Northern Territory border in the east, and from the edge of the Great Sandy Desert in the south, to the islands off the northern coast. This region spans many language groups; see Map 5.1 in Chapter 5.



Fig 1.1: Boab trees near Derby, 1979
 Australian News and Information Bureau, Canberra
 NAA: A6135, K15/8/79/10
 National Archives of Australia

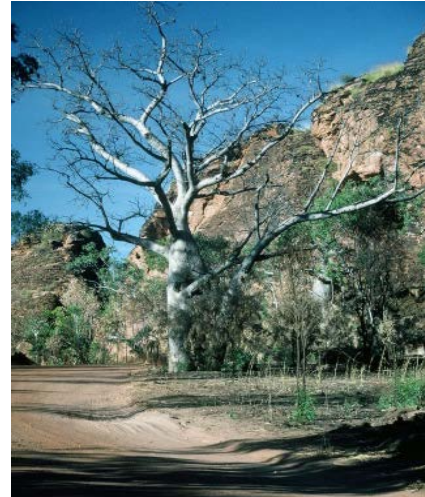


Fig 1.2: Boab tree near Kununurra, 1997
 Lang Private Collection

The tree is an obvious focal point in the landscape, being a tall tree with a beautiful creamy flower, which produces large seed pods that hang like ornaments in the branches. It is these seed pods, usually called nuts, which are collected by local Aboriginal artists for incising and painting (Fig. 1.3). The nuts are oval to round in shape and come in many shades of brown. They vary in size from approximately 10 to 30 cm from proximal to distal ends.



Fig 1.3: Boab nuts (seed pods), 1997
 Lang Private Collection

The themes portrayed on decorated⁸ boab nuts include contemporary observations of life in the Kimberley, historic narratives, as well as the faunal, floral and bipedal motifs that are embedded in the Ancestral Past.⁹ Stanner (1979) describes the Ancestral Past ‘the

⁸ The term ‘decorated’ will be used as an alternative to ‘incised and painted’ throughout this thesis and is not to be confused with ‘decorated’ in the sense of adornment with something ornamental or beautiful only.

⁹ The term ‘Dreaming’, ‘Dreamtime’, ‘Ancestral Past’ or other variation is generally used as shorthand by scholars to facilitate discussion of a phenomenon which is part of the existence, a reality of life, as conceptualised by Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples. The Worora call this creative period Lalai (Blundell 2003: 155; Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 23–7; Jebb & MAC 2008: 161).

Dreaming’ as a cosmogony that explains ‘how the universe became a moral system’

(Stanner 1979: 23–9). Faulstich (1998) explains that the Dreaming:

has various levels of meaning: it is the mythological realm of totemic Ancestors; it is the embodiment of metaphysical potency in the land; it is the ‘Law’ to which humans must conform; and it is the spiritual identity of the individual ... the Dreaming is a *process*, a dynamic unfolding of the universe which provides the dominant reference points for human identity, intellect, and action in relation to the land. (Faulstich 1998: 198)

In regards to artwork, Caruana (1993) affirms this relationship to identity in that:

Art is an expression of knowledge, and hence a statement of authority. Through the use of ancestrally inherited designs, artists assert their identity, and their rights and responsibilities. They also define the relationships between individuals and groups, and affirm their connections to the land and the Dreaming... [and] with varying degrees of modification...into the making of art for the public domain. (Caruana 1995: 14-5)

Therefore decorated boab nuts are important economic and political statements. Through the depiction of Dreaming narratives the producer of these artworks performs obligations inherent in the ‘Law’ and confirms the artist’s relationship to, and identification with, their Country¹⁰. Country is not just the physical landscape and there are custodial obligations associated with location, with Country.

Artefact/artworks have been a medium for interaction between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people, impacting on the economic and political circumstances and identity of both groups over time. For Aboriginal people this is connection to Country through the forms produced, the art practice itself, and the imagery incised¹¹, or painted. Morphy (1999) notes that:

Art in Aboriginal Australia is, in this respect, information: one of the main ways, if not the main way in which individuals are socialised into the Dreaming – the Ancestral Past – is through art. People learn about mystic events through learning meanings that are encoded in paintings and explained in song and dance. (Morphy 1999: 13)

For example, the production of artworks for sale allowed Aboriginal people, many of whom had been removed from their land and were unable to fulfil their custodial

¹⁰ The term Country or ‘country’ is used as an accepted shorthand to express an Aboriginal view of Country as the Ancestral Past in the present day, and this includes ongoing events that shape the landscape through narratives and dreaming. It is the shaper of identity and is socially constructed. This worldview is discussed in Chapter 4.

¹¹ The term ‘incised’ is used by Lang (1999) and Jebb (2006), and is the same technique described as ‘engraved’ by Akerman (1993) and ‘carved’ by Sculthorpe (1990), and earlier observed first-hand and described in 1916 as ‘incising’ by Basedow (1925). All three terms are used in the National Museum of Australia catalogue descriptions.

obligations being away from Country, to maintain this connection to Country and to the knowledge of resources.

As explained earlier, by examining the National Museum of Australia's collection of 77 decorated boab nuts accessioned or receipted in or before 2002, this thesis aims to position the Western-style landscape genre depicted on some of these decorated nuts as one of the ongoing art practices in the Kimberley region. In excavating below the surface of the 'tourist art' label, the motifs themselves reveal this genre as not merely an adaptive approach to colonial and post-colonial conditions but as a re-visualisation of profound narratives, as well as a record of more recent events and observations of socio-political interactions with non-Indigenous groups.

Visual imagery on decorated boab nuts can be placed into three major categories or genres: geometric, figurative, and realistic (or advanced naturalistic).¹² The last of these categories has been ubiquitous since the mid-twentieth century. The two earlier style categories have been observed being used in conjunction or individually. The traditional motifs are either geometric, for example, mazes and roundel designs (Fig. 1.4), or figurative, for example, animals, plants and Ancestor figures (Fig. 1.5). Early examples of incised boab nuts have motifs and styles very closely associated with local rock art, body decoration, tree marking and some forms of traditional wooden implements, while the now predominant realistic genre includes landscapes, seascapes, hunting scenes, faunal and floral figures, and other images from contemporary life or history (Figs 1.6 & 1.7). In twentieth-century Australia the pressure of assimilatory policy and practice was immense, but all over the Kimberley instances of a two-way adjustive relationship developed in the production of artefacts/artworks.¹³ This realistic genre reflects the artist's vision embedded in both their Ancestral Past and their lifestyle experiences.

¹² The term 'naturalistic' is often used interchangeably with 'figurative' in the early literature. To be clear and to reflect the visual style, the terms 'figurative' and 'realistic' are therefore used in this thesis. Understandably there may be an issue with the pejorative aspects of the word 'realistic' in this context as an opposite of words such as naive, crude, primitive etc., but that is not intended. For further discussion of these terms see Chapters 3 and 4; additional examples of how these terms are used can be examined in Akerman's 'Jack Wherra: Quiet Storyteller and Carver of Boab Nuts', *The John McCaffrey Collection of Kimberley Art* (2003: 70–1); Akerman & Stanton's *Riji and Jakoli: Kimberley Pearlshell in Aboriginal Australia* (1994: 40); Lang's *Meandering Paths: An exploration of incised boab nuts from the Kimberley, WA* (1999); and Jebb's 'Jack Wherra's Boab Nut Carving. A Cross-Cultural History' (2006: 697–715).

¹³ This assimilatory pressure is discussed in Chapters 4 and 5; however, it is the Aboriginal response using long enduring innovative practices as demonstrated in their art practices that is the focus of this thesis.

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Fig. 1.4: Example of the geometric genre [c. 1940]¹⁴, North-west Australia
L 160mm x W 65mm x D 55mm
Dr. Robert Wishart Collection
NMA 1985.0102.0423

Fig 1.5: Example of the figurative genre [1914, North-west Australia]
L 180mm x W 90mm x D 100mm
E. Milne Collection
NMA 1985.0059.0400



Fig 1.6: Example of the realistic genre 1966–71, Mowanjum
L 175mm x W 110m x D 105mm
Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1
NMA 1982.0092.0001

Fig 1.7: Example of Western-style realistic landscape [c. 1970s, North-west Australia]
L 195mm x W 95mm x D 90mm
Enid Bowden Collection
NMA 1987.0050.0313

¹⁴ The use of [] in image captions denotes supplementary data to that provided by the National Museum of Australia database, and the documentation of the research supporting these additions can be found in the Appendix under my research notes. All captions contain data as cited in their museum catalogues and therefore may appear inconsistent.

As observed in the literature globally, artefacts/artworks made for internal use quite often differ in characteristics from those created and made for exchange and sale externally (Stewart 1993; Phillips & Steiner 1999). This is not verifiable in the decorated boab nut field due to the small number of very early examples being extant and generally poorly provenanced; however, the surviving boab nuts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in museums around Australia and overseas were decorated with more geometric motifs, sometimes in conjunction with figurative elements, which were related to body and weapon adornment and communicated aspects of identity to other Aboriginal people. Those made recently, in part for external consumption, are dominated by figurative and/or realistic motifs. The need for cross-cultural ‘legibility’ of designs has been heightened by the external consumption of the decorated boab nuts by collectors and others. This concept is discussed further and argued as a significant factor in Chapter 4.

The aim of this thesis

The aim of this thesis is to assess the evidence for decorated boab nuts to be considered as part of an authentic historic and ongoing art practice in the Kimberley, one which is connected to the aesthetics of rock art and tree marking, but responsive to cultural changes. This is in contrast to their being considered as evidence of an ‘assimilation’ practice. The argument will demonstrate that the Western-style landscape imagery that developed in the mid-twentieth century is a response to an encircling non-Indigenous Australian culture, while simultaneously remaining deeply embedded in the Kimberley art practice and local Aboriginal communities. This involves socially constructed meaning as well as engaging profound narratives in both contemporaneous and historic visual images.

By examining the Western-style landscape genre in decorated boab nuts and its place in the Kimberley milieu, it is hoped to remove the label ‘assimilated craft’ or ‘tourist art’ and to place the incised and painted boab nuts in the broader context of a contemporaneous and ongoing art practice, and further illustrate how the visual arts enhance and strengthen the more recent understandings of frontier/contact interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people of the Kimberley.

Motivation for examining the thesis question

The idea for this doctoral thesis arose from my honours thesis examining the incised boab nuts held in the South Australian Museum (SAM) (Lang 1999) and an associated field trip to the Kimberley in 1997. During my time at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts in Kununurra, I

had the great pleasure of meeting a number of artists, especially Alan and Peggy Griffiths. I am most grateful to them for taking the time to examine photographs of the incised boab nuts from the South Australian Museum collection and undertaking to explain a number of designs to me. Sitting on the verandah and talking with artists, then helping in the Art Centre and interviewing the coordinator Kevin Kelly, was the highlight of my field trip. This contextualisation of the boab nuts outside of a museum environment set alight my passion for these artworks. This thesis provides an opportunity to expand the continuing interest of, and dialogue with, scholars over these fascinating objects. It is important to note that the foundation for part of Chapter 5: Kimberley History and Art Practice was laid during my fieldwork in 1997 and is the platform from which further questions emerged, becoming the starting point for testing the question of whether a realistic Western-style landscape genre had developed in decorated boab nut imagery in response to lived events in the Kimberley and the Australian narrative.

Limitations of the thesis

There are a number of limitations to this thesis. Firstly, I acknowledge issues of the non-Indigenous scholar as ‘other’ and of their ability to speak for Indigenous groups (Anderson 1995). Second, at the time of data collection, there was limited access to other major state collections and the primary documentation attached to the decorated boab nuts for comparison with that of the National Museum of Australia. This constraint is discussed in Chapter 2: Methodology. In museum-based research the lack of engagement with the oral¹⁵, performative and musical dimensions for interpretation of these artworks is unavoidable, given the colonial foundations of museum collections in Australia; indeed the lack of written documentation is considerable. Third, other general questions of larger scope, for example, what is art, who defines cultural objects as art, amongst others, are not examined at length within this thesis.¹⁶ Issues of gender have only briefly been mentioned and this would be a productive research question in its own right.¹⁷

¹⁵ Jebb (2002) make it clear that, while some narratives are ‘immutable, oral testimony is very much alive and dynamic in the Kimberley region’ (Jebb 2002: 16). Museum practices have been changing over the last couple of decades with oral and audio-visual histories/biographies of objects being collected and/or re-associated with the items.

¹⁶ For example, see Hall (2003), Clifford (1985), Myers (2002) and Taçon (1991).

¹⁷ There has been increasing research in recent years into women’s roles and contributions in non-Western artwork, for examples of Aboriginal women’s contributions see Broun (1995), Eickelkamp (1999), and Nugent (2011). See Lang (1999: 57-61) for a discussion of gender and art production at Waringarri Aboriginal Artists in the mid-1990s where the number of women artists rose to 60% of art producers.

The literature

Australian Aboriginal material culture has been seen to have a long history of exchange and commodification (for example, Berndt & Berndt 1988; Thomas 1991 & 1999; Akerman 1993; Kleinert 2000; Coleman 2001; Taçon, South & Hooper 2003; Edmonds 2007). In particular, this is applicable to the Kimberley region of Australia from the late nineteenth century with the introduction and development of missions, settlements, pastoral and agricultural concerns, and industries including pearl shell harvesting and meat processing; and later mining and tourism. Across Australia, Aboriginal artefacts and artworks have been collected and documented by explorers, anthropologists and archaeologists, scientists and others; for example, material from the Central and Western Deserts region (Rose 1950; Brokensha 1978; Sculthorpe 1996; Eickelkamp 1999; Myers 2002; Weichart 2004; Nicholls 2009), Northern Territory (Williams 1976; Hamby & Young 2001; Taçon & Davies 2004; Morphy 2007; L. Taylor 2008; Ward & Crocombe 2008), the eastern states (Kleinert 2002; Taçon, South & Hooper 2003; P. Jones 2007; Gibson 2008; Nugent 2011), South Australia (P. Jones 1996; Baylis 2013) and Western Australia (Davidson 1937; Stanton 1986; Akerman 1993; Akerman & Stanton 1994, Lang 1999 & 2005; Akerman, Fullagar & Van Gijn 2002; Jebb 2006). Examples and observations can be found from the early nineteenth century in diaries, academic journals and newspapers, through to the artists themselves adding to scholarly works, exhibitions and magazines, and the Internet from the later twentieth century.¹⁸ For example, Herbert Basedow reported on decorated boab nut designs and their production and function in 1925 in *The Australian Aboriginal* and, in his 1918 article based on his expedition to north-western Australia was able to report that boab nuts ‘are eagerly sought after by the local residents who send them as curios to their friends living south or in the mother country’ (Basedow 1918: 217).

Primary areas of scholarship

The research question posed for this study touches upon primary areas of scholarship on the Aboriginal art/artefact relationship to issues of authenticity and innovation; the object and its collection as meaningful social constructs, which allows insight into Indigenous

¹⁸ Examples of these works regarding the Kimberley include King (1827), Clements (1903), Basedow (1925), Davidson (1937), Crawford (1968), Nangan & Edwards (1976), Lowe (1987), Sculthorpe (1990), Akerman (1993), Mowaljarlai and Malnic (1993), Lang (1999), Blundell and Woolagoodja (2005), Jebb (2006) and others. Most art galleries, private and state, have an online presence often with interviews with the artists they represent, for example, <http://www.waringarriarts.com.au/artists/> and http://www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/events_programs/Desert-River-Sea.asp.

responses to contemporary environments; landscape and geography scholarship; the history of the Kimberley region; and anthropology.

Research by art historians, historians and anthropologists includes Clark (1949), Graburn (1974¹⁹ & 1999), Ben-Amos (1977), Thomas (1991), Phillips (1995), Phillips and Steiner (1999), and Steiner (2001); and in Australia by Davidson (1937), Black (1964), Munn (1966), Blundell (1975), Crawford (1968), Akerman (1979 & 1993), Berndt and Stanton (1980), Megaw (1986), Stanton (1986, 1988 & 1989), Berndt and Berndt (1988), Morphy (1991, 1992, 1995, 1999 & 2007), D. Rose (1996), L. Taylor (1996 & 2008), Sutton (1988), Myers (2002 & 2006), and Clarke (2003). Foundational to this thesis is the argument for decorated boab nuts to be considered as part of a continuing and ongoing art practice and therefore embedded in Country. Bringing concepts to this discussion of decorated boab nuts in the realistic Western-style landscape ‘being’ Country are landscape geographers such as Appleton (1975) and Cosgrove (1985) and historians, for example, Schama (1995) and Jebb (2008), as well as scholars from other disciplines such as landscape architecture (Nassauer 1995), archaeology (C. Smith 1989; Taçon, South & Hooper 2003; Tilley 2004; P. Smith 2007), visual culture (Berger 1973; Mitchell 1980; Pink 2001; Rose 2002 & 2008), aesthetics (Coleman 2004; K. Taylor 2008), museology and collecting (Pearce 1992 & 1994; Berry 2005; Kaus 2014), tourism (Altman 1990; Hume 2009 & 2013; Newstead 2014) and the artists themselves (Nangan & Edwards 1976; Utemorra et al. 1980; Mowaljarlai & Malnic 1993; Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005), many of whom have been researching and evaluating changing art production and markets. Change within and between cultural groups has recently been conceptualised as representing structural components of a society with contextual meaning(s) rather than the more historical view of an ‘apolitical study of aesthetic forms’ (Price 2001: 127). This context should include documentation such as archival material or artists’ biographies, oral history and interviews, images, performances, or even the results of analyses of taxonomy in museums or the prices quoted and made at auction.

In the later years of the twentieth century, researchers unveiled the historical underpinnings of the ‘Primitive Other’ (for example, Torgovicnick 1990; Shiner 1994; Young 1995; Price 2001²⁰), which includes the view of the nature of authenticity²¹ as tradition²², the myth of

¹⁹ Graburn’s seminal work *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural expressions from the Fourth World* (1976) establishes within the overall field of art a number of genres, which includes tourist art and souvenirs as genuine expressions of art style.

²⁰ The second edition of Sally Price’s *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* has been used in this thesis; however it must be noted that the first edition was published in 1989 at the forefront of this particular research area.

²¹ The authenticity debate is elaborated upon in Chapter 4.

the pre-contact static 'Primitive', and the binary distinction between art and craft. Post-modern thought questions essentialism and has allowed for discussion on the instability of both thought practices and concepts of authority (Filmer et al. 1998: 35). Over time in Australia, the earlier categorisation of objects produced by Aboriginal people as items of ethnographical interest and/or curiosity has for the most part migrated to 'art' within the commercial gallery and auction system. More recently, researchers have looked at the collecting and display of such art within both the museum context (Philp 2007; Kaus 2014) and as consumption (Pearce 1995; Belk & Groves 1999; Fisher 2014). Most important, was the re-examination by researchers of how consumption and collecting function. This followed Appadurai's (1986) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, an edited collection which recontextualised the commodification process as the 'social lives of things' and emphasised the ways by which objects are transformed over their life span, with migrations, for example, between exchange and consumption and vice versa.

While earlier views of authenticity weakened (Glaskin 2005), these were not completely negated, as an Australian movement in the later part of the twentieth century coincided with changes in the political and the social will. The environment changed, with the increased need to negotiate with Aboriginal people for industry, mining and tourism reasons, and, most recently, with a functional change with the armchair viewing of the world through the Internet influencing most Australians in the twenty-first century.²³

The main period of relevant scholarship in the authenticity of art was in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which matured over the 30 years from the initial ground-breaking works of the 1970s (for example, Graburn 1976; Ben-Amos 1977). Scholars such as Jules-Rosette (1984), Stewart (1984), Morphy (1989 & 2007), Thomas (1991 & 1999), Myers (1991, 2002 & 2006), Shiner (1994), Phillips and Steiner (1999), and Coleman (2001) address artefacts/art/craft categories within their operation as commodities and consequently the shifting authenticities in art, which coincided with increasing social and political changes, allowing the opportunity for Indigenous self-determination and the increasingly loud voices of the artists to be heard. Other researchers have noted the often large differences

²² Glaskin (2005) discusses two views of tradition, the earlier view, but still with some current use, as a core of customs and values 'passively and unreflectively' handed down the generations; the other is based on the creative aspects of culture as a 'spectrum', at one end, and having continuity with prior meanings and the 'selective representation' of the past against contemporary priorities (Glaskin 2005: 297).

²³ Gibson (2008) argues that in rural and urban regions authenticity in art and culture still grappled with these earlier view of authenticity and 'people on the ground continue to live with their resonances' (Gibson 2008: 295).

between remote and urban/regional Aboriginal art as ‘authentic’, and the importance of the artist’s ongoing connection to ‘heritage’ and their Country (Fisher 2012: 255; see also Lane & Waitt 2001; Chapman 2006: 219; Butler 2008) and the relationship to the art/craft binary.

Twentieth-century research had focused on some forms of the then contemporary material culture as ‘assimilated’ or ‘tourist’ crafts.²⁴ Batiks (Eickelkamp 1999), pokerwork (Sculthorpe 1996), shell work (Nash 2010; Nugent 2011), beads and string (Hamby & Young 2001), feather flowers (Kleinert 2000), wood carving (Taçon, South & Hooper 2003) and incised emu eggs (Nangan & Edwards 1976; Baylis 2013) are examples where there has been much discussion on the relationship between these objects as either ‘tourist art’²⁵ or as part of an ongoing trajectory of artistic expression by the artists. Even those artworks that are seen by non-Indigenous people as ‘traditional’ art, such as the bark paintings of Arnhem Land and the acrylic paintings of the Central and Western Deserts, have accommodated change in part as a response to Western contact (Williams 1976; P. Jones 1992; Thomas 1999; Myers 2002; Morphy 2007; L. Taylor 2008; Wildburger 2009).

Colonial practices stimulated commodification of the artefact/art as the souvenir (Benson 2001; Swanson & Timothy 2012), through exchange, appropriation or theft, and then eventually through increased production, as tourist art. This was not only a response to the settler-colonial society, as a non-capitalist economic system of exchange was already deeply embedded within Aboriginal society through the circulation of ceremony and material goods, allowing for transformations and innovation, especially in regard to reciprocity (Micha 1970; Shaw 1986; Myers 1991; Poirier 1992; Anderson 1995a; Thomas 1999; Glaskin 2005; Kleinert 2010).

With increasing emphasis on contextual meaning, the deep narrative of objects – that holistic approach through image, text, object biography, oral narratives, history, and the object’s relationship with identity (Coleman 2001, Kolig 2003, Edmonds 2007), resistance (Poirier 2010), and remembering (Gill, Paterson & Kennedy 2001, Harrison 2004) – begins to come into play as factors worthy of research consideration. As Thomas (1991) discusses

²⁴ Graburn (1976) developed a number of categories of art, including functional fine arts, commercial fine arts, souvenir arts, and assimilated fine arts, where the dominant society’s forms are used (Graburn 1976: 7; Williams 1976: 282). Discussion of categories of art/craft and their relationship to authenticity are discussed at length in Chapter 4.

²⁵ Tourist art may be defined as artefacts not only made for sale to outsiders but made in a style adapted to consumer’s tastes (Graburn 1976) and hence operates under a belittling ‘tourist art’ label (Shiner 1994: 228).

in *Entangled Objects*, the historical encounters between Pacific and European people and objects (Thomas 1991; see also Strathern 1994: 1014; Jebb 2002: 13) were not one-sided.

Further to this, the history of landscape and landscape art scholarship has been extensive and fruitful, investigating aspects of the aesthetic, physical, geographic, political and the cultural. In the nineteenth century the dominant approach was permeated with nationalistic, religious, scientific and evolutionary ideology (Harley 1994; Noyes & Abrahams 1999). Over time research has moved from dealing with subjects such as the picturesque, to environmental and textual concerns. Writers have embraced these themes at different times and with locations such as the United Kingdom, Europe and United States considered, with later scholarship dealing with Africa and the Asia-Pacific regions. As Taylor (2008) notes, a 'common denominator in this is human attachment to landscape and how we find identity in landscape and place' (K. Taylor 2008: 1).

By the twentieth century, the interpretation of landscape beyond that of a view or a picture had gained recognition (for example, Hoskins 1955; Cosgrove 1985). Hoskins (1955) determined that landscape was a palimpsest of historic processes and the 'richest historical record we possess' (Hoskins 1955: 14). It mirrors our memories and myths (K. Taylor 2008: 3; Schama 1995: 6–7), is full of human values and it:

is now widely accepted that landscapes reflect human activity and are imbued with cultural values. They combine elements of space and time, and represent political as well as social and cultural constructs. As they have evolved over time, and as human activity has changed, they acquired many layers of meaning that can be analysed by historical, archaeological, geographical and sociological study. (Leader-Elliott, Maltby & Burke 2004: n.p.)

Western landscape art likewise was being recognised as sources for imagining subjective cultural mores and 'as a characteristically modern way of encountering and representing the human social and moral experience of the world' (Cosgrove in Tilley 2004: 19). Researchers like Schama (1995) were describing landscape as a 'values-driven' landscape, a place of remembering or active 'unremembering' (Noyes & Abrahams 1999; S. Harrison 2004), a shaping of community identity. In Australia, for some Aboriginal artists who work in the Western-style landscape genre, it is the significance of specific places to 'draw upon the collective store of landscape knowledge which situates the heritage and cultural meaning of place based narrative tradition about ancestral domains' (McWilliam 2002: 8) and which is the foundation of Aboriginal Law, regardless of style (J. Green 1988, Kleinert 2010).

Appadurai (1986) and Phillips and Steiner (1999) emphasised the movement of objects between different states, for example as a commodity, gift or heirloom; thereby analysing objects and their circulation, opening up the foundational categories for the academic discussion of art and artefacts, including tourist art (Hume 2013). The automatic identification of art with aesthetics was beginning to uncouple and the focus was placed upon the ‘intercultural circulation’ or entanglement of objects made by Aboriginal artists within a settler society (Myers 2004: 204; see also Thomas 1991). The recent research in cross-cultural histories is revealing the variety of transactions and two-way exchange, as Thomas (1991) argued earlier:

the values that the items had for the two sides were not self-evident and, certainly on the Pacific side, cannot be captured under the model of ‘the imposition of the West upon the rest. (Thomas 1991: 83)

Expanding on this, Graburn (2004) suggests that the emergence of new terms:

with which to discuss objects previously frozen in categories ... [and] with notions of aboriginality and how claims for cultural identity and social positionality become a locus for Indigenous relations to nation-states frequently mediated through material or visual culture. (Graburn & Glass 2004: 110)

As mentioned earlier, so-called ‘tourist artworks’ are being reviewed by art historians and anthropologists as being integral elements of ongoing Aboriginal art practice, for example, fibre objects (Hamby & Young 2001), boomerangs (Taçon, South & Hooper 2003; Hume 2009), Kimberley points (Akerman, Fullagar & Van Gijn 2002; Harrison et al. 2006), wood sculpture (Sculthorpe 1996), shell work (Nash 2010; Nugent 2014) and painted landscapes (J. Green 1988; Hardy, Megaw & Megaw 1992; Ward & Crocombe 2008). Objects not included in this category but which have been perceived as authentic anthropological specimens in the past such as pearl shells (Akerman & Stanton 1994), toas (Jones & Sutton 1986; Taylor 1988), and bark painting (Morphy 2007; L. Taylor 2008) and other items are also being re-evaluated.

Research on decorated boab nuts

Decorated boab nuts have not been researched extensively or in depth and until recently the only major sources of information on decorated boab nuts were: Gaye Sculthorpe’s 1990 article, ‘Designs on Carved Boab Nuts’, based on the Museum of Victoria and National Museum of Australia collections; Kim Akerman’s 1993 book chapter ‘From Boab Nuts to Ilma: Kimberley art and material culture’; and Michele Lang’s 1999 honours thesis

'Meandering Paths: An exploration of incised boab nuts from the Kimberley, Western Australia' and her 2005 article 'Decorated Boab Nuts: from rock wall to shop shelf'; and Mary Ann Jebb's 2006 and 2008 articles on artist Jack Wherra as discussed below.

Notwithstanding, some important first-hand observations were made in the twentieth century and earlier. The most valuable were the descriptions of boab motifs and production, as well as information provided in relation to their function in ceremony; for example, Herbert Basedow in his 1925 book *The Australian Aboriginal* recorded his observations during his 1916 expedition to the Kimberley (Basedow 1925: 311, 374). Importantly for the argument of incised boab nuts as constituting an ongoing art practice, Basedow also includes a number of references to incised boab trees in his book (Basedow 1925: 309).²⁶ Other scholarship on decorated boab nuts includes the observations and research by Saville-Kent (1897), Clements (1903), Kennedy (1933), Davidson (1937), McCarthy (1966), Crawford (1968), Berndt, Berndt and Stanton (1982), and Akerman (1993), amongst others.

Lang's honours thesis (1999) was based on an analysis of the South Australian Museum collection of 29 incised boab nuts and their gradual change in style over time. A subsequent paper dealing with late 1990s decorated boab nuts (Lang 2005) examined stylistic changes associated with transformations in Aboriginal society while retaining embedded continuity with design precursors from rock art and tree carving. Mary Ann Jebb, a consultant historian, has researched the biography and analysed the visual narrative artworks of the deceased Aboriginal artist, historian and celebrated decorated boab nut creator Jack Wherra. These articles by Jebb²⁷ include 'Jack Wherra's Boab Nut Carving: A Cross-cultural History' (2006), and 'Kimberley Histories told through Boab Nut Carving' (2008), researched the decorated boab nuts and associated audio recordings created by Jack Wherra for the American anthropologist John McCaffrey. Jebb argues that communication of 'historical narratives and cultural knowledge in a medium that, whether gifted, exchanged or sold, could make it accessible across cultures' (Jebb 2006: 697). As a historian who researched²⁸ and lived in the Kimberley, she is closely associated with the

²⁶ The connection between tree incising and boab nuts will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 5.

²⁷ Jebb's research of Wherra's work was funded by AIATSIS in collaboration with Mowanjum Aboriginal Community near Derby, West Kimberley. A large number of Wherra's boab nuts were auctioned by Sotheby's in 2003 and sold, with 21 bought by the National Museum of Australia, 18 by the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, and five by Kerry Packer (Jebb 2006: 697–8).

²⁸ Jebb's publications include the award-winning *Blood, Sweat and Welfare: A history of white bosses and Aboriginal workers* (2002), and 'The Lock Hospitals Experiment: Europeans, Aborigines and venereal disease' (1984).

Mowanjum community, editing and compiling *Mowanjum: 50 years community history* (Jebb & Mowanjum Aboriginal Community 2008). Jebb focuses her work on the 'realist' genre of boab nut carvings made by Wherra between 1941 and 1976 and their relationship to historical narratives.

The examination of the literature concerning Aboriginal art and authenticity underpins the foundational question of whether adjustive innovative practices, in this case in relation to decorated boab nuts, are encompassed within a continuing Aboriginal art practice. An argument for how the 'Western-style' realistic landscape depicted on decorated boab nuts emerged is made throughout the thesis by examining the social and cross-cultural landscape within the Kimberley art environment and history. It is within this environment that incised and painted boab nuts *speak* inter-generationally and cross-culturally, particularly via the development of a Western 'realistic genre'.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Since the late nineteenth century, anthropologists, explorers, historians and others have displayed interest in incised and painted boab nuts, and in more recent times these have been given, exchanged and sold to collectors and cultural institutions.²⁹ This Aboriginal art form from the Kimberley region is an important economic activity, and one which engages in the political. The way certain objects were commodified functioned to communicate aspects of Aboriginal identity and experience. These objects' connections to Country³⁰ were and are reflected through their putative functions, production and imagery.

The chapter discusses the approach used in the thesis to provide evidence of the development of a new genre and a Western-style landscape category in the mid twentieth century. Decorated boab nuts were chosen for my study because they most importantly reflect an Aboriginal world view, albeit one closely related to a particular large region of Country. They are also exemplars of changing tastes, and have been reasonably represented, although not well documented, in both institutional and private collections. They exhibit a range of imagery, which has great potential for conveying information about stylistic change in relation to the context of production.³¹ Artefact-derived data is a source of information about social processes (Lilje 2013: 2). The incised and painted boab nuts are used as ways of interpreting: they are 'visual texts' and provide context and analysis within historical and ethnographic records. As a visual text³² they provide excellent insights into the contexts in which particular boab nuts were incised and/or painted.

To test the hypothesis, which is constructed on the findings of my previous honours research, that a new Western-style landscape 'realistic' type³³ in decorated boab nuts developed out of the complex relationships between the original inhabitants of Australia and the colonial settlers, I examined in detail the collection of boab nuts held by the

²⁹ See Chapters 4 and 7 for discussion on exchange and collection theory.

³⁰ See Chapter 4 for an examination of notions of Country and landscape realism.

³¹ See Chapter 4 for an examination of the relationship between the environment and the means of production.

³² See Glossary for a description of 'visual text', and Chapter 4 for the context.

³³ See Chapter 4 for a discussion on the use and appropriateness of the term 'realistic', and Chapters 5, 6 and 8 for the practical application of this term to stylistic genres and decorated boab nuts.

National Museum of Australia.³⁴ Other large collections in major institutions and a small number in a private collection were used as comparisons to illustrate/substantiate specific claims. Unfortunately, a detailed analysis of all of the notable decorated boab nut collections held in state and university museums is outside the scope of this thesis, but would be a productive and fascinating future project. Some comparison with boab nuts held in private collections has enhanced the analysis of institutional material. Generally both institutional and private collections are not well documented, but the potential for first-hand collector experience is more likely in this private group. The examination of stylistic differences was underpinned by the associated historical and geographic narratives to reveal the impact of cross-cultural interaction on Aboriginal art manufacture (Kleinert 1997; Taçon, South & Hooper 2003). As noted previously, field work in 1997 as part of my honours research was the platform from which this thesis developed (Lang 1999).

This study was conceived as contributing to a greater understanding of cultural change. Through the reconceptualisation of Western-style realistic landscapes as a contemporaneous and ongoing art practice, these art objects enhance and strengthen the more recent understandings of the frontier/contact interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people of the Kimberley (Clements 1991; P. Jones 2007; Smith 2007).

Aims and approach

The examination and documentation of this collection of incised and painted boab nuts aims to provide evidence that a Western-landscape style exists within the realistic genre that developed with sustained cross-cultural interaction, and, through a stylistic analysis, that this new category emerged in the mid-twentieth century. It was therefore necessary to:

- record the more salient imagery on these boab nuts, which had been accessioned/receipted between c. 1900 and 2002, and through an appropriate standardised descriptive approach identify similarities and differences;
- examine the stylistic changes within the parameters of visual culture in cross-cultural interactions and the associated theoretical implications; and
- examine the historical and cross-cultural influences that transformed the function and style of decorated boab nuts.

³⁴ See Chapter 7 for the history of the National Museum of Australia and the context of their collection of incised and painted boab nuts. The Appendix contains the details of the National Museum of Australia collection and further research notes.

The approach for analysing and contextualising the data includes methods that compare images and historical documentation, using both qualitative and quantitative analysis, as well as a case study investigation. A more inclusive complementary methodology was necessary due to the cross-cultural and inter-cultural nature of the project. As Pearce (1994) succinctly summarises, objects can be researched using a complementary or mixed methods approach. The model Pearce proposes is based on a theme of artefact properties and how they may be researched and analysed for each property (Pearce 1994: 128–31; see Fig. 2.1 below). Pearce (1994) concludes that, although there are potential issues relating to subjectivity in comparisons of artefacts by category or through a ‘cluster of significant characteristics’, nevertheless ‘objects do relate to each other in an objective sense, they do fall into groups with shared characteristics’ (Pearce 1994: 128).

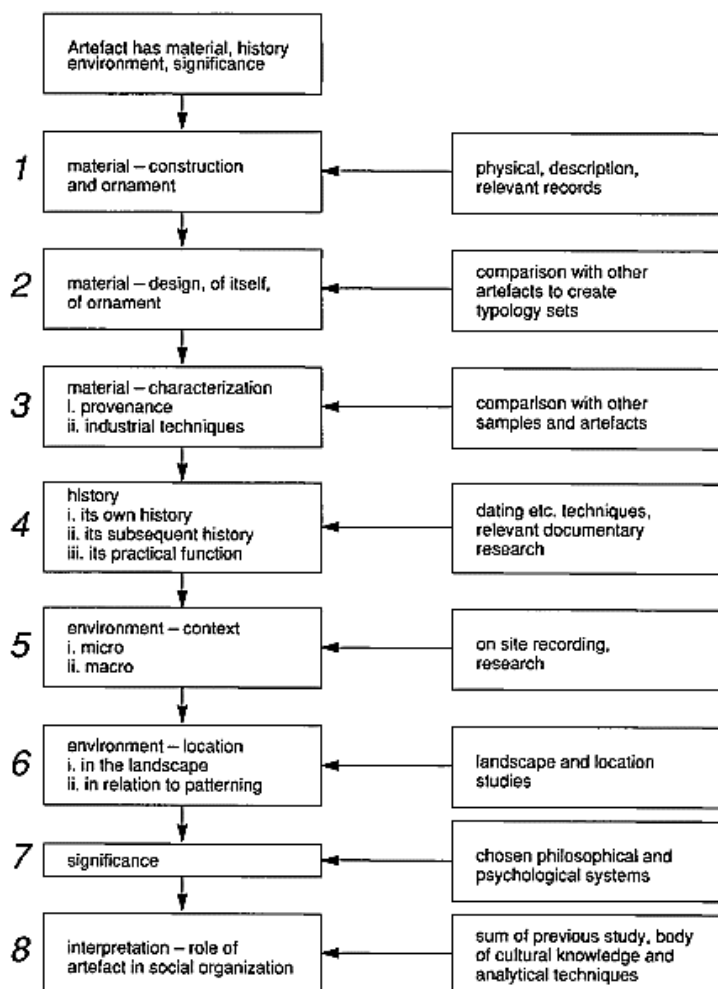


Fig. 2.1: Pearce’s proposed model for artefact studies (Pearce 1994: 129 Fig. 18.2)

Detailed research into the available literature on decorated boab nuts, as well as into the specific historical contexts in which they are embedded, including the pre-contact artistic

conventions of the region, have played a key role in the approach. The extensive coverage of the existing literature, in combination with a close visual analysis of the design elements in the incised and painted boab nuts, allowed for observation of the structures of change and continuity. Initially, the analysis of images was focused on detecting patterns of similarities and difference, and the results combined with other relevant data. It is apparent, as a non-Indigenous researcher, especially one who is not living in the Kimberley, that there are issues involved with context, for example, with respect to what interpretation, importance and meaning might be associated with particular imagery. Moreover, there is a need to be mindful of the ethical issues in writing about Aboriginal history (Nugent 2014a: n.p.).

Further, throughout the history of the collections involved there are likewise similar problems with collectors and collecting institutions that are operating within the dominant colonising milieu. In discussing Canadian Aboriginal artwork, Phillips (2004) observes that ‘other kinds of meanings associated with these objects elude an approach through visual studies, in which the ocularcentrism [sic] of art history and other Western discipline becomes even more insistent’ (Phillips 2004: 594). She further notes:

Methodologically, furthermore, projects of recovery often call for techniques of material culture analysis, art-historical connoisseurship, and historical documentation and recontextualization, and necessitate understandings both of the practices of users and the unique qualities of materiality that are only partly visual. (Phillips 2004: 594)

This is an ongoing and important argument in the literature, and Nicholls makes the point that the interpretation of visual symbols and artistic practices of another very different cultural group inevitably involves an ethnocentric process, the ‘politics of interpretation’, rather than being an issue with the approach of visual analysis per se (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 11 July 2015).

As an adjunct to the decorated boab nuts themselves, I have made use of primary sources, for example, official records, photographs, interviews and letters, to explain the development of specific social phenomena rather than that of a universal experience (Llobera 1998: 73).³⁵ In this particular case, for Chapter 6, many of the files relating to the Mowanjum community were closed access. It is the specific relationship between the

³⁵ Chapter 4 argues for the specific and the locational aspects of Aboriginal art and identity.

decorated boab nuts and the environment that required the *depth* inherent in case study investigation: through the objects themselves and the locative aspects of the original boab trees. A narrative-descriptive approach was used to present a case study on the context of the Western-style landscape category in a boab nut-producing community.

Examining the collections

In July 2006 the National Museum of Australia collection of 77 decorated boab nuts³⁶ accessioned or receipted in and prior to 2002 was photographed. The decision to limit the date range of the objects for analysis was due firstly to the purchase of the Jack Wherra Collection by the NMA in 2003 from the late Professor John McCaffrey's collection though Sotheby's³⁷ and, secondly Mary Ann Jebb with her research ties to the Mowanjumb community, had received funding from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies to research this particular collection and hence the decision to limit this project from c. 1900 to 2002. The NMA collection includes both incised and painted boab nuts, which were examined closely³⁸ and photographed.

Prior to visiting the NMA in 2006, museum staff provided photocopies of all documentation on file and a compact disk of a single issue photographic database. NMA staff had measured many of the boab nuts and added this information to their database.³⁹ Most of the collection was held at the National Museum's Mitchell Repository and only one day of photography was allowed. The National Museum of Australia policy required a staff member to oversee the handling of the boab nuts (66 only) and to remain during the examination procedure and the photographing of the individual boab nuts. A further staff member moved the boab nuts between the stacks and a well-lit table, so having two staff dedicated to a full day of examination of the collection was a large resource commitment and hence the time constraint. The three-dimensional nature of the boab nuts and the large variations in size led to difficulties with boab nuts being positioned to provide sharp

³⁶ Although not included in the analysis for this thesis, additions to the NMA collection in 2003 and in 2006, respectively, were 21 Jack Wherra Collection boab nuts, and three Winifred Hilliard No. 4 Collection boab nuts. In 2007, three ATSIIC boab nuts, and in 2009 two Gwen and Wayne Masters No. 2 Collection boab nuts were donated.

³⁷ The John McCaffrey collection comprised 54 boab nut carvings created by Jack Wherra (Wirra) in 1964–65. McCaffrey, an American anthropologist, also undertook 80 hours of audio-recorded interviews with Wherra, which are now owned by the Sydney Powerhouse Museum. In 2003, 21 boab nuts were purchased by NMA, 18 by the Sydney Powerhouse and five by Kerry Packer (Jebb 2006: 697).

³⁸ See the Glossary and Chapter 4 for a discussion of the understanding of an image as 'text'.

³⁹ The OPAL database provided included the measurements of each nut but these entries varied between length, width, depth; and length and diameter. There was no time during photography to remeasure and no resources at the NMA to do so later.

photographs. This proved challenging and the use of a fixed-height tripod for all the photography was necessary. Much interest was shown by other museum staff⁴⁰ and helpful support was forthcoming in the form of personal anecdotes on encounters with either the artists or boab nut production and conservation. A further couple of hours the following day were spent photographing the remaining eleven boab nuts, which were on display in the Open Collections display at the National Museum of Australia. These decorated boab nuts could not be removed from the gallery and were under special lights to preserve the exhibits. One boab nut was missed (1982.0092.0005) and David Kaus generously photographed this boab nut for me in November 2006.

The photographs were taken with a digital Canon EOS, with no flash. There was some additional fluorescent lighting at the Mitchell Repository and the exposure ranged between two and six seconds using F8 with a fluorescent lighting mode. At the NMA, with its exceptionally low lighting, the exposure ranged between 11 and 15 seconds, using a tungsten lighting mode, which unfortunately was unable to give a true indication of colour but did reveal more detail than could be seen with the naked eye.

The images and documentation from the NMA collection were then collated into a Microsoft Excel database using a series of variables, which were employed to determine changes in visual content. Besides the physical features and historical details of collection; for example, collector, region of collection, accession or receipted details, date and artist, the other data fields included genre category, motif and incising types, and other external documentation. For each boab nut up to 22 variables were offered for coding and these included: genre (geometric, figurative, realistic); landscape (planar, frontal/ lateral/profile, Western-style); major motifs and minor motifs; incising style (zigzag, line, scraping, pitting); pigmented (colour, number of colours); border (proximal, distal, type); partitions (vertical, horizontal, comic book style⁴¹, undecorated sections); and signed or otherwise labelled.

The aim of this process was to provide replicable comparison and generalisation (Slater 1998: 235; Searle & Kelly 1998: 148). The visual content analysis⁴² approach was

⁴⁰ In particular, Mr David Kaus, Manager Repatriation Office NMA, who has in-depth institutional knowledge of the collection when it was part of the Institute of Anatomy before being incorporated into the NMA; and who has written a thesis and numerous publications on two of the major anthropological collectors of boab nuts and other artefacts, Herbert Basedow and Edmund Milne.

⁴¹ This partitioning style will be elaborated upon in Chapter 6.

⁴² Content analysis has limitations in the restriction of its application to superficial meanings.

adopted, the aim being to provide a good basis for the initial analysis and the examination of chronological changes in designs, based on predefined categories (Ezzy 2002: 83).⁴³ A number of other research publications were consulted to help to determine what type of design variables would be useful in constructing style elements (C. Smith 1994; Sculthorpe 1996; Burns 2002; Taçon, South & Hooper 2003; Watson 2003). Coding of the design elements validates the comparisons (Seale & Kelly 1998: 146) as long as the coding is reliable (Bauer & Gaskell 2000: 143–4), in this case by a single researcher. For cross-cultural research, Smith (1994) observes that the methodological challenge is:

Distinguishing between figurative and non-figurative motifs ... the establishment of these categories is based upon subjective interpretation which is grounded in culturally specific rules for decoding art. (C. Smith 1994: 63)

Smith (1994) concludes that different visual perspectives do not critically undermine the analysis as the ‘important point is that the material is coded consistently from the same perspective’ (C. Smith 1994: 63).

For illustrative comparison, less detailed data was collected about decorated boab nuts in other major institutional collections for comparison with the NMA collection. This included structurally similar boab nut collections in the South Australian Museum (SAM), and Museum Victoria (MV), both of which provided images and documentation. The South Australian collection had previously been photographed and documented in 1997. The Berndt Museum of the University of Western Australia (BM), the Australian Museum (AM) and the Western Australian Museum (WM) were approached for information but were unable to provide enough detail or images to proceed with any consistent analysis. In particular as of 2002, the Berndt Museum held a collection of 42 decorated boab nuts from the early twentieth century until the mid-1990s. Many of these boab nuts are on loan rather than being donated. The documentation provided to me included basic catalogue entries without descriptions, with some additional archival material, as well as very poor copies of single photograph photocopies. The Western Australian Museum, as of 2002, has a collection of 97 boab nuts acquired between 1903 and 1998. An incomplete database of registration was supplied but, at the time of my request for images and documentation, the museum was unable to provide further information or support. Likewise, as of 2002, the Australian Museum’s 22 incised boab nuts were collected between 1900 and 1985. An additional four boab nuts have been de-accessioned and no further information was available. The museum provided a database of basic information and a single photocopied

⁴³ See Chapter 7 for a discussion on objects, and Chapters 3 and 4 on categorisation.

image for each boab nut. While these museums generously provided varying degrees of documentation and images and support for any queries, unfortunately due to the incompleteness and unevenness of data provided and later made available online, I am unable to discuss the collections represented in the Berndt Museum, the Australian Museum, and the Western Australian Museum.

The South Australian Museum collection of 29 incised boab nuts was acquired between the late nineteenth century (although the accessioning only began in 1911) and 1992, and as explained earlier, was photographed and examined as part of my honours thesis (Lang 1999).⁴⁴ Museum staff supplied copies of catalogue entries and some archival information. The collection itself was not well documented internally but some of the additional research contained in my honours thesis was part of the background visual research for this thesis.

The Museum Victoria collection includes 42 decorated boab nuts acquired between 1915 and 1995.⁴⁵ The documentation provided to me included copies of catalogue entries and single photograph images. This collection was examined by Gaye Sculthorpe and documented in her article 'Designs on Carved Boab Nuts' (Sculthorpe 1990).

A further group of boab nuts held in a private collection was used for illustrative purposes only. Many private collections represent mementos of holidays or work-related visits to the Kimberley region and consist of fewer than five items. However, a major private collection⁴⁶ of over 100 boab nuts, initially with 24 boab nuts collected during a field trip in 1997 and a further three boab nuts in 2001, with further boab nuts bought over the last 14 years from other private collectors, is used to provide demonstration of a number of points.

⁴⁴ I wish to acknowledge Mr Andrew Hughes (Collections Curator, Anthropology) for his support during my honours research in 1997.

⁴⁵ Sculthorpe (1990) notes that the nine boab nuts of the Oldham collection possibly date from 1870s (Sculthorpe 1990: 42).

⁴⁶ This private collection is owned by Michele Lang.

Use of photography

For each NMA boab nut a series of photographs was taken to allow a view of the object that, while physically ‘unreal’ or artificial⁴⁷, is also perceived as realistic in the Western world. We are used to seeing and believing such ‘realism’: it is in the map of the world behind a newsreader and in panoramic pictures. These serial photographs can produce new knowledge; initially serial photographs showed the gait of horses and people; and now we can see their use every day in the composite weather maps, the GIS scans, and Google Earth.⁴⁸

Rose’s (2008) discussion of the use of photographs as illustration in human geography research can be used to deconstruct the practice of photography in object studies. She discusses considerations that researchers must take into account when using photography or analysing archive photographs, for example, photography as being a representation of social power relations, and she goes on to comment that, while historically scholars ‘used photographs as a sort of window onto wherever they are discussing’ (G. Rose 2008: 151), more recently researchers acknowledge that ‘photographs can be active players in the construction of a range of different kinds of ... knowledge’ (G. Rose 2008:151). Rose (2008), quoting Becker, emphasises that ‘photos work as part of the analysis because they are “specified generalization”’ (Becker in G. Rose 2008: 158), that photographs are a ‘general idea embodied in images of specific people, places, and events’ (G. Rose 2014: 38).

My photographs of the NMA boab nuts are used to provide evidence that supports my argument that another genre and style developed in the twentieth century. Of course, the focus of each photograph may have been influenced by my desire as a non-Indigenous person to generalise motif and genre, via the dominant and understandable icons, as a means to underpin my argument on legibility and the creation of Western-style landscapes as Aboriginal responses at a juncture with the dominating settler society, but also as a practice inherently in the Aboriginal art milieu. On the other hand, I have pursued the ideal of self-awareness in this process based on the understanding that all human beings will

⁴⁷ See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the use and relevance of Western realism.

⁴⁸ For discussion on the ‘reality’ of photography see Sontag (1977) and this relationship described by Sontag to anthropology and archaeology see Edwards (1997), Shanks (1997), Wright (2004) and Garrod (2009).

inevitably interpret the artworks of other cultures, to some extent at least, through the prism of their own cultural lens. It is anticipated that the contexts provided by the historical and other appropriate documents in conjunction with the photographs of the objects will mitigate this issue.

The case study

As the aims of this thesis required evidence of the historical development of a new style or genre in the decoration of boab nuts in the twentieth century, the stratification by chronology within the NMA collection examples was a key index in the database. My concerns over the reliability of catalogue entries and some of the museum practices that support them are addressed in Chapter 7.

The decorated boab nuts that represent the Western-style landscape category are discussed in relation to their chronology in Kimberley history and art practice. The strength of a case study is that it permits a broad range of supporting evidence, from objects to interviews, to be used to mount a coherent and in-depth argument. One general danger for researchers is that a lack of rigour may be perceived as the result of a deficiency of sample frequency or generalisation (Yin 2003: 10); however, the use of multiple sources of data produces more valid and reliable understandings of complex situations. In this case, for incised and painted boab nuts, the NMA sample size for the type of collection is at the upper end, second only to the Museum of Western Australia.⁴⁹ The NMA also contains a well-spread sample range, by decade, from the 1910s through to the 1970s with the exception of the 1930s, with many of the boab nuts collected in the mid-twentieth century.

A narrative-descriptive approach was used to structure the case study. The use of theory was intertwined with and underpinned by the complex cultural and historically-embedded connections which informed the decoration of boab nuts over time. This method is often used by cultural and historical studies scholars, especially when creative nuance and causality is required (Tuan 1991: 686; Phillips 2004). Narrative description relies on that which ‘draws together diverse events, happenings, and action of human lives into

⁴⁹ The following museums held collection sizes in 2002 of: MWA = 97, NMA = 77, BV = 42, MV = 42, SAM = 29 and AM = 22. The NMA collection holds the most diverse spread of collection years by decade; MV is notable for the 1870s Oldham Collection; the BM contains the Akerman collection of mainly 1970s West Kimberley examples; and the SAM has important early examples registered before the 1930s.

thematically unified goal-directed processes’ (Polkinghorne 1995: 8).⁵⁰ However, the ‘fallacy of anachronistic narrative’ must be avoided; that is, ‘to read the past as if it was nothing but a staging ground for the present’ (Boyce 2000: 326–7), an error of scale also possible in research attempting to understand different cultures historically.

Boab nuts with the provenance of the Mowanjum Presbyterian Mission (Old Site 1956–79) was chosen because artworks from this community are well represented in the National Museum of Australia collections. There are also a number of books and articles about the community during the 1950s to 1980s and other documents such as transcripts of interviews and newspaper items from the NMA files, in other archives, and online. This community of the Worora, Ngarinyin and Wunambul people included some pivotal artists and artefact makers, and boab nut artists, including Albert Barunga, Alan Mungulu and Jack Wherra. Some artists, such as David Mowaljarlai and Donny Woolagoodja, have written their own books, and other members of this community have published their narratives and stories. A number of anthropologists, linguists, historians and other scholars have worked in this community.

Information from archival sources, narrative, and analogy from other Aboriginal groups whose artworks have been researched and understood was used. This palimpsest of context and meaning was used to reconnect content to the incised and painted boab nuts. This reconnection to the historical narrative has been essential, as these decorated boab nuts are objects⁵¹ that act not only on an aesthetic level but as a means of information about interaction and relationships, identity and politics.

Visual stylistic attributes, archival material, and written documentation etc. have been used to define context for individual boab nuts. The establishment of the chronology of the items through both external documentation and internal evidence, such as subject matter and technique, was attempted. The relationship of the designs to the environment, both physical and cultural, has been considered and related to changes in Aboriginal and non-Indigenous society within the larger historical process. Such correlations hold considerable significance in relation to this research.

⁵⁰ Rose (2002) argues that culture ‘is not so much a set of things – novels and paintings or TV programmes or comics – as a process, a set of practices’ (G. Rose 2002: 4); it is the production and exchange of meaning between groups of people.

⁵¹ There is extensive commentary on ‘the object’ (for example, Clifford 1985; Rowley 1992a; Strathern 1993; Belk 1994; Barringer & Flynn 1998; Tilley 2006; Byrne et al. 2011) much of which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

In the next chapter, the historical background of decorated boab nuts, the relationship between these artworks and the styles found in their precursors in boab tree incising and painting and rock art, and a description of the three major genres of imagery will be discussed and provide the necessary context for the discussions in Chapters 4 and 5.

CHAPTER 3: OVERVIEW OF BOAB TREES AND DECORATED BOAB NUT GENRES

Traditionally, the dry season in the Kimberley led to the intensification of ritual activity and consequently increased trade in artefacts, objects and ritual ceremonies, which is historically due in part to the increase in food sources for hunting and the number of fruits and roots available for harvesting. The foods included ants, honey, lizards, small mammals, birds and fish, as well as vegetation such as yams, berries, seeds, fruit, water lily roots and ‘everything from the nut of the baobab tree to the bloodwood apple’ (Terry 1931: 43). Crawford (1982) catalogues ‘47 species of root crop, 49 species of fruit/seed, [and] 24 species used to make implements’ (Crawford 1982: 1). Ceremonial objects and other everyday items were exchanged along trade routes by groups, small and large, including the Bardi, Miriwoong, Ngarinyin, Wunambul, Worora, and many others (Lofgren 1975: 51). These exchanges connected the Kimberley with northern and southern Australia and operated within the framework of an ancient mode of trade and obligation (Blundell 1980: 111–14). This process is further described in Chapter 5. This chapter builds the foundation for the thesis argument by providing context for a discussion of art practices and the relationship with Kimberley rock art, tree marking and body painting designs.

The boab tree in the Ancestral Past, in the landscape, and in art

The Australian boab species *Adansonia gregorii* grows only in the Kimberley region, in the country between Derby and Kununurra to the north-west of the Fitzroy Valley, and into the western part of the Northern Territory (see Map 1.1). It was named after the explorer Augustus Charles Gregory by the botanist Ferdinand Mueller in 1861 although it is called, for example, by the Worora *jumululu* (Lowe 1998) and Bunaba *larrkarti* (Lowe 1998).

George Grey wrote in his 1837 journal that:

this tree is, from this combination of useful qualities, a vegetable production of no slight value, and probably comes near the cocoa-nut tree in value: its worth is well known to the natives, for its vicinity is one of their favourite haunts.

(Grey 1841: 112)

The tree is of economic, medicinal, environmental, dietary, cultural, symbolic and spiritual importance. All plant, animal and fish, and natural phenomena have associated ceremony that needs to be maintained by qualified women or men (N. Green 1997: 29). Von Brandenstein in researching kinship systems reported that some Aboriginal people ‘are

born into the boab tree or boab flower “section” (Von Brandenstein in Akerman, Skyring & Yu 2010: 29). Aboriginal author, Mary Pandilo commenting on the boab tree, explained that ‘if you hit or touch the tree, even if you sit underneath it, he can make it rain’ (Pandilo in Lowe 1998: 49).

The boab tree grows over 15 metres high and 20 metres in girth. While the trunk shape is usually bottle or teapot-shaped, it can assume grotesque gouty forms. In earlier days, bats sheltering in the branches were caught by hand for food (Serventy 1966: 26). McKenzie recorded that the bark was stripped for fibre, crushed for medicine and the pollen used as glue (McKenzie 1980: 36; Clarke 2007: 120) and the sap from the trunk could be eaten (Bates in White 1985: 261; Brock 1993: 81). Mulvaney (1996) notes the use of boab nuts as containers for carrying ochre (Mulvaney 1996: 16). In some instances the boab nut’s velvety covering is mixed with ochre and used for ‘painting up’ the body for ceremony (Jebb & Mowanjum Aboriginal Community [MAC] 2008: 153). Boab nuts have been used as toys and rattles (Haagen 1994), and have been observed by Basedow (1925) as being used in ceremonies, where they are incised elaborately (Basedow 1925: 374). The boab nuts can be ground to form ‘flour’, and when the nuts are green can be roasted, and children sometimes eat the pulp raw (G. Green 1988: 27–8). Basedow (1925) records the collection of water from:

The branches of this species surround the ‘gouty’ stem in a circle at the top, like the heads of a hydra, and by this means form a concavity between them, which is capable of storing a considerable volume of cool, clear rainwater. To reach this water, the natives [sic] construct ladders by simply driving a series of pointed pegs into the soft bark of the tree one above the other. (Basedow 1925: 97–8)

The extensive area and softness of the bark also allows for carving and the painting of designs (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 146) and, consequently, also presents a record of historic non-Aboriginal memorials from early contact history (Lewis 1996; Clarke 2007: 25). As one of the most comprehensive early observers, Basedow (1925) in 1916 reports on Aboriginal markings that:

Along the north-west coast of Australia, where the baobab tree flourishes, the tribes often carve animalistic and other designs into the bark, which, on account of its softness, lends itself admirably for the purpose. The carvings are usually to be found near a camp or at the

site of an ordinary corroboree ground. The designs, once they have been cut into the bark, remain there during the life of the tree. (Basedow 1925: 309)⁵²

The boab tree is slow growing, and initials cut into a tree at Boab Tree Camp on the Ord River in 1883 were reported as ‘quite distinct after nearly half a century’ (A Pioneer 1929: 11). This phenomenon is discussed in Chapter 4 as part of the ongoing practice of the Kimberley for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups.

The fruits, or nuts as they are usually called, are large with a velvety almond-like covering, which can be rubbed off with either sand or charcoal or scraped before the nut is incised or painted. Nut shapes range from round to ovoid and are found in a variety of sizes, of up to about 30 cm from distal to proximal ends and 20 cm in diameter. Often the flaws in the nuts are used to suggest and highlight a design. The colour of the nuts ranges from beige through to red-brown to brown-black. Decorated nuts are often identifiable by artists and art centre workers as coming from specific and known trees (Lang 1999: 10).⁵³ The boab nuts for incising are collected in the dry season, between April and August, as the shell has hardened and the pulp is dry (Lang 1999: 10). Nuts collected early are too brittle for incising, while boab nuts held in collections are sensitive to humidity change and sunlight and tend to crack. Inside the fruit are a number of kidney-shaped seeds contained in mucilaginous pulp (Fig. 3.1).⁵⁴



Fig. 3.1: Natural boab nuts and pulp (Lang 1999: 11)

⁵² Basedow is using ‘animalistic’ to describe figurative representations of animals, for example, emus and snakes.

⁵³ It is possible to speculate how these trees were/are subject to kinship regulations, but that is a matter beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁵⁴ Full descriptions of Australian boab nuts can be found in both Lowe (1998) and Lang (1999).

Early descriptions of decorated boab trees and boab nuts

Early descriptions of decorated boab trees and boab nuts can be found in observations by Saville-Kent (1897), Clements (1903), Kennedy (1933), Davidson (1937); in the 1930s, it was noted that Aboriginal people ‘carved beautiful pictures on the woody, smooth surface of the gourd-like nut’ (Utemorrhah et al. 1980: 36; see also McKenzie 1969: 265). The earliest description of incised boab trees are reported by Grey (1841), who observed that:

I often also found rude drawings scratched upon the trees, but none of these sketches indicated any thing but a very ordinary degree of talent even for a savage: some were so imperfect that it was impossible to tell what they were meant to represent.

(Grey 1841: 112–13)

Bassett-Smith (1894) on the survey ship, HMS *Penguin*, on landing in a small harbour on Cape Bougainville recorded that:

there were several of these large Baobab trees at the back of the beach, and others were seen further inland; carved into the bark of one at the back of the camp were a number of figure drawings which I copied.

(Bassett-Smith 1894: 330)

The most important reports come from Basedow (1925) during his 1916 expedition. He records his observations of a boab tree at King Sound, which carries an emu design three feet high, an emu track and a snake five feet long, noting:

the whole bark with the area occupied by the design has been removed. The feet, it will be observed, are portrayed in a perfectly free way in order to leave no doubt in the mind of the observers as to the track the bird actually makes.

(Basedow 1925: 309)

Basedow (1925) memorably describes the incised designs and the artists, stating that: ‘an aboriginal’s [sic] design may be crude, but his imagination is, nevertheless, wonderful; we see the line, but he sees the life; we behold the images, he the form’ (Basedow 1925: 297). However, the most significant first-hand recollection was by Basedow (1925) in 1916, when he observed:

In the Kimberley district of WA, the large nuts of the baobab, when dry, are used after the style of the European toy known as a baby’s rattle by the children, but curiosity soon leads to the destruction of the shell, when the pithy matrix and seeds are eaten. Occasionally these nuts are introduced into ceremonial dances by the men; they are then elaborately and beautifully carved as previously referred to.

(Basedow 1925: 374)

This observation contains a salient point: the transformation from the everyday by the use of carved designs into objects associated with ceremonial practice (Lang 1999: 113).

There is also a post-contact history of boab trees being used as prison cells (McKenzie 1969: 265; Lang 1999: 14; see Chapter 5 Fig. 5.26). McKenzie (1969) records that:

at the turn of the century [the boab tree] was used as an overnight stopping place when police were bringing in natives from the bush. The chained natives spent a terrifying night in its hot hollow trunk. (McKenzie 1969: 265)⁵⁵

The most notable today are the prison trees at Derby and Wyndham. Stuart (1923) described the Hillgrove Lockup at Wyndham as 45 feet in circumference and having been used by police to confine Aboriginal men awaiting trial (Stuart 1923: 114; Colebatch 1929: 418; Hart 1988: 87; Lang 1999: 14; Akerman, Skyring & Yu 2010: 30).

Boab tree and rock marking in relationship to decorated boab nuts

A few boab trees incised with Aboriginal motifs survive (Figs 3.2 & 3.3), although many accessible boab trees have been graffitied since post-contact. For example, one tree near Looma is incised with a figure called Larrkarti whose enormous phallus has been shortened by an axe (Lowe 1998: 50). Crawford provides a chapter on carved trees and boab nuts (Crawford 1968: 126–32). Crawford (1968) in the 1960s provides a description of how boab trees are carved:

The technique they used was quite simple: they used whatever knives were available (principally skinning knives for cattle) and carved their designs into the trees. They then proceeded to fill the excavated areas with paint, applying the usual pigments. The results were quite striking, and a rather drab camp was rapidly turned into an art gallery with snakes, crocodiles and turtles on all of the trees. One Aboriginal, whose camp was under a white-stemmed river gum, did not attempt to carve the tree, but applied the paint over the bark without preparing it in any way. It is not known whether all of the tree carvings were once painted, but probably some were not ... It therefore seems likely that outlined engravings on the trees were not painted but were frequently re-engraved, whereas the figures with their bodies completely excavated possibly were once coloured although any paint that was on them has now washed away. (Crawford 1968: 128–9)

Men and women were involved in this tree marking practice, as verified by Phyllis Kaberry, an anthropologist working in the Kimberley in the 1930s, who specifically referred to ‘women’s ceremonies and women’s involvement in repainting’ (Frederick & O’Connor 2009: 170) Wandjina images. These tree carvings form a continuum between

⁵⁵ Terrifying also in regards to associated sorcery elements, see below and also Chapter 5 on imprisonment.

the incised boab nuts and the designs carved on wood or shell and painted on rock walls (Lang 1999).



Fig. 3.2: Carved boab tree with manta ray design, Kunmunya (Donaldson & Kenneally 2007: 108 Fig. 6.6; see also Crawford 1968: 126 Fig. 112)

Basedow (1925), recording his 1916 expedition to the Kimberley, in which he collected a number of decorated boab nuts, was not the only observer of the practice of decorating boab trees: Dahl, a zoologist and explorer, had reported in 1895 in the region of the Victoria River, just east of the Kimberley in the Northern Territory, that

the bark of this tree appeared an age-old sculpture made by the natives. It consisted of grotesque figures, as shown in the accompanying sketch. The left figure obviously represented a snake, but the meaning of the other was unintelligible to me. (Dahl 1927: 181 Fig. 5)

Lewis mentions that boab trees with carving on them were:

seen by members of Gregory's Expedition to the Victoria River in 1855–56. Thomas Baines was the storekeeper and artist on this expedition and some of his sketches and paintings include boabs with such carvings on them.

(Darrell Lewis, pers. comm., 5 September 1997)

Lewis (1996), during research of historic sites in the Victoria River region⁵⁶ for the Northern Territory branch of the National Trust of Australia, recorded several Aboriginal-marked boab trees, and on a tree in Koolendong Waterhole he photographed:

an emu-like bird and the 'geometric design' on the two trees right at the waterhole. The artistic conventions evident in the 'emu' carving are identical to those used in Aboriginal rock paintings in the Victoria River district. The other design is not of a subject identifiable to a European and consequently I believe it unlikely to be of European origin. In comparison to rock paintings and engravings, Aboriginal tree carvings are rare. I have

⁵⁶ The Victoria River region is immediately east of the Western Australian Kimberley border in the Northern Territory and boab trees grow in this area.

examined many hundreds of boabs within the past fifteen years and to date I have recorded only five or six with images that can be ascribed to Aborigines with a reasonable confidence. (Lewis 1996: 26)



Fig. 3.3: Detail of Site 4: Aboriginal carving of a bird, with European initials and geometric figure (not shown). Koolendong Waterhole. The bird is 122 cm long (Lewis 1996: 28–9).

Boab trees have been incised with geometrical and figurative motifs and occasionally painted initially with ochres and other natural pigments (Crawford 1968: 128; Utemorrhah & Vinnicrombe 1992: 25; Lewis 1996: 24–9; Lang 1999: 15–6; Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 146; Wickens 2008: 128).⁵⁷ Utemorrhah (Utemorrhah & Vinnicrombe 1992; see also Woolagoodja in O'Connor 2008), in discussion about the repainting of boab tree motifs (at a later date), comments that creation songs from the Wandjina⁵⁸ are sung to increase the fertility of natural resources⁵⁹; on the refreshing of painted trees. Utemorrhah states (see also Lommel 1970: 221; Lang 1999: 16–20):

where *Wandjina* made snakes or yams or honey or when we wanted to have plenty yams or crocodile we would go back to that place and paint them again. We used to keep the things *Wandjina* painted looking nice and fresh. We looked after them for a long time now. We go [sic] shifted out of country and this makes us very sad.

(Utemorrhah in Utemorrhah & Vinnicrombe 1992: 25)

Twentieth-century accounts demonstrate that Aboriginal people were using both geometrical and figurative motifs in rock art and tree marking. Clements (1903) has

⁵⁷ Lewis (1996) and Drake (1932) also comment on the explorers and settlers who also incised names and dates on boab trees. Drake (1932) reported that at Mujilabbera, a water hole near Wyndham, a boab tree is incised with 'Police Camp, Fanning 19-1-00', where the police camped on their search for the Aboriginal outlaw Major (Drake 1932: 4).

⁵⁸ Wandjina is also written as Wanjina (Morphy 2012: 294–305; Blundell in O'Connor et al. 2013: 539; Akerman 2015).

⁵⁹ Layton (1992) also states that 'increase' rituals amongst Kimberley language groups include re-touching rock paintings, and/or rubbing stones as reported by Capell (in 1939) in the Drysdale River called *rul* or *jalala* (Layton 1992: 47). Muecke (1992) states 'To know country is to walk around it along tracks put down by the ancestors, participating in ceremony: for, the arts are performed, repeated arts ... [and] the cave paintings are "always there" – the process of retouching them is re-creation, not creation, and the effect of the ceremony is to provide the conditions for the seasonal increase of plants and animals' (Muecke 1992: 168).

recorded that the types of designs carved onto the boab trees in the 1900s were identical to paintings ‘found almost on all hill tops, and consist mainly of representations of emus, kangaroos, snakes, turtles and human beings in all sorts of positions’ (Clements 1903: 9; see also Lowe 1998).

In a 1932 newspaper report, Drake (1932) notes that boab nuts: ‘make suitable letter tablets, may be covered in pictures, delicately carved, of crocodiles, snakes, turtles, all the creatures which delight the eye’(Drake 1932:4). Crawford (1968), in the mid-twentieth century, speculates that:

it is not known whether all of the tree carvings were once painted, but probably some were not. When visiting trees with snakes or long lines carved on them, any guides often picked up a lump of rock and re-scoured the lines in order to make them more obvious but they never offered to paint the lines. It therefore seems likely that outlined engravings on the trees were not painted but were frequently re-engraved, whereas the figures with the bodies completely excavated possibly were once coloured although any paint that was on them has now washed away. (Crawford 1968: 128–9)

Like boab tree incising, decorated boab nut designs are created by removing sections of the surface of the boab nuts. The early designs are based on styles and subjects similar to the rock art of the region. Geometric and figurative designs have been incised on weapons and ceremonial objects such as pearl shell phallocrypts, as well as boab nuts (Lang 1999). These motifs are also depicted in rock paintings and engravings, ground and body painting. Clements (1903: 9) noticed ‘[b]oabab-nuts with line ornamentation as well as with animals and men’, while Davidson (1937) observed that boab nut decoration is:

consistent with the general styles of decoration in the Kimberley region. In some instances, angular meanders are employed and there also are appearances of other geometrical figures such as crude zigzags and concentric circles, squares and rhomboids. For the most part, however, the decoration seems to be naturalistic and includes turtles, snakes, plants, leaves and kangaroos. These representations, although not the outstanding motifs of the Kimberley region, also appear occasionally on the local incised boomerangs.⁶⁰

(Davidson 1937: 64–5)

⁶⁰ ‘Meanders’, ‘ladders’, ‘lattice’ etc. are descriptors used in early records of geometric designs and have continued to be used in the literature over the twentieth century.

Kennedy, writing on Indigenous musical instruments in 1933, and confirming Basedow's (1925) interpretation, asserted that:

the large seed vessels of the baobab trees (*Adansonia gregorii* F.v.M.) are used as rattles in the Kimberley District, Western Australian. When dry, the seeds in the seed vessels become loose and make a rattling sound, and the native children shake the vessel or pod for amusement. Sometimes the men introduce them into ceremonial dances, for which purpose they are often incised with figures and symbols. (Kennedy 1933: 152)

While there is some disagreement as to function⁶¹ (for example, Dahl 1927; Lofgren 1980), Akerman (1993) notes 'they seem to have been used occasionally as maraca-like rattles to accompany singers during secular ceremonies and dances' (Akerman 1993: 106). This may provide some evidence for Sculthorpe's (1990: 46) conclusions for decorated boab nuts that over time the demise of the earlier geometric motifs was due to loss of opportunity to maintain sacred ceremonies.⁶²

The connection between local rock art, particularly through figurative motifs, incised boab trees and decorated boab nuts, will be demonstrated throughout this thesis. The incised boab nut as a pre-contact artefact appears to be indicated despite its later changes in function (McCarthy 1957: 170; Lang 1999) and internal innovations (Crawford 1968, Stanton 1986; Morphy 1998; Lang 1999).⁶³ As Basedow (1925) noted decorated boab nuts were most sought after by visitors to the Kimberley, this still being the case in 1969 when boab nuts 'were much sought after by tourists' (McKenzie 1969: 265) in the Derby area. In more recent times, it is the boab tree motif itself that has become a metaphor for the Kimberley, because of the physical presence of the trees and the relationship to the Wandjina narratives.

⁶¹ Like many Aboriginal artefacts, there were likely multiple functions for boab nuts.

⁶² Geometric designs are the predominant body markings in ceremony in the Kimberley with few exceptions as discussed later in this chapter.

⁶³ See Chapter 4 for further explanation of 'internal innovation' used in this thesis.

Decorated boab nuts: innovative tradition or introduced practice?

In the Kimberley region, wood engraving, or incising, has been an observably dominant practice in designs on artefacts such as shields and boomerangs and on the boab trees themselves, and, in regard to decorated boab nuts, there are no verifiable observations by European visitors and settlers in the nineteenth century that the practice was introduced from elsewhere.⁶⁴

A number of explorers, anthropologists and others have commented on the origins and purpose/s of decorated boab nuts. For example, Saville-Kent photographed an incised boab nut in the West Kimberley (Saville-Kent 1897: 10) (Fig. 3.4). Importantly, Basedow (1925) made two observations on their function during his 1916 expedition. He believed boab nuts were used as baby rattles or toys, and also used in ceremony where they were 'elaborately and beautifully carved' (Basedow 1925: 374). The depiction of objects such as *wananga*⁶⁵ on incised boab nuts suggests the ceremonial function attributed by Basedow (Basedow 1925: 374). Normally food and possibly items of seasonal use, a boab nut, when decorated, becomes an object associated with ceremony (Campbell in Mountford & Harvey 1938: 116; Perez 1977: 63; von Brandenstein 1972: 223).



Fig. 3.4: Photographed boab nut with 'Grecian Key' design [interlocking key] centre.⁶⁶
Carved baobab nut and shell aprons, with human hair girdles, Kimberley District, Western Australia
Photographer: William Saville-Kent (Saville-Kent 1897: 10 Fig. 3)

⁶⁴ Although D.S. Davidson (1949) has suggested that the interlocking key design used on pearl shell and boab nuts originate from the Celebes or New Guinea (Davidson 1949: 85).

⁶⁵ *Wananga* or thread cross used in ceremony and may be worn as a headdress (McCarthy 1966: 31). Early examples were made from either boab tree fibre or hair string, which is wound around a cross made of sticks forming a diamond-shaped spiral, which is often decorated with 'pieces of fur, coloured bird-down, and tufts of feathers' (Black 1964: 70; see also Love 1936: 207; McCarthy 1957: 146, McCarthy 1966: 30-1).

⁶⁶ Saville-Kent (1897) uses 'Grecian Key' to describe a design which is now recognised by the term 'interlocking key'. The pearlshell in the top left-hand corner also depicts an interlocking key design.

Crawford (1968) comments that the boab nuts do not store well due to their cracking as the shell dries out, meaning that early examples are not well represented in museums. He notes:

At least one Aboriginal has told me that the carving of the nuts is an introduced custom, taught to the Aborigines by Europeans, and because the old nuts are not preserved, it is difficult to counter this argument; but a few specimens which have been preserved suggest that is incorrect. (Crawford 1968: 131–2)⁶⁷

Although Crawford (1968) also notes changes through time:

The oldest specimens in the Western Australian Museum differ in two ways from the more recent additions. The old nuts carry designs which are typically Aboriginal – circle and meandering lines are frequent – whereas the modern examples [late 1960s] show luggers, animals and dancers depicted in European style. Secondly, the modern nuts have been carved with a steel blade whereas the old ones are more deeply incised by a gouge of some kind. Possibly this was the traditional possum tooth gouge mounted on the end of a stick: such gouges are known to have been used for incising designs on sacred boards.

(Crawford 1968: 132)

However, the carved boab nuts in Figure 119 in *The Art of the Wandjina* (Crawford 1968: 132) show an earlier realistic lugger, which Crawford dates back to the Kunmunya Mission⁶⁸ 1948 (Fig. 3.5).



Fig. 3.5: Pearling lugger, Kunmunya Mission 1948 (Crawford 1968: 132 Fig. 119).

⁶⁷ Nicholls suggests that this may possibly be a case of gratuitous concurrence between Crawford and his sources (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 24 July 2015).

⁶⁸ At Kunmunya in 1927 George Homes, Industrial Assistant, gave pearl shell carving lessons to a small number of Aboriginal men in an attempt to provide some income for the mission and this may explain this early realistic boab nut. For further details see Chapter 5.

Berndt and Berndt (1988; see also Berndt, Berndt & Stanton 1982: 120) also believed, like others previously cited, that the decorated boab nuts were:

used as rattles in ceremonies ... incised and painted so that their designs stand out in bold contrast to the natural brown colour of the dried nuts and the lighter colour of the under surface. (Berndt & Berndt 1988: 438–9)

Although McKenzie (1980) from her research in the late 1960s believed that this was possibly an introduced craft, she went on to observe: ‘in the old days it was probably a pastime indulged in by the artists as they reproduced their Dreaming designs’ (McKenzie 1980: 33). Likewise, Kevin Kelly, art advisor at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts in 1997, believed it may have been introduced and had observed:

some boab nuts that clearly carry a lot of story but then a lot of them are done as a pastime to make some money on ‘mila week’, milo week, non-pension week and we support both as an art centre. People who are artists produce [boab nuts] with good story attached and other people bring in [boab nuts which are] quite saleable and [have] done it on [sic] off money week to get some food. They are still artists, even if they are doing it for tucker. Some of the old people just sit here because they love doing stuff, money is not so important for them, but a lot of the women need that extra income to go through that off week and carving will do that.

(Kevin Kelly, pers. comm., 22 August 1997 in Lang 1999: 57)

Jebb (2006), in her discussion of Jack Wherra’s work, states that they ‘were probably carved as gifts and exchange items before Europeans settled in the north Kimberley but this is open to debate’ (Jebb 2006: 703).

Certainly the practice of decorating boab nuts definitely predated the twentieth century because a number of nineteenth-century and very early twentieth century reports provide evidence of the presence of this practice (for example, Saville-Kent 1897: 10; Clements 1903: 2) and, indeed, extant early boab nuts exist in collections in Australia⁶⁹ and overseas. Photographic evidence and illustrations from books and journals from the nineteenth century confirm motif continuity with design precursors in rock art and wood carving (Fig.3.4).

Discussion of Kimberley art practices over time continues in Chapter 5. The long and enduring geometric and figurative genres have, however, declined in the twentieth century with the development of a Western realistic genre. Incised boab nuts and other Kimberley

⁶⁹ While the National Museum Collections discussed in this thesis are composed of twentieth-century examples, Museum Victoria has the Oldham Collection of nine boab nuts dated in the 1870s (X85152-X85160).

art forms, like the bark paintings of Arnhem Land and the more recent acrylic paintings from the central desert regions, are highly desired art objects for art galleries, museums, and tourists, to name just a few, and this stimulates and intensifies their production. A discussion of innovation and exchange follows in Chapters 4 and 5. The cross-cultural influences associated with Kimberley art practices will be discussed in Chapter 5. A description of decorated boab nuts, the genres, technique and their function follows.

Decorated boab nut techniques and motif styles

Incised boab nuts – zigzags, lines, and scraping

The incising of boab nuts after the removal of the soft outer velvety covering is achieved by using a sharp tool such as a pen knife, a piece of wire, a glass edge, a razor blade, a drill etc. to gouge a channel across the surface at different depths to expose the varying changes in colour⁷⁰ and to give depth to incised figures by scraping larger areas away (Davidson 1937: 64 Fig. 46–7; McCarthy 1957: 53; Akerman 1993: 107; Jebb 2006: 704).⁷¹ Before metal tool technology became available, decoration would be incised by stone, shell, tooth (Fig. 3.6) or bone edges (Basedow 1925: 311; see also Black 1964: 90; Crawford 1968: 132). These were also used on wooden implements (Fig. 3.6), with Basedow (1925) reporting that boomerangs from this region were usually decorated with incised patterns (Basedow 1925: 311). For example, the deep gouges in early designs were a characteristic of: ‘the lower incisor of a possum, wallaby or kangaroo where the point of the tooth is modified by snapping off the tip to provide a narrow chisel edge of broken enamel (Fig. 3.7) (Horton 1994: 338–9; see also Barritt & Croll 1943: 20). The characteristic zigzag by an incisor was:

caused by the tip of the blade biting into the shell on alternate sides of the main axis of direction as it is rocked. The line varies in the width, in the density of the zigzag per centimetre, and in depth, depending on the rapidity and amplitude of the rocking motion imparted to the blade and the degree of pressure exerted upon it. (Akerman & Stanton 1994: 7)

⁷⁰ The colour becomes lighter as the tool penetrates more deeply.

⁷¹ The best-known artist for incised boab nuts is Jack Wherra, a Ngarinyin man, who spent 18 years in Broome Prison before being released in 1964. Akerman (2003) reports that Wherra ‘used a three inch nail and pieces of broken glass to create his works. Pocket knives were possibly forbidden to him in prison’ (Akerman 2003: 71).

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Fig. 3.6: Shield (*Wunda*) and detail of zigzag incising
Kimberley, c. 1940
L 960mm x W 140mm x D 55mm
MV X44691
Museum Victoria

Fig. 3.7: Animal bone fabricator, with a bifacially flaked point at the distal end
Derby, 1935
L 200mm x W 45mm x D 30mm
Dr. Robert Wishart Collection
NMA 1985.0102.0371

Basedow (1925) describes boab nut incising seen during his 1916 expedition. With increasing access to metal tool technology in the late nineteenth century (Stanton 1986a: 25), Basedow (1925; see also Black 1964: 90) observes that the boab nuts were incised by holding the:

nut firmly in the left hand and work[ing] the design in the dark, outer layer of the shell with the sharp point of a bone, or, as the case nowadays, with the point of a piece of iron wire or of a pocket knife. The instrument is held in the right hand, with the four fingers against the palm, while the thumb is laid straight along it on the top. The nut is steadied against the body whilst the point of the instrument is applied from the distant side. By applying semi-rotary movements with the hand, the point is made to plough forwards, and by so doing the thin, brown surface is broken and falls away leaving a white, and slightly jagged, line upon a dark background. (Basedow 1925: 311)

Likewise, the medium's surface also determines the final design; for example, while the soft skin of the boab nut allowed for fluid designs and diverse styles, the designs applied to emu eggs early this century were rigidly determined by the hard but delicate shell until more precise tools became available (Lang 1999: 62). The replacement of stone or bone tools made changes to both the incising technique and the designs on boab nuts. Since the early twentieth century, most artists have been using a pocket knife (Kevin Kelly, pers. comm., 22 August 1997; Lowe 1998: 50) or sometimes pointed wire, bread and butter knives and linocutting tools; even dentist's drills⁷² are used (Akerman 1993: 106, Akerman & Stanton 1994: 7; Crawford 1968: 131; Lang 1999: 62) (Figs 3.8 & 3.9). A pocket knife

⁷² Alan Mungulu was provided with a dentist drill while in Derby hospital with poliomyelitis, initially to make pearl buttons and buckles, as a means for making money (McKenzie 1969: 192, 194). Mungulu later also produced incised boab nuts and taught others; see Chapters 5 and 6 for further details.

blade, sharper and more precise than an incisor, will produce a similar zigzag if it is twisted side to side as the knife is pushed away from the body (Black 1964: 90; Crawford 1968: 131; McKenzie 1980: 36). Depth is determined by pressure (Alan Griffiths, pers. comm., 22 August 1997) but the zigzags today are very much shallower than the incisions produced last century, most likely due to the greater choice in tools. The width of the zigzag line is determined by both the tool used and its manipulation by the artist. The depth of a line is controlled by the pressure applied on the tool or through the use of a tool such as a drill (Figs 3.10a, 3.10b & 3.10c).



Fig. 3.8: Jack Wherra working on a boab nut carving, Mowanjum, WA, 1965
Wherra is using a sharpened screwdriver.
Photographer: Neil Tilden
black & white negative, 10cm x 13cm
John David McCaffrey Collection
AIATSIS Ref: McCaffrey.J01.BW-N07441_05
(AIATSIS 2013: cover)

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Fig. 3.9: Christine Trent with a manually operated dentist's drill to be sent to Broome to be used by local Aboriginal people to engrave shells and boab nuts, 8 September 1966 [original SLWA caption]
Ken Hotchkin collection of photographs
BA1524/119
State Library of Western Australia

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Fig. 3.10a: Detail of deep straight-line incising [North-west Australia, c. 1940s]
L 160mm x W 65mm x D 55mm
Dr. Robert Wishart Collection
NMA 1985.0102.0423

Fig. 3.10b: Detail of fine zigzag incising with scrapped bands North-west Australia, c. 1927
L 200mm x W 95mm x D 95mm
Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection
NMA 1985.0073.0042

Fig. 3.10c: Detail of lines made with a dentist's drill
Jim Jolly
Geraldton, 1998
L 165mm x W 70mm
Lang Private collection

The zigzag line is now used as a stylistic device throughout various mediums, including printing, engraving and painting, and is no longer an attribute of the tool used. This use of the zigzag line is firmly embedded in the Aboriginal aesthetics of the Kimberley region today and is used by paint and print artists such as Tommy Bung Bung and Jimmy Pike (Fig. 3.11). Although the zigzag line dominates small artworks such as incised boab nuts and incised slates, it crosses over into print media. As boab nut artist Barbara Backstrom, who won the 1992 West Kimberley Craft Festival artefact section, explains that she uses the zigzag ‘in all her work, including her lithographs, [and this] comes from her Aboriginal heritage, indicating the natural channel system of small creeks and rivers’ (Backstrom 2006: n.p.).

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Fig. 3.11: Mangkaja, c. 1987
Jimmy Pike
33.6cm x 45.4cm
screen print 56/95
21.1988
Art Gallery of NSW

The zigzag is a meaningful characteristic. Rose (2000) argues that, in an Aboriginal cosmogony, the ‘geography of country [is] embedded in the “motion and pause” of dance and song’ (D. Rose 2000: 289). The zigzag aesthetic is relevant here. She explains this as place-centred wherein:

life unfolds through presence and non-presence. The interplay between return and departure, the here and the not-here, the beat and the interval, [the zig and the zag] is movement in time and place that unfolds into moral connections of responsibility.

(D. Rose 2000: 290)

Marquis and Wyeld (2010) discuss mark making and the visualisation of ancestral power. They argue that repetition, the haptic⁷³ aspects of making and marking, as embedding this Ancestral power. Citing Biddle, they observe that a painting's surface is a surrogate 'skin' and is a:

somatic surface that feels, that imprints, that scars; boundary and border of what is essentially an animate being. The forms, features, marks and named places that make up Country hold precise affiliations and identifications as well as powerful and potentially dangerous forces. Marks, and the practice of mark-making, invokes a force that has the potential, for example, to rejuvenate Country and its inhabitants; to control fertility; regulate social relations and heal illness. (Biddle in Marquis & Wyeld 2010: 393)

For the Arnhem Land art of the Yolngu, Morphy (1989) argues for the significance of the 'brilliance' of Ancestral power in the *raark* through the alternating lines of colour in the cross-hatching (Morphy 1989).⁷⁴ This cross-hatching is the physical manifestation of *bir'yun*, the emanation of spiritual power using the visual element of shimmering (Ryan 1996: n.p.). In the Kimberley, the embedded expression of the act of doing and feeling zigzag incising on boab nuts and the incised line and spaces of wooden and pearl shell objects reflect these connections. The Dreaming narratives move from place to place, and so too the 'travelling eye'.⁷⁵ This ebb and flow, the repetition, is in the zigzag and the seriality of designs as seen in incised boab nuts.

Painted boab nuts and the finishes

Painted designs on boab nuts are uncommon, especially in earlier examples, possibly due to the instability of pigments⁷⁶, natural environment, missionary craft concerns of saleability⁷⁷, and collector bias. Mulvaney (1996), researching Miriwoong and Kadjerong rock art⁷⁸, noted the restricted sources for ochre within their country, and that mineral pigments are always connected with sacred sites (Mulvaney 1996: 15). By way of

⁷³ Haptic is used in the sense of the tactile sensation of manipulating objects.

⁷⁴ Newstead (2014) notes that Kuninjku artist Peter Marralwanga's paintings were figurative and explained his paintings were 'the interplay between stylistic conventions [cross-hatching] and his own personal interpretation as being "half secret one, half ordinary one"' (Newstead 2014: 127).

⁷⁵ See Chapter 4 for a discussion of this 'way of seeing'.

⁷⁶ Natural pigments could include 'ochre' (iron-oxide based, natural based and burnt minerals), clay-based pigments, and charcoal (Flood 1997). These ochres were traded through the *wunan* and carried in bags and containers such as boab nuts. See Fig. 3.15 for an example of red ochre from Mowanjum.

⁷⁷ Rey (2011) notes that over the twentieth century missionaries, anthropologists and staff in art centres have introduced colours outside of the ochre palette as well as introducing different techniques and media (Rey 2011: 35). Importantly Rey notes that 'this is not to deny artists' agency, but to acknowledge the rather unique working environment of these art communities...embedded in two distinctly different world views, flow[ing] both ways' (Rey 2011: 35).

⁷⁸ Jibijung is just north of the Kimberley border, halfway to the Victoria River. A number of Miriwoong artists live and work out of Kununurra and Waringarri Aboriginal Artists art centre and have close relations across the border, for example, senior artists Peggy and Alan Griffiths.

example, he discusses the collection of red ochre from Jibijung (on Legune station), which was subsequently mined between the 1930s and the 1940s, leading to the availability of different coloured ochres. Mulvaney (1996) remarks:

Today at Jibijung, people collect a range of coloured minerals including a white-blue ochre, reds, and others that provide a bright yellow tint. These are exposed in a cutting and would not have been available prior to the late 1930s commercial mining activities at the location. (Mulvaney 1996: 16)

Carr (2010), in her examination of paintings by East Kimberley artists, notes the use of naturally occurring pigments while elsewhere Kimberley artists, particularly on three-dimensional artworks, often use acrylic paints, for example, in the communities around Balgo, to the south at Jigalong (Carr 2010: 217) and Kununurra (Lang 1999: 46 & 64). Interviews with East Kimberley artists during Carr's field trips over 2007–09 allowed her to observe the 'belief of painting "country with country"' (Carr 2010: 218) and supports the comment by Warmun artist Peggy Patrick that:

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.

(Patrick in Carr 2010: 218)

In Sculthorpe's article on the National Museum of Australian and Museum of Victoria collections she noted there were no painted nuts collected before the 1950s and suggested that 'painting [was] not done before access to European materials' (Sculthorpe 1990: 43). However, Utemorrah and Crawford both mention boab trees being painted much earlier (Crawford 1968: 129; Utemorrah & Vinnicrombe 1992: 25), with Utemorrah recording that 'when we wanted to have plenty of yams or crocodiles, we would go back to that place [boab tree] and paint them again' (Utemorrah in Utemorrah & Vinnicrombe 1992: 25). This provides further evidence for boab trees generally, and most likely boab nuts, being deeply associated with increase rituals and fertility. It also suggests that mission and collecting practices may be involved in the lack of painted boab nuts in collections. A number of incised and painted objects, including shields, are in the National Museum of Australia collections, meaning that it is possible that boab nuts were painted in earlier periods⁷⁹; however, the impermanence of ochre and other natural pigments on the boab nut surface,

⁷⁹ Other very early objects such as incised pearl shells are observed as pigmented with ochre or other materials (Akerman & Stanton 1994).

the fragile nature of the boab nut structure regarding cracking and humidity changes, and again, collector bias must be considered (Lang 1999: 73).

An example of receptiveness to new paint media is demonstrated by Jack Wherra who was taught in Broome Prison how to make his own paint and glaze by Warder Stan Ferridge, who worked there from 1949 to 1963. Ferridge had trained in the 1930s as a tin painter and his son recalls ‘the bottles of fermenting beer kept around the house for use as the base for the paint’ (Jebb 2006: 701) (Fig. 3.12).



Fig. 3.12: Detail of painting use to convey three-dimensionality to kangaroos on incised boab nut
Jack Wherra,
Derby, [c. 1970s]
L 205mm x W 100mm x D 100mm
Enid Bowden Collection
NMA 1987.0050.0315

The NMA holds 15 painted boab nuts from Forrest River Mission c. 1953–54 (1985.0066.0050-1985.0066.0064) and three painted boab nuts in the Y. Pettinato Collection (1985.0003.0082-1985.0003.0084) potentially from the 1970s (Figs 3.13 & 3.14). In the late twentieth century, Alan and Peggy Griffiths, senior artists at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts in Kununurra and well known for their decorated boab nuts, occasionally paint their boab nuts but incise them beforehand because of the fragile nature of the paint and binders (Alan & Peggy Griffiths, pers. comm., 22 August 1997; see also Akerman 1993: 106).⁸⁰

⁸⁰ It is possible that sometimes paint is used to conceal an incised motif, for example, see Fig. 3.14 (1985.0065.0057).

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Fig. 3.13: Incised and painted [pigment unknown]
[Forrest River?, possibly c. 1970s]
L 240mm x W 115mm x D 105mm
Y Pettinato Collection
NMA 1985.0003.0083

Fig. 3.14: Incised motif under paint [pigment unknown]
Forrest River, 1953–54
L 135mm x Dia 70mm
Bruce Coaldrake Collection
NMA 1985.0066.0057

Mulvaney (1996) explains the use of the Billy Goat Plum tree (*Terminalia carpentariae*) as both a gum for binding ochres and as a red pigment (Mulvaney 1996: 16).⁸¹ Clarke (2007) notes the growing tip of a bush gardenia can be pounded to produce gum for making artefacts (Clarke 2007: 121). The NMA's Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1 includes a block of ochre owned by Albert Barunga from Mowanjum (Fig. 3.15) and implies that some artists used colour on their incised works.

Carr (2010) notes that Cathy Cummins, the art coordinator at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts in 2009, had mentioned that the artists had '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' (Carr 2010: 220); it was determined that natural bush binders produced the best overall finish. The use of binders in pigments for rock art and body painting included fat or blood, beeswax or resins (Carr 2010: 220). Carr (2010) comments that, at Warmun, Rover Thomas and Jack Britten in their paintings of the early 1980s:

mixed their ochre with kangaroo blood and tree resin and even sometimes 'chewed' grass to colour the ochre if it was of poor quality ... 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].

(Carr 2010: 220–1)

⁸¹ Mulvaney (1996) discusses in detail the mineral and non-mineral pigments available to the Miriwoong and Kadjerong.



Fig. 3.15: Red ochre, c. 1966–71
 Owned by Albert Barunga
 L 70mm x W 70mm x H 45mm
 Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1
 NMA 1982.0092.0022.005

Akerman (1993) observes that the painted boab nuts often feature broad bands of colour with dotted borders (Akerman 1993: 106), similar to East Kimberley paintings (Fig. 3.16a). Other boab nuts also include figurative elements such as snakes, owls, fish and butterflies/moths (Figs 3.16b & 3.16c). Wickens (2008) reports that coloured crayons have been used (Wickens 2008: 129). Quite often acrylic paints are used, as ochre can deteriorate rapidly under certain conditions and with handling of the boab nut. Other natural pigments can be very unstable on three-dimensional objects with uneven surfaces (Lang 1999: 64).



Fig. 3.16a: Painted boab nuts
 a) Shirley Lumai,
 Kununurra, 1997
 L 105mm x W 55mm
 b) Everlyn Hall, 1995
 Kununurra, 1997
 L 95mm x W 70mm
 Lang Private Collection



Fig. 3.16b: Painted owl motif
 Judy Mengili,
 Kununurra, 2001
 L 163mm x W 110mm
 Lang Private Collection

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Fig. 3.16c: Painted figurative boab nut
 Joong Ari
 Forrest River Mission, 1953–54
 L 220mm x W 120mm x D 110mm
 Bruce Coaldrake Collection
 NMA1985.0066.0054

Decorated boab nuts occasionally appear ‘varnished’ (Figs 3.17a & 3.17b; see also 4.5b), although when this finish may have been applied is uncertain – by the artist, by the art centre or gallery, or by the museum for preservation. However, Hamby and Young (2001)

note that Pitjantjatjara artists oil their wooden sculpture, *punu*, ‘to deepen the colours and make the branded black pattern more vivid (Hamby & Young 2001: 24). They further record the use of metallic paints, hair oil, and cooking oil as a finish in the Western Desert region (Hamby & Young 2001: 24).

It may be productive to speculate on the importance of shininess. Morphy (1991) reported that for the Yolngu in Arnhem Land, ‘this brightness is one of the things that endows the painting with ancestral power’ (Morphy 1991: 194). This includes both cross-hatching and naturally shiny surfaces and is connected with health and wellbeing.⁸² The shiny surface of the Kimberley pearl shell is perceived as ‘water, its flashing the lightning that precedes the summer storms’ (Akerman & Stanton 1994: 19) and has religious and/or magical associations. Akerman and Stanton (1994) also mention shininess in relation to the Warlpiri in the Central Desert region as a sign of ‘health, well being and beauty’ (Akerman & Stanton 1994: 19). More recently, Akerman (2015) has noted the ‘glowing effect’ of the stippled painted infill in embodied Wandjina on rock walls (Akerman 2015: 2) and the presence of Ancestral power. Or it may be that at some point between producer and display case, it was decided that the varnish may make it look better or improve its preservation.

Image not available due to copyright restrictions



Fig. 3.17a: Varnished or burnished boab nut
Northern Western Australia, [c.1950s–1970s]
L 210mm x W 90mm x D 90mm
Professor Henry Krips MBE and Mrs Luise Krips Collection
NMA 1993.0047.0215

Fig. 3.17b: Varnished or burnished boab nut
Northern Western Australia, 1930
L 197mm x W 118mm
R.C. Glasson Collection
SAM 14628
South Australian Museum (Lang 1999)

⁸² Hamby and Young (2001: 24) link a number of transformations of surfaces, such as how the land changes with rain and the ceremonial body with fat from animals and ochres.

Geometric genre of decorated boab nuts

The geometric motifs from the Kimberley region have been well recorded (Clements 1903; Basedow 1925; Davidson 1937; McCarthy 1957; Lommel 1970; Berndt & Berndt 1988; Sculthorpe 1990; Akerman 1993; Akerman & Stanton 1994; Lang 1999) and have been recorded on boab trees, pearl shell (Fig. 3.19), wooden weapons (Figs 3.6 & 3.20b) and boab nuts (Fig. 3.18). In the incised boab nuts discussed in this thesis, generally geometric designs are depicted in conjunction with figurative motifs.

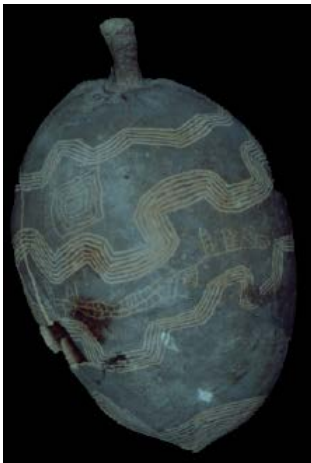


Fig. 3.18: Incised boab nut with interlocking key design [possibly early 1910s] Northern Western Australia, accessioned 1950s Mt Gambier Institute
L 175mm x W 122mm
SAM 44368
South Australian Museum (Lang 1999)

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Fig. 3.19: Shell pubic cover North Western Australia, 1916
L 215mm x W 170mm x H 30mm
Dr. Herbert Basedow Collection
NMA 1985.0060.0761
<http://collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/object/11537>

Davidson (1937) observed in his publication on Kimberley art that boab nut decoration is:

consistent with the general styles of decoration in the Kimberley region. In some instances, angular meanders are employed and there also are appearances of other geometrical figures such as crude zigzags and concentric circles, squares and rhomboids. For the most part, however, the decoration seems to be naturalistic and include turtles, snakes, plants, leaves and kangaroos. These representations, although not the outstanding motifs of the Kimberley region, also appear occasionally on the local incised boomerangs.

(Davidson 1937: 64–5) (Figs 3.20a & 3.20b)

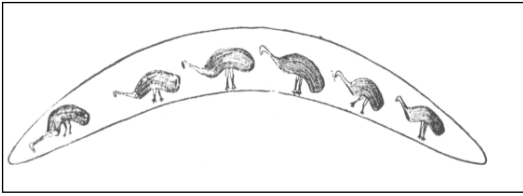


Fig. 3.20a: Boomerang of the Pidunga tribe, Broome [1916] (Basedow 1925: 317 Fig. 18)

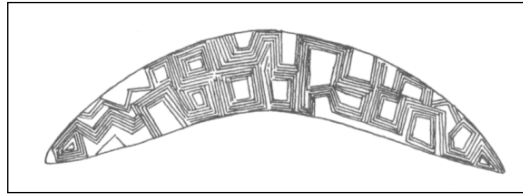


Fig. 3.20b: Boomerang from the Kimberley District Western Australian Museum (Davidson 1937: 20 Fig. 8)

Morphy (1981) had earlier observed that the Yolngu, also from northern Australia, produced paintings which ‘in restricted contexts were predominantly geometric’ (Morphy 1981: 65), while ‘paintings produced for public context were largely figurative’ (Morphy 1981: 65). Kleinert (2000a) likewise argues this point for wooden implements of south-eastern Australia as:

The evident parallels between the rock art, carved wooden weapons ... and body designs of the region, make it likely that these graphic elements encoded restricted knowledge as they do elsewhere in Aboriginal communities today. (Kleinert 2000a: 241)

The depiction of geometric designs in body painting is the predominant genre in the Kimberley region, although there are a few documented examples belonging to a restricted context⁸³ where figurative motifs rather than geometric designs are incorporated in sacred body painting (Wurms in Akerman 2015: 78 & Fig. 10).

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Fig. 3.21: Men dressed for dance, Kalumburu, 1963
Note the geometric body designs; some of these designs appear in the borders of incised boab nuts. (Donaldson & Kenneally 2007: 105 Fig. 6.3)

Interpretations of geometric designs

The interpretation and use of these geometric motifs in the Kimberley has been discussed since the nineteenth century. Saville-Kent, a biologist, notes the ‘strictly rectilinear plan’ of the carved weapons he observed in the 1890s while Commissioner of Fisheries for

⁸³ This secret-sacred cult context will not be discussed in this thesis.

Western Australia (Saville-Kent in Sculthorpe 1990: 41). Many early weapons, pearl shells and boab nuts are decorated with meanders⁸⁴, zigzags or mazes, and interpretations of these designs over the twentieth century have ranged from specific waterways (Davidson 1949; Von Brandenstein 1972: 238), to representations of Ancestral Beings, for example, the anthropologist Petri suggests that ‘random meanders may be a schematised representation of the Rainbow Serpent itself’ (Petri in Akerman & Stanton 1994: 36), while the anthropologist Lommel comments that they may ‘show the wandering and paths of traditional ancestors and totemic heroes’ (Lommel 1970: 219). Nicholls argues strongly against the idea of ‘random meanders’, commenting that they are about male initiation and post-initiation practices. She contends Aboriginal men are reluctant to talk to outsiders about initiation-related designs so it may be outside/inside configuration, for example ‘the outside layer being ripples on a beach or sand dune, the “inside” narrative relating to initiation’ (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 28 June 2015). Evidence is provided for the non-randomness of meanders by Crawford (1968), who notes for his photograph of a 1962 incised boab nut from Wyndham that ‘the vertical line represents the road from Wyndham to Kununurra and the adjoining loops are significant places on that road’ (Crawford 1968: 132 Fig. 119) (Figs 3.22a & 3.22b).



Fig 3.22a: Geometric design indicating a route that ‘looks’ like random meanders Wyndham, 1962
Crawford indicates that these lines represent a road (route) and significant places along the route (Crawford 1968: 132 Fig. 119).



Fig 3.22b: Geometric motif similar to Fig 3.22a
On the other side of this boab nut is a circle and line, design
Northern Western Australia, unknown date
L 120mm x W 70mm
Lang Private Collection

Other attempts at meaning have included, for example, the explorer Alexander Forrest who observed in 1879 that it was the ‘endless rugged *zigzags* of the cliffs’ (Forrest in Jebb

⁸⁴ Terms such as ‘meanders’, ‘mazes’ and ‘ladders’ for geometric designs are conventional descriptions used in early observations and do not indicate Aboriginal attributions of meaning. See also footnote 60.

2002: 27; my emphasis) that prevented him and his men from crossing the ranges and entering Ngarinyin country and which consequently proved a barrier to pastoral settlement until the end of the twentieth century (Figs 3.23a & 3.23b).



Fig. 3.23a: Aerial view of part of the Ord River in the Kimberley, 1968
Note the 'zigzag' in the landscape⁸⁵
Photographer: unknown
colour print
NAA A1500 11933796
National Archives of Australia



Fig. 3.23b: Between Argyle and Ivanhoe cattle stations, some 80 miles south of Wyndham, the Ord River carves its way through the rugged red mountains of the Carr Boyd Range, 1952
Photographer: W. Petersen
black & white photographic negative
NAA A1200 11223412
National Archives of Australia

Akerman and Stanton (1994), in their significant and substantial research on Kimberley pearl shell, noted that (see also Sutton & Anderson 1988: 3):

according to Paddy Roe, a senior custodian of ritual activity in the Broome area, the linear rectangular pattern derived from the zigzag is known to coastal groups as *ranya-ranya*. It represents, among coastal groups in the area, the ripples left in the sand by the receding tide. In most cases, aligned multiple zigzags have been described by Aboriginal people as either flood water, or ripples caused by wind on the surface of flood waters.

(Akerman & Stanton 1994: 36)

Geometric designs used in body painting are also applied on incised or painted on weapons and ceremonial objects (McCarthy 1957: 170) (Figs 3.21, 3.24a & 3.24b). Basedow (1925) from his observations in 1916 noted in relation to wooden weapons both the 'longitudinal geniculate bands, alternatively incised lengthwise and crosswise, together giving the effect of a false herring-bone motif' (Basedow 1925: 311). Clements 'claimed a relationship

⁸⁵ See Gibson (2008) for an example of the relationship between the physical landscape and its echo in the use of 'repetitive outlining of form' by geometric lines on artworks/artefacts by Barkindji artists in Wilcannia, New South Wales (Gibson 2008: 288).

between geometric design and scarification' (Clements in Lang 1999: 84).⁸⁶ More recently in the West Torres Strait, Brady concludes that the rock art 'reveal[s] correlations with scarification designs and designs on decorated objects' (Brady 2008: 340). Brady argues that:

A rock painting executed on a granite boulder or a sandstone rockshelter represents a fixed symbolic marker that reflects social interaction or communication, and establishes a connection or relationship to a place. The distribution of portable artefacts and the symbolic images or designs they bear, also represents social interaction and exchange.

(Brady 2008: 347)

These correlations are evidence that the incising of these geometric designs on the earlier boab nuts is not secular 'ornamentation' but are Law knowledge with associated religious properties. Akerman (1993) comments, for example, that the ladder design is the 'manifestation of the Rainbow Snake found in conjunction with either zigzags or loosely radiating lines' (Akerman 1993: 110) and this includes the representation of the *mirra* or blind snake.⁸⁷ This is a structural parallel with body painting. At Forrest River during his 1916 expedition, Basedow (1925) observed that:

a favourite mode is to draw a broad step-ladder-like pattern from the ankles up the front surfaces of the legs, continuing this up the trunk to about the level of the nipples, and then circling outwards, down an arm on either side, to run out at the elbow.

(Basedow 1925: 325)

⁸⁶ For discussion on Australian Aboriginal body art see Claire Smith (1997) on body art and archaeological theory; and Françoise Dussart (1997) on Warlpiri women and the movement of body painting from 'torso to acrylics' (Dussart 1997: 193).

⁸⁷ There are numerous Kimberley snakes and lizards with 'ladder-like' or 'zigzag-like' markings including the Black Headed Python *Aspidites melanocephalus* (seen in rock art with its eggs), the Night Tiger Snake *Bioga irregularis* and Velvet Gecko *Oedura rhombifer*.

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Fig. 3.24a: Example of body painting from the Kimberley in 1920s [location unknown] (Lofgren 1975: 49)

Fig. 3.24b: Incised boab nut with 'ladder' motif North Western Australia, c. 1910
L 124mm x W 96mm
SAM 6430
South Australian Museum (Lang 1999)

Geometric motifs and decorated boab nuts

In the south-western Kimberley, the interlocking key design (Figs 3.25 & 3.26) circulates from the Lagrange Bay area and: 'in various forms is found along the northern coast of Western Australia on baobab nuts, boomerangs, spear throwers, shields, pearl shell and *churingas*' (Davidson 1949: 90). Elkin, an anthropologist, clergyman and later Chair of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, observed during his 1920s field work in the Kimberley that the interlocking key pattern found on weapons and pearl shell is:

the same as that engraved on the bull-roarers and large sacred wooden boards which symbolise the sky culture-heroes. Moreover, this design cannot even be made on the shells by any person except those men who know the 'song' which belongs to it.

(Elkin in McCarthy 1966: 9)

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Fig. 3.25: Pearl shell pubic cover with
interlocking key design
Karadjeri [Roebuck Bay], 1927–28
W 120mm x H 165mm x D 4mm
Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection
NMA 1985.0073.0041

<http://collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/ce/elkin?object=15933>

Fig. 3.26: Detail of shield with
interlocking key design, #33
Lagrange Bay region, c. 1900
H 80cm
Marc and Elena Pinto Collection
(Mossgreen Auctions 2015)

Other geometric motifs include ‘concentric’ squares, rectangles, triangles, herringbone, rhomboids and line-and-circle in patterns that are characteristic motifs on ceremonial *churingas* (Black 1964: 69) (Figs 3.27a & 3.27b).⁸⁸ Mountford and Harvey (1938) summarised geometric engraving into four subdivisions: angular meander or maze designs; meandering and zigzag lines; lattice and ladder designs; and parallel lines and stars (Mountford & Harvey 1938: 131). All these designs can be found incised on early portable objects such as boab nuts, pearl shell, wooden weapons and ceremonial objects (McCarthy 1957: 170).

⁸⁸ Line-and-circle designs are known as *tinjari* in the desert regions to the south of the Kimberley. Nicholls notes that ‘conjoined concentric circles attached within a crystalline-type structure make reference to male initiation ceremonies which co-initiates undergo at the same time’ (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 6 June 2016). For example, see Figs 3.27a and 3.27b,

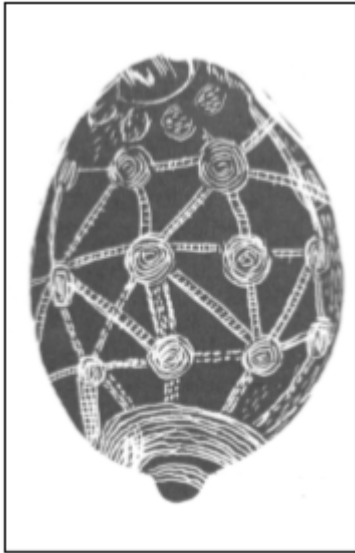


Fig. 3.27a: Early carved boab nut depicting line-and-circle design (Norton 1975: Fig. 9)

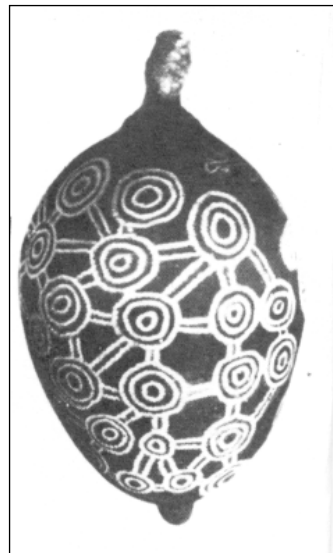


Fig. 3.27b: Carved boab nut depicting line-and-circle design 1916 (Basedow 1925: Plate XLIII)

In these earlier boab nuts the geometric motifs on boab nuts are often found in conjunction with figurative motifs (Basedow 1925: 311; Davidson 1937: 64; Davidson 1949: 90; McCarthy 1966: 52); this is far less common from the mid-twentieth century onwards (Figs 3.28a & 3.28b), apart from motifs in the borders of panels, which appear restrained to fit the narrow space (Figs 3.29a, 3.29b, 3.29c & 3.29d).



Fig. 3.28a: Incised European figure with meander design
Derby, pre- 1929
L 182mm x W 92mm
WHL Walter Collection
SAM 14522
South Australian Museum (Lang 1999)



Fig. 3.28b: Incised introduced animal (bullock) with linked line-and-circle design
Northern Western Australia, late 1960s,
L 140mm x W 100mm
Lang Private Collection
Note: other side includes a jockey with hat, whip, silks and boots (Fig. 5.32b), as well as an Aboriginal head with headdress, fish, horse, pig and other geometric motifs – helixes, s-curves, meander.

Stanton (1989) observes that the decrease in the earlier style of geometric motifs may be the consequence of their being 'less readily interpreted by tourists' (Stanton 1989:8)⁸⁹ and the market forces in the later twentieth century propelling the identifiable figurative elements into the readily understandable realistic motifs (Williams 1976; Berndt & Stanton 1980; Lang 1999).

In one of the earliest observations recorded, Clements (1903)⁹⁰ wrote that the Aborigines are very fond of carving boab nuts with 'line ornamentation as well as with animals and men' (Clements 1903: 2). Further, with regard to decorated boab nuts, Sculthorpe (1990) also makes a similar point, concluding that:

it was those nuts with a geometric design which were used in ceremonial contexts. The paucity of nuts with elements of geometric design after 1950s could then be attributed to a decrease in the number of restrictive contexts of use due to European influence on Aboriginal society and/or to increased difficulty for Europeans to gain access to those restrictive contexts in order to collect such nuts. (Sculthorpe 1990: 43)⁹¹

Lang (1999), examining the South Australian Museum collection of decorated boab nuts, noted that a number of scholars had connected the early geometric motifs with the body painting and rock art of the region and that the subsequent absence of these motifs was a consequence of the reduced opportunities for ceremony as interaction increased with colonial society. Occasionally boab nuts still include some elements of the older-style geometric motifs. Although 'people in the 1960s and 1970s still did these [older geometrics but they were] regarded as cheaper quality nuts in comparison to European styles' (Akerman in Lang 1999: 83).

Davidson (1937), Crawford (1968), Berndt and Berndt (1988) and others have commented on the traditional geometric designs on boab nuts and suggest that for most part these were combined with figurative motifs such as animals, reptiles and birds in the same manner as the decoration of pearl shells and boomerangs. Geometric and figurative motifs also occur on boab tree trunks (Grey 1841:112–13; Eylmann 1908: Plate 17; Dahl 1927: 181;

⁸⁹ See Chapter 4 for a discussion on legibility.

⁹⁰ Between 1896 and 1928 Clements sold over 1600 Western Australian Aboriginal artefacts to museums in the United Kingdom including the British Museum, and in Europe, especially in Germany (British Museum n.d.).

⁹¹ Smith also suggests it may be that a change in style is related to a change in audience, from ceremony to tourists (Claire Smith, pers. comm., 11 March 2016).

Basedow 1925: 353; Crawford 1968: 128; Utemorrhah & Vinnicrombe 1992: 25; Berndt & Berndt 1988: 441).

When geometric motifs appear on later twentieth-century objects made for external markets, they are usually positioned at the borders and margins (Lang 1999; Sculthorpe 1990).⁹² Less frequently, modern geometric designs such as dots and triangles appear and these reflect other East Kimberley styles from other mediums, for example, painting. Since the 1920s, the geometric designs appear marginalised by the figurative and, later, the realistic motifs. This possible correspondence with the ‘marginalisation’ of Aboriginal society will be considered in Chapter 5. The borders between sections and around either end of the boab nut are geometric in style and vary significantly and potentially may also reflect body painting designs (Figs 3.21 & 3.24a; 3.29a, 3.29b, 3.29c & 3.29d).



Fig. 3.29a: Detail of border design
North Western Australia, [c. 1970s]
L 230mm x W 100mm x D 95mm
Enid Bowden Collection
NMA 1987.0050.0317



Fig. 3.29b: Detail of border design
Jack Wherra
Mowanjum, 1966–71
L 145mm x [W 130mm]
Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1
NMA 1982.0092.0002

⁹² Nicholls suggests a link to the ‘primary school “virtues”’, that is, the imposition by teachers on students of drawing in margins and around the boundaries of artwork is therefore ‘legible to whitefellas who are also socialised into these “virtues”’ (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 14 November 2015).

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Fig. 3.29c: Detail of border design
Jack Wherra
Derby, 1940–1978
L 187mm x W 105mm x D 105mm
MV X101237
Museum Victoria

Fig 3.29d: Detail of border design
Mowanjum, 1971
L 240mm x D 90mm
Adrian Luck No. 2 Collection
NMA 2002.0018.0063

Figurative genre of decorated boab nuts

Figurative and geometric designs frequently appear together on the earlier decorated boab nuts and later, with the development of panel division of the boab nuts, realistic designs were included on boab nuts with figurative motifs (Lang 1999). Stanton (1989) argues that figurative images are within the repertoire of Aboriginal art in the Kimberley and are not ‘merely a product of external influences’ (Stanton 1989: 9). As Basedow (1925) recorded in 1916:

Boomerangs are often decorated with incised patterns, but more frequently the decoration is only lightly graved into the wood with the point of a stone-knife or with the sharp cutting edge of a shell, tooth, or bone. From an art point of view, the finest productions come from the north of Western Australia. The King Leopold Ranges natives [sic] cover on whole side of their boomerangs with an incised pattern consisting usually of parallel geniculate lines, false herring-bone, or concentric rhomboids posed along a median line. Some of the most attractive specimens, however, come from the Pidunga tribe at Broome. These natives [sic] covered both surfaces of the missile with a wonderful variety of designs, which included excellent representations of emu, kangaroo, snakes, crocodiles, turtle, tracks of every description, dancing men, corroboree [sic] circles, and many decorative designs. Other articles, such as adze-handles, tjuringas, and message sticks, are carved after much the same fashion. (Basedow 1925: 311)

Early rock art from the region demonstrates that ‘figurative representation long precedes contact with outsiders’ (Stanton 1989: 9; see also Crawford 1968; Layton 1992; Akerman 1993; Flood 1997). Motifs from local rock art paintings are also incised on the earlier boab nuts as well as on pearl shell phallocrypts, wooden weapons and implements (Akerman 1993; Davidson 1937) (Figs 3.30, 3.31, 3.32 & 3.33), although more recently ‘realistic’ versions of the faunal and floral imagery are widespread. The exception to this is the continuing Wandjina-related figures, which have made a significant resurgence in the last 20 years.



Fig. 3.30: Rock paintings, Forrest River, Western Australia, 1916
L 100mm x W 125mm
glass plate negative
Dr. Herbert Basedow Collection
NMA 1985.0060.1071.001



Fig. 3.31: Aboriginal Wandjina Rock Art in the Wunnamurra Gorge, Barnett River, Mount Elizabeth Station, Kimberley, Western Australia, 2013
Courtesy of Graeme Churchard, Bristol, UK



Fig. 3.32: Pearl shell, Roebuck Bay (Mountford 1938: 120 Fig. 34)



Fig. 3.33: Incised boab nut Broome, 1916
L 290mm x W 150mm x D 120mm
Dr. Herbert Basedow Collection
NMA 1985.0060.0806

As explained, figurative motifs appear either by themselves or in conjunction with geometric designs (Lang 1999) on early decorated boab nuts and on incised boab trees. McCarthy (1966) links incised boab nuts with the tree carving of the region, by observing:

the motifs are either incised in the skin of the nut or the skin is scraped off with a sharp bone implement. Such drawings are also engraved in the soft bark of the baobab tree, which has a large circumference and an extensive area of bark. (McCarthy 1966: 53)

McCarthy notes that the figurative⁹³ motifs include ‘human figures as well as the more common kangaroos, emus, snakes and crocodiles’ (McCarthy 1966: 53). Lewis (1996) photographed a human figure carved into a boab tree on Coolibah Station, on the bank of the Victoria River. Lewis records:

the human figure is typical of human figures in local rock art sites and is likely to be Aboriginal in origin. It may well pre-date European settlement ... If the human image is Aboriginal in origin, it may be related to sorcery practice.

(Lewis 1996: 164–7, site 34)

In the Gregory National Park he also records:

Also carved into the trunk are images of a sailing boat with two masts, a human figure with chevrons inside the torso, and other unidentifiable designs ... The origin of the carved human figure is unknown; it could have been done by a European or an Aboriginal. The twin-masted sailing ship is yet another example from the series of ‘ships’ carved on boabs along the East Baines River. (Lewis 1996: 102)

Figurative motifs can also represent the special relationship between individuals and the narratives, songs and ceremony of the Beings from the North-western Kimberley region who created the Country and the Law. In the North-west Kimberley, the Wandjina⁹⁴ left images of themselves as rock paintings as well as leaving essences of people and animals at water holes:

Wandjinas are responsible for the increase of species, for the rain and for the sacred waters where ‘spirit-children’ sojourn awaiting incarnation ... a child is conceived by or through the father catching one of these spirit-children in a dream or in a flash of lightning ... and taking it home to his wife. (Coate in Treloyn 2003: 211)

⁹³ McCarthy uses the term ‘naturalistic figures’ (McCarthy 1966: 53).

⁹⁴ Wandjina and Wanjina are currently used, and Wunjina occasionally in early writing. See Glossary for the explanation of Wandjina and Wanjina.

David Mowaljarlai offers an Indigenous perspective and states that the Wandjina rock paintings are ‘images’ not ‘Art’, explaining:

To us they are IMAGES. IMAGES with ENERGIES that keep us ALIVE – EVERY PERSON, EVERYTHING WE STAND ON, ARE MADE FROM, EAT AND LIVE ON. Those IMAGES were put down for us by our Creator, Wandjina, so that we would know how to STAY ALIVE, make everything grow and CONTINUE what he gave to us in the first place. We should dance those images back into the earth in corrobborrees [sic]. That would make us learn the story, to put new life into those IMAGES. The message we read in our rock-paintings is like a bible written all over our country. In those images we read HOW THE CREATOR MADE NATURE FOR US and how he put us in charge TO LOOK AFTER IT ON HIS BEHALF.

We read the sacred messages in our rock-paintings, from the stones and from the earth images. A single man reads it for himself – once he is taught how to read and understand it – then he is initiated. Women too have their responsibilities to the land – women can be bosses of the country too. (Mowaljarlai in Mowaljarlai et al. 1988: 691)

The Wandjina images are strongly identified with North-western Kimberley art production, in particular with the Mowanjumb community near Derby. As previously stated, the Wandjina-producing artists are solely the Worora, Ngarinyin and Wunambul peoples, who have custodial rights in the narratives and images related to the Wandjina and this is discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6. Blundell and Woolagoodja (2005) describe the Wandjina as ‘animals⁹⁵ before the world changed’ and these animals are also ‘helpers’ or ‘partners’ to, or ‘represent’ the Wandjina (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 27). There is a special link between particular animals⁹⁶, plants and people and they describe them in English as ‘totems’ (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 27).

The Dreaming narratives describe the relationships between Ancestral Beings, geography and people. These narratives are site specific, for example, in the context of the West Kimberley, Akerman, Skyring and Yu (2010) have written:

how the Lalai Wunggurr Snake opened up the space where the Prince Regent River now flows by travelling from the inland toward the sea. Rock Cod and the Baler Shell, as Wanjina in their animal forms, then created Malandum (the Prince Regent River) by swimming upstream through this space. At the place known today as King Cascade, Rock Cod was forced to stop abruptly by the Lalai Bowerbird. As Rock Cod ‘put on the brakes’,

⁹⁵ Rather than ‘animals’ possibly ‘creature’ may be a better term.

⁹⁶ Prominent ‘totems’ include owls, emu, kangaroo, and barramundi (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 27).

she was thrust against the soft mud. In this way she created the step-like formation where today water cascades into the Prince Regent River from a stream atop the plateau where Bowerbird now lives. Travelling back toward the sea, but unable to go any further, Baler Shell became tired and swam around in a frenzied way. She was 'looking for a home' where she could 'stop', and in the process created a huge basin (St George Basin). Finally Baler shell 'stopped' and transformed herself into St Andrews Island, which takes its Worrorra name of 'Ngarlangkarnanya' from Baler Shell. Meanwhile, Wanjina in the form of a Flat-Headed Fish lifted up part of the land that adjoins this basin, thus protecting Mt. Trafalgar from Baler Shell's frantic activities.

(Senior Worrorra/Wunambul woman [unnamed] in Akerman, Skyring & Yu 2010: 4⁹⁷)

Figurative faunal motifs and decorated boab nuts

Painted on rock walls are faunal, floral, human/spirit and Ancestral Being⁹⁸ motifs, which are depicted on decorated boab nuts. Artist Albert Barunga lists some of the animals and marine life that abound in the region and are depicted on boab nuts: 'kangaroos and turkeys and emus are thick on the land, there are fat barramundi in the rivers, and a multitude of fish, dugong, turtle and stingrays in the sea' (Barunga in Jebb & MAC 2008: 22). The common motifs depicted on boab nuts include birds, mammals, fish and reptiles (Figs 3.34b, 3.34c & 3.34d), which are the animals associated with the Dreaming narratives, for example, the Emu, Kangaroo, Dingo, Barramundi, Cockatoo, Eaglehawk, Crocodile Dreamings etc. and also include introduced animals such as the Buffalo⁹⁹ (Fig. 3.34a). The incorporation into the Dreaming narratives of introduced species and new events is discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. On incised boab nuts the emu is most commonly represented although the bird motifs such as cockatoo, eaglehawk and bush turkey are common as well as are other prominent North Kimberley totemic birds, the nightjar owls (Lang 1999: 108). The dominance of depictions of the local fauna was noted by the prospector E.J. Stuart (1923), during his exploratory coastal voyage in 1917, reported:

The drawings on the rocks chiefly represent the animal and bird life of the country, and the kangaroo and crocodile appear to be the favourite subjects for the contributors to this gallery, but the draughtsmanship is very crude. (Stuart 1923: 108)

⁹⁷ Buruwola Algarra also relates this narrative in *Visions of Mowanjum: Aboriginal writings from the Kimberley* (Algarra in Utemorrhah et al. 1980: 83–4). In this recounting the Rock Cod warns the Baler Shell about the spirit children living in that country who may kill her (Algarra in Utemorrhah et al. 1980: 84). Sam Woolagoodja dreamed the *Nyalikan joonba (balga)* public performance of this narrative (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 106). For further details on the Wunggurr Snake see Blundell and Woolagoodja (2012: 474–5).

⁹⁸ While not strictly representational images of fauna, flora or humans, these magical or religious motifs/Beings are considered to sit within this genre in this thesis and much of the literature.

⁹⁹ See Sansom (2001) for an example of how the buffalo has been incorporated into the Dreaming narratives.

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Fig. 3.34a: Detail of incised buffalo, an introduced species
unknown, c. 1930s
L 175mm x W 120mm
Lang Private Collection

Fig. 3.34b: Incised emu motifs
Forrest River Mission, 1953–54
L 160mm x W 80mm x D 80mm
Bruce Coaldrake Collection
NMA 1985.0066.0063



Fig. 3.34c: Incised birds and snake
in a figurative flattened landscape
unknown, [1970s]
L 270mm x W 100mm x D 90mm
Enid Bowden Collection
NMA 1987.0050.0320



Fig. 3.34d: Incised kangaroos, snake and
birds in a Western-style realistic landscape
Derby, c. 1975
L 240mm x W 110mm x D 95mm
Mrs Mary Fox Collection
NMA 1985.0005.0002

Mammals represented in rock art and on boab nuts include dingoes/domestic dogs, as well as introduced species such as cattle and horses (Figs 3.28 & 3.29c), while the marsupials include kangaroos (Fig. 3.34d). Insects also appear on decorated boab nuts (Fig. 3.16c). Marine animals such as fish (Figs 3.35a & 3.35b), dugongs, and turtles are particularly popular on boab nuts from coastal areas in the northern Kimberley (Figs 3.33 & 3.36b). Reptiles such as snakes (Fig. 3.34c), crocodiles (Figs 3.36a & 3.36b), and lizards are common images and these motifs appear in rock art paintings. Many of the fish and

crocodiles are depicted in planar view which is the convention used in most Wandjina rock art.



Fig. 3.35a: Detail of Wandjina and fish¹⁰⁰
A photograph by H. Morphy of a Wandjina painting referring to a mythical chase across country by two lovers in the form of mullets (McDonald & Veth 2012: 7 Plate 12).



Fig. 3.35b: Incised boab nut with Wandjina-style fish
Derby, late 1950s
L 140mm x W 80mm
Lang Private Collection



Fig. 3.36a: Rock art image of a crocodile
Mitchell River
(Donaldson & Kenneally 2005: 12, Fig. 1.21)



Fig. 3.36b: Crocodile motif incised on boab nut
Mowanjum, 1966–71
L 185mm x W 100mm x D 90mm
Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1
NMA 1982.0092.0004

While the Wandjina dominate North-west Kimberley, Crawford (1968) observes that ‘snakes [pythons] are predominant among the paintings and mythologies of East Kimberley, but are rarer in West Kimberley’ (Crawford 1968: 103), in particular, the connection with the python, the Ungud.¹⁰¹ These pythons ‘travelled east to west following

¹⁰⁰ The association of Wandjina with sea/fresh water creatures is very strong.

¹⁰¹ The Ungud or Ungudd snake created long river beds as it pushed through the land, which are then filled by the power of the Wandjina (Jebb 2008: 4).

or making the rivers' (Crawford 1968: 103). On the Ungud relationship to water, Albert Barunga discloses that:

Lumuru [another name for Ungud] ... well it's like a magic stick: it has got power in it, a snake they used to say. It has only turned itself into a log, but inside it is a snake. It will swallow people. Those people who tried to cross the Prince Regent, those that sank, well, Lumuru swallowed them – that is what the old people believe.

(Barunga in Crawford 1968: 105)

Akerman notes about the adoption of the serpent image (Fig. 3.37):

Cyclones, willy-willys, waterspouts and tornadoes are all perceived to be destructive manifestations of Rainbow Serpents in the Kimberley. Such destructive forces are believed to appear whenever or wherever the Serpents have been offended by the inappropriate behaviour of human beings. There are countless stories told and retold across the region of punishments inflicted on humans who have ignored or taken for granted the presence of Rainbow Serpents.

(Akerman in Klingender 2013: 29)



Fig. 3.37: The rock python and her babies at Gibb River Station (Crawford 1968: 109 Fig. 94)

In the East Kimberley region the depiction of particular species of snakes associated with the power of 'medicine-men' on cave walls and on boab trees is as common as the Wandjina icon is in the West Kimberley (Basedow 1925: 309; Elkin in McCarthy 1957: 56; Crawford 1968: 128–30). According to Crawford (1968):

they play almost the same role as the *Wandjinas*, being associated with the weather, with child spirits and fertility, and they too wandered around the Kimberley leaving their portrait in caves, carvings on trees and, occasionally their infertile eggs as polished rocks in caves which they visited. (Crawford 1968: 103)

Often nearly unrecognisable as a figurative motif, the snake figure can appear similar to a geometric design or border (Figs 3.38a & 3.38b).

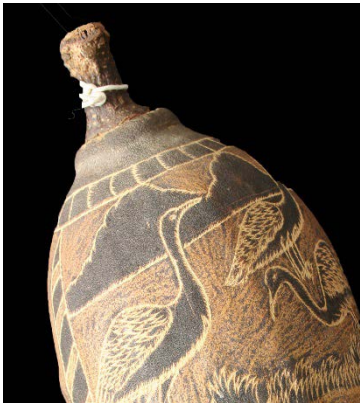


Fig. 3.38a: Ladder design as proximal border
Mowanjum, 1971
L 240mm x Dia 90mm
Adrian Luck No. 2 Collection
NMA 2002.0018.0063



Fig. 3.38b: The 'ladder design' is actually a snake motif
Mowanjum, 1971
L 240mm x Dia 90mm
Adrian Luck No. 2 Collection
NMA 2002.0018.0063

Different from some decorated boab nuts having multiple motifs are the boab nuts that portray, via their shape or contours, a complete animal or bird. Echidna, possum and bird boab nuts can be either depicted figuratively or realistically, and usually have the face of the creature developed around the distal tip of the boab nut (Lang 1999: 108) (Fig. 3.39a). Akerman (1993) notes that the prominent Mowanjum boab nut artist, Collier Bangmoro, was very skilled at producing owls and nightjars, possums and echidnas on these animal-shaped boab nuts (Akerman 1993: 107). In the 1990s Peggy Griffiths, working out of Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, became renowned for her incised boab nut birds, which can represent within the one 'bird shaped' boab nut 'the Mook owl, pigeon, willy wagtail, butcher bird and zebra finches' (Peggy Griffiths, pers. comm., 22 August 1997; Fig. 3.39b).

Image not available due to copyright restrictions



Fig 3.39a: Echidna-shaped boab nut (head at distal end)
Forrest River Mission, 1953–4
L 230mm x W 115mm x D 100mm
Bruce Coaldrake Collection
NMA 1985.0066.0051

Fig 3.39b: Bird-shaped boab nut incised as a bird that incorporates several bird species
Peggy Griffiths
Kununurra, 1997
L 85mm x W 40mm
Lang Private Collection

Figurative vegetal motifs and decorated boab nuts

Figurative plant motifs similar to rock art and pearl shell designs have been recorded by Akerman and Stanton (1994) and Crawford (1968). In discussing pearl shell motifs, Akerman notes the predominance of ‘leafy sprays’ (Akerman & Stanton 1994: 50) similar in style to those on rock walls, which Crawford believes may be roots, as depicted at Wanalirri (Crawford 1968: 41), or tubers (Welch 2003: 7), possibly yams, which are associated with Wandjina and are retouched to increase fertility (Utemorrah & Vinnicrombe 1992: 26) (Fig. 3.40a). As noted earlier, Utemorrah comments ‘we would go back to that place to paint them again’ (Utemorrah & Vinnicrombe 1992: 25).¹⁰² These ‘leafy sprays’ are common on the earlier pearl shells (Fig. 3.32), as well as on incised boab nuts (Fig. 3.40b), and quite often painted and incised; figurative floral motifs and tree motifs are also portrayed. Less obviously a plant, vegetal roots, tubers, stems and branches (Fig. 3.40a) have on some occasions been classified by museum staff as unidentified motifs or possibly as geometric designs (Figs 3.41a & 3.41b).¹⁰³ Akerman and Stanton (1994) notes the traditional figurative style in pearl shell engraving ‘includes leaves and tuberous plants’ (Akerman & Stanton 1994: 39 Plate 32a)

¹⁰² See Lang (1999) for a more detailed rendition of Utemorrah’s comments on retouching images to increase fertility.

¹⁰³ For example, see Appendix for NMA description for 1985.0102.0424.



Fig. 3.40a: Detail of rock art at Wanalirri, plum root motif (Crawford 1968: 41) ¹⁰⁴



Fig. 3.40b: Incised vegetal motif
Mowanjum, 1966–71
L 185mm x W 100mm x D 90mm
Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1
NMA 1982.0092.0004

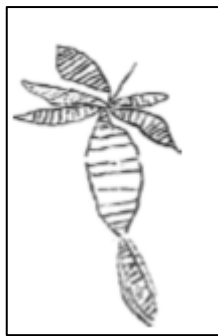


Fig. 3.41a: Line drawing of rock art root motif painted in blackish red pigment, 32 cm high (Welch 2003: 8, Fig. 12)

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Fig. 3.41b: Possible root or tuber motif incised on boab nut
Forrest River Mission, 1953–54
L 195mm x Dia 152mm
Bruce Coaldrake Collection
NMA 1985.0066.0059
<http://collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/object/15470>

Yams (Fig. 3.42a), which are associated in this region with Wandjina, are edible tubers with long thin roots and are eaten raw or cooked (Thomas 1906: 113). The Yam Creation song is ‘associated with *Djangarr*, who makes forked lightning at the onset of the rainy season when yams may be dug’ (Utemorra & Vinnicombe 1992: 26). With cave paintings, the creation song is ‘sung while outlining paintings to increase fertility’ (Utemorra & Vinnicombe 1992: 26). In 1903 Thomas noted in relation to women’s magic that if an Aboriginal woman wanted ‘to injure another woman, perhaps an older wife of her

¹⁰⁴ Malnic describes being taken to see this painting site by David Mowaljarlai and calls the ‘root’ *gula* – a native plum tree with green fruit, Mowaljarlai says: ‘This is the living tree belong to this country. All the fruit we eat of this. It is the pattern of life and the track’ (Mowaljarlai & Malnic 1993: 15). This Wandjina is Wojin and also painted in this shelter are earlier Lightning Spirits and Ngolngol the Cyclone Spirit (Mowaljarlai & Malnic 1993:15–16).

husband, she uses yam-stick magic' (Thomas 1906: 234). In the Kimberley, Crawford (1968) observes that rock art depictions of yam motifs can become yam 'people' (Fig. 3.42b).



Fig. 3.42a: Probable yam motifs incised on boab nut
unknown, [North Western Australia]
L 107mmx W 47mm
Anglican CMS collection
SAM 65919
South Australian Museum (Lang 1999)

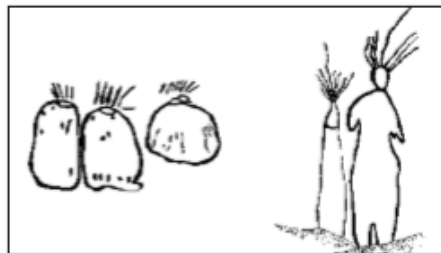


Fig. 3.42b: Figures showing transition from yams to 'humans' in rock art ¹⁰⁵
(Crawford 1968: 99 Fig. 87)

Human and quasi-humanoid figures and decorated boab nuts

Human and spirit/magical figures are also found depicted on decorated boab nuts. Aboriginal male figures are frequently portrayed undertaking ceremonial performance, while European male figures are associated with pastoralism or policing in this figurative genre. However, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal representations of men and women depicted on incised boab nuts in the realistic style discussed below are usually represented within scenes of historic and contemporary narratives, for example, hunting scenes. Such Western-style landscapes are discussed and illustrated throughout this thesis, especially in Chapters 6 and 7.

Motifs associated with ceremony, which include body decorations and headdresses (Figs 3.43a & 3.43b), are also painted on rock walls and boab trees (Crawford 1968: 131); for example, the *ngadari* conical headdress made from paperbark by Ngarinyin men 'worn

¹⁰⁵ Nicholls observes that 'all Dreaming Ancestors have the quality of being both (x) with x equaling their animal/plant etc. incarnation plus a human incarnation and the ability to morph between these states of being' (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 6 June 2016).

only for traditional ceremonies' (Welch 1996: 75) (Figs 3.43c & 3.43d). Other related motifs may include the *wananga* (McCarthy 1966: 31; Black 1964: 70), made of hair string, boab tree fibre, fur, or feathers (Black 1964: 70; see also Love 1936: 207; McCarthy 1966: 31; McCarthy 1967: 146). *Wananga* are 'particularly sacred objects which represent the totem of the clan performing the ceremony or some article carried by the clan's culture hero' (McCarthy 1966: 30) (Figs 3.44a & 3.44b).

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Fig. 3.43a: Detail of ceremonial headdress
[North-west Australia], [c. 1970s]
L 223mm x W 100mm x D 90mm
Y. Pettinato Collection
NMA 1985.0003.0082

Fig. 3.43b: Detail of ceremonial body design and headdress¹⁰⁶
North-west Australia, c. 1927
L160mm x W 95mm x D85mm
Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection
NMA 1985.0073.0044
<http://collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/object/15936>

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Fig. 3.43c: Men wearing *ngadari* headdress, headdresses carrying spear throwers and feather bunches
Kimberley, 1938
(Welch 2007: 82)

Fig. 3.43d: Rock painting of men with *ngadari* (Welch 1996: 76, Fig. 5)

¹⁰⁶ Nicholls suggests that the segmentation of the body could possibly indicate a sorcery figure and notes in general 'that Aboriginal imagery is rarely exclusively descriptive' (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 12 November 2015).

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Fig. 3.44a: Detail of *waniga* cross
Hall's Creek, unknown,
[size unknown]
Presbyterian Church Collection
NMA IR3095.0002

Fig. 3.44b: Detail of *waniga* and
Aboriginal man with ceremonial headdress
Derby, 1934
L 222mm x W 107mm
A.M. Morgan Collection
SAM 21094
South Australian Museum
(Lang 1999)

Spirit or magical figures are also depicted in rock art and incised boab nuts. These Beings have been discussed by Crawford (1968), Stanton (1989), Mowaljarlai and Malnic (1993) and Akerman (2015), amongst others. *Ulu*, little grotesque figures with bad-magic/sorcery properties, are often incorporated in rock art with Wandjina and snakes (Crawford 1968: 109) and incised on boab nuts (Fig. 3.45a). Occasionally *ulu* figures are 'found on isolated rocks or trees because these rocks and trees represent the snake just as fully as the paintings' (Crawford 1968: 111) (Fig. 3.45c). The use of bad magic by carving on a boab tree is described by Lowe (1998) as when:

someone [who is] intending to harm another person used to draw an effigy of this victim in the bark of the Boab trunk, name it, and then sing a malevolent song. As a result of this bad magic, the victim, usually a person who had broken a taboo, would blow up 'like a balloon', or like a Boab tree. (Lowe 1998: 50)

For example, the use of magical interaction between a Ngarinyin 'wish man or *banmun*', named Ngulit, a brutal white man called Jack Carey, and the police and trackers in the 1920s is elaborated by Jebb (Jebb 2002: 75–6). This was a story of resistance and, importantly, the actions of Ngulit are the most significant. By using magic he had confronted Carey and then escaped. Ngulit eventually ended up in the Derby Leprosarium. The institutionalisation of diverse groups of people in hospitals and prisons is one of the means that has encouraged and facilitated the exchange of stories and imagery.

These types of magic and/or sorcery figures were more common pre-1940 (Fig. 3.45a); however, they were once more being seen on prints in an incised style created in the 1990s by Alan Griffiths in Kununurra (Fig. 3.45b). This type of imagery again links rock art, boab tree marking and decorated boab nuts with ongoing art practices (Figs 3.45c & 3.45e). The use of spindle-spun hairstring in the context of a figurative male representation indicates sorcery, perhaps love magic or bad magic (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 28 June 2015) (Fig. 3.44b). Other Cosmological Beings¹⁰⁷ associated with Wandjina depiction include *arkula* (*agula*, *argula*), *jilinya*, *múlu-múlu*, *wurula-wurula*, *nara-nara*, *lulinja*, *cherenji*, *garirinja*, *waraarijayi* and *balubalua* (*balubalulya*) (Akerman 2015: 161–9). *Arkula*, or devil spirits, are depicted on decorated boab nuts (Figs 3.45d, & 3.45f) and Akerman notes they can have rounded ears, pointed ears or long ears (Akerman 2015: 161–3).



Fig. 3.45a: Detail of incised *ulu* figure unknown, pre-1918, unknown collector
L 145mm x D 111mm
SAM 6429
South Australian Museum
(Lang 1999)

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Fig. 3.45b: Detail of a *ulu* from a print by Alan Griffiths 1997
Waringarri Aboriginal Arts
Cat. No. PM57
(Lang 1999: 100)

¹⁰⁷ A term used by Akerman (2015: 161).

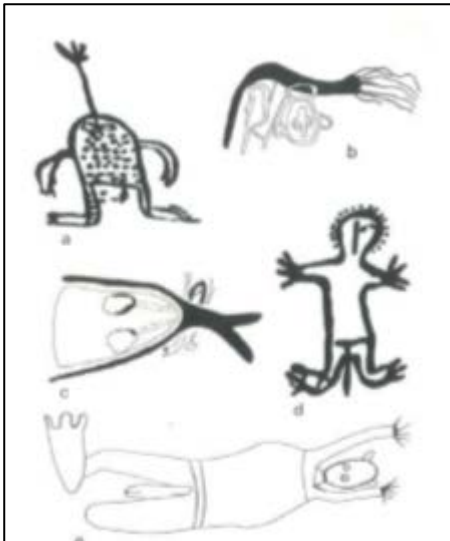


Fig. 3.45c: *Ulu* figures, used in ritual killings, are found in association with snakes and Wandjinas (a & d) are from Vansittart Bay; (b&e) from Prince Frederick Harbour; and (c) from St George Basin (Crawford 1968: 110 Fig. 95)¹⁰⁸

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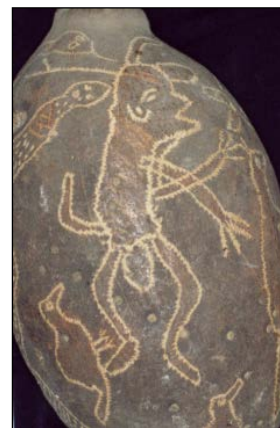


Fig. 3.45d: Detail of Bipedal Being possibly an *arkula* [rounded ears] Forrest River, 1953–54 L205mm x W 130mm x D 140mm Bruce Coaldrake Collection NMA 1985.0066.0064

Fig. 3.45e: The *arkula* called Nangina Wattie Karawarra Derby, 1975 Photograph by Kim Akerman (Akerman 2015: 162 Fig. 72)

Fig. 3.45f: Detail of Bipedal Being possibly an *arkula* [rounded or long ears] Broome, pre-1918 L 220mm x 118mm Robb Collection SAM 9451 South Australian Museum (Lang 1999)

To the general public, possibly the most recognised Kimberley Ancestral Being is the Wandjina, for example via the 2000 Olympic Games (Fig. 3.53). Observations of these Ancestral Beings painted on rock walls have been recorded since the early nineteenth century in the north-west of the Kimberley. The Wandjina are quasi-humanoid figures depicted in black, red or yellow on a white background with a cloudlike headdress, which is ‘both the feathers which the Wandjina wore and the lightning which he [or she] controls’

¹⁰⁸ Large genitals are prominent features of sorcery figures in both the sorcerers and those they wish to harm.

(Crawford 1968: 28). In most cases they have no mouths, only round fringed eyes and an ovate nose; the female Wandjina have breasts (Crawford 1968: 32; Akerman 2015: 2) (Figs 3.46a & 3.46b). Wandjina are depicted in the form of either a head, as a head and shoulders with chest object such as a pearl shell, or as a ‘complete Being with the torso, arms, legs, fingers and toes delineated (Akerman 2015: 2).¹⁰⁹ Akerman (2015) discusses the absence of the mouth and notes that the anthropologist Petri in the 1950s indicated a number of reasons why this was so, and that:

in the beginning all Wanjinias had mouths, they spoke Ngarinyin and gave all things their names. However, at the end of the Ungur time when the present began, the rainbow Serpent Unggud sealed the Wanjina’s mouths ... if Wanjinias had mouths and were to open them a great ‘all-destroying’ flood would emerge. (Petri in Akerman 2015: 27)

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Fig. 3.46a: Anatomy of a Wunambul Wandjina (after Akerman field notes)
Note that not all the features may be present on any single image (Klingender 2013: 5).
(cf. Mowaljarlai & Malnic 1993: 212, Appendix 1 Figures of Wandjinias; Akerman 2015)

¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, Akerman (2015) comments that the body ‘is usually infilled with either coarse stippling or stripes of colour on a brilliant white background, creating a glowing effect that reinforces the presences of ancestral forces’ (Akerman 2015: 2). This demonstrates, like the Yolngu ‘shininess’, the display of Ancestral power (Morphy 1989).

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Fig. 3.46b: Bark painting with male and female Wandjina
Alan Mungulu
Kimberley, c. 1970s
NMA: Bark painting depicting a Wandjina figure, a female figure [note Wandjina 'halo'],
animals, and a small winged figure
Enid Bowden Collection
NMA 1987.0050.0270
<http://collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/object/36342>

Associated with the Wandjina painted in rock shelters are Dreaming animals¹¹⁰ and objects. These Wandjina and/or their associated fauna and flora are linked to the boab tree itself through a number of significant narratives. Many Wandjina incised on boab nuts in conjunction with owl motifs, especially during the 1970s, are related to the Wanalirri narrative (Akerman 1993: 107). Possibly the best known is the story of the mutilation of Tunbai (Tumbi), the barn owl, by children. Tunbai reported this to the Wandjina, Wodjun, who destroyed all but two humans by flood and lightning (Crawford 1968: 31; Akerman 1993: 107; Morphy 1998: 55–6; Akerman 2015: 141–9¹¹¹). This narrative became quite popular through the *balga* performance¹¹² (public story) created by Wattie Ngerdu in the 1970s (Akerman 1993: 107), and these public performances demonstrate processes of internal innovation and the authenticity of artworks, and will be further discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

¹¹⁰ These include 'fish, tortoises, brolgas ... [and] butterflies – all of which have connections with water and the West Season – the very element controlled by the Wanjina and the season at which the potency of the Wanjinis is most obvious' (Akerman in Klingender 2013: 15).

¹¹¹ Akerman (2015) provides variations of this narrative from Elkin Umbagai, Laurie Utemorra [Utemorra], Collier Bangmorra, Jack Wera [Wherra], George Jomari, David Mowaljarli, Sam and Donny Woolagoodja.

¹¹² *Balga* or *palga* performances are 'a medium by which both current and historical events and traditional spirit stories can be revealed in public' (Morven 2014: para 14). In the north-west, the public narratives in Ngarinyin are called *jernba* (Redmond 2008: 256) or *jumba* (Treloyn 2003: 208) or *joonba* for the Worora, Ngarinyin and Wunambul at Mowanjum (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 104). Other language groups have different names for similar performance types, for example, *ilma* in Bardi (Treloyn 2003: 209).

Artists at Kalumburu had been encouraged to paint Wandjina figures on canvas or engrave the motif on slates¹¹³ as Indigenous art centres were being established in the north-west Kimberley region in the 1980s (Stanton 1986a: 23).¹¹⁴ Colonialist interventions in Aboriginal lives may well have, for some, distanced the Wandjina and perhaps this accommodated the transfer of this motif across media or, for others, depicting Wandjina on artwork may be an opportunity to fulfil custodial obligations for those people who are not living on the Country. Blundell and Woolagoodja (2005) note the depiction of Wandjina on boab tree trunks, stone slabs and pieces of bark (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 146-7).

At Mowanjum, however, the Wandjina observances were strong, and art practices using the Wandjina image maintained the cultural practice of:

senior men of exceptional spiritual powers called barnman [who] could paint a small copy of the Wanjina on to stone or a piece of bark, and then ‘blow water over it and recite the relevant chant’ ... the Wanjina whose picture was painted this way, ‘finds itself incarnated, vivified in the picture and will descend as rain upon the surrounding district’.

(Lommel in Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 147)

For the artists of the Mowanjum community, discussed in Chapter 6, this Creator Being is often depicted by only the head and shoulders on boab nuts (Figs 3.47a, 3.47b & 3.47c) although a boab nut from the K.G. Kimber Collection portrays a full length Wandjina (Fig. 3.47d). Further discussion and examples of Wandjina are given in Chapter 6. Although incised on boab nuts earlier, the Wandjina motif experienced a steady rise in popularity in the 1980s as a Kimberley icon, along with the boab tree, as identifiers of the Kimberley region itself.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Interestingly, the Vatican owns two c. 1915 ochre painted slates by Paul Murion depicting ‘Dancers carrying painted story boards performing the krill krill narrative from the Wandjina Song Cycle’ (Neale 2011: 117) and a ‘representation of the Wandjina and associated water totems from the Wandjina Song Cycle’ (Neale 2011: 117), and both are painted on each side. Murion was a devout Christian and ceremonial leader at Kalumburu (Neale 2011: 118) and this was a very early occurrence of the Wandjina on portable art.

¹¹⁴ Sculthorpe argues for the ‘late occurrence of the Wandjina motif around the 1960s’ (Sculthorpe 1990: 45).

¹¹⁵ The other major rock art style in the Kimberley is the Gwion Gwion (previously called Bradshaw) style, considered to be an even older art type (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2012: 476–7); however, these figures are not known to be portrayed overtly on boab nuts.



Fig. 3.47a: Incised Wandjina motif on boab nut with animal associates
Jack Wherra
Mowanjum, c. 1966–71
L 145mm
Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1
NMA 1982.00092.0002



Fig. 3.47b: Incised Wandjina motif on boab nut
Derby, 1969–70
L310mmx Dia 140mm
Mrs Mary Fox Collection
NMA 1985.0005.0001



Fig. 3.47c: Incised Wandjina motif on a landscape background
Derby, c. 1927
L 130mm x W 85mm x D 75mm
Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection
NMA 1985.0073.0047

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Fig. 3.47d: Full length Wandjina motif shown starting on the distal end
La Grange, 1974
[L 155mm]
R.G. Kimber Collection
NMA IR2971.0074

Other human figures depict ‘European’ men with hats and/or clothes and boots, sometimes with a gun¹¹⁶ or with a horse, and these range from figurative in style (Fig. 3.48c) to later

¹¹⁶ Crawford (2001) notes that King recorded in 1818 that the theft of canoes was a source of conflict, and the Indonesians would threaten to shoot Aboriginal people with flintlock guns, the presence of which is borne out archaeologically by flints and musket balls (Crawford 2001: 89). Therefore gun images on very early boab nuts may not necessarily be wielded by European men. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of non-European contact in the Kimberley.

more realistic versions, for example, a Derby jockey in silks (Figs 5.32b, 3.48a, 3.48b, & 3.48c). Flood (1997) states that these contemporaneous events are also illustrated in rock art, for example: ‘an aspect of immediate history such as depicting the local station manager with guns. This narrative function is particularly important in “contact” [rock] art’ (Flood 1997: 304).

It has been suggested that ‘European’ motifs are not depicted on boab nuts in the second half of the twentieth century as *figurative* elements, as ‘the result of carving to cater for what tourists consider “genuine” Aboriginal design’ (Sculthorpe 1990: 45). For example, an incised boab nut collector of Kununurra explains that he ‘told his wife not to buy scene boabs but [he] wanted “real” designs”’ (Lang 1999: 52). A number of craft and tourist shop owners believe, however, that this aspect of them is less important than the price and the quality of work (Lang 1999: 51).



Fig. 3.48a: Incised boab nut with ‘European’ man and gun
unknown, pre-1952
L 178mm x D 96mm
J.M. Yelland Collection
SAM 43926
South Australian Museum
(Lang 1999)



Fig. 3.48b: Incised boab nut with ‘European’ man
Derby, pre-1929
L 182mm x D 92mm
WHL. Walter Collection
SAM 14522
South Australian Museum
(Lang 1999)

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Fig. 3.48c: Incised boab nut with ‘European’ clothing and hats
unknown, pre-1985
L 230mm x W 110mm x D 100mm
A.R. Eadie Collection
NMA 1985.0291.0041

Realistic genre of decorated boab nuts

The Western-style realistic¹¹⁷ genre of boab nuts have motifs which are similar to the figurative category, which has been previously discussed; for example, animal and plant types, although these motifs have been interpreted in a manner often different in style, using different salient characteristics, and technical precision. It is important to note that the categorisation of some figurative and realistic motifs may be imprecise and is contextual within the design and through the observer's knowledge. This genre not only displays individual motifs or groups of motifs, for example, both classically Aboriginal objects (Fig. 3.49a) and introduced items (Fig. 4.8), but has developed Western-style landscapes illustrating examples of everyday life and historic narratives (Figs 3.49b & 3.49c). As Akerman (1993) makes clear: 'it ranges from depictions of artefacts, hunting and domestic scenes, and life in the pastoral and pearling industries to portraits of men and more often nubile women' (Akerman 1993: 106). A detailed discussion on the development of Western-style realism in Aboriginal art and the Western-style landscape boab nuts is contained in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.

The scenic landscape representations are commonly divided into a number of sections with decorated borders and can have sections of both landscape and other individual motifs. These designs require fairly large nuts to enable the addition of rich detail (Lowe 1998: 50). The landscape designs can include animals and boab trees against a Kimberley backdrop of hills and escarpments, Aboriginal men and women collecting food (Akerman 1993: 106), and other realistic designs from everyday life, especially that of the stockman (Fig. 5.16). Stock work was a major occupation for Aboriginal men in the Kimberley up until equal pay was introduced in 1968–69 (Jebb 2002: 3). Depictions of the stockman figure, or cowboy, often include the associated images of horses and boots (Stanton 1986a: 24; Berndt & Berndt 1988: 439). Many later boab nuts are at least in part decorated with Western-style landscapes and some completely without segmentation or panels (Figs 3.49b, 3.49c & 3.49d), and occasionally painted with Western-style landscapes similar to the Central Desert Hermannsburg style (Hardy, Megaw & Megaw 1992; see Plate 25) (Fig. 3.50).¹¹⁸ A detailed discussion on the development and use of Western-style landscape imagery follows in Chapters 4, 5, and 8, providing further evidence to substantiate the major argument of this thesis.

¹¹⁷ The term 'realistic' will be used rather than Akerman's 'advanced naturalistic' (Akerman 2003: 70-1); as discussed in footnote 12; also, see Glossary.

¹¹⁸ Eileen Cox, a Halls Creek artist producing this style of work, also depicts these landscapes on coolamons and other wooden artefacts (Eileen Cox, pers. comm., 20 August 1997).

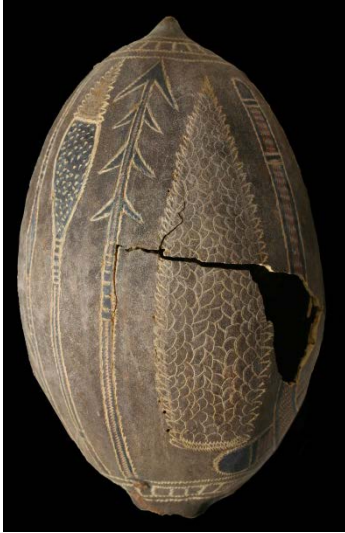


Fig. 3.49a: Kimberley points and spears incised and painted in realistic style on boab nut
Mowanjum, c. 1966-1971
L 175mm x W 110mm x D 105mm
Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1
NMA 1982.0092.0001



Fig. 3.49b: Incised Western-style landscape boab nut
Derby, [unknown]
L 181 mm x W 150mm x D 150mm
Mr Herbert Keys Collection
NMA 1987.0044.0047

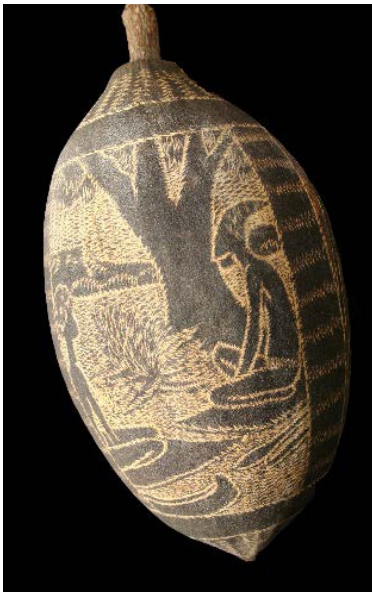


Fig. 3.49c: Incised Western-style landscape in one panel; other panels contain a Wandjina and weapons
unknown, [c. 1970s]
L 195mm x W 95mm x D 90mm
Enid Bowden Collection
NMA 1987.0050.0313



Fig. 3.49d: Incised Western-style landscape in the round, no panels
late 1970s
L 200mm x W 110mm
Lang Private Collection



Fig. 3.50: Painted boab nut in Western landscape-style
Mt Sonder, Gabriella Wallace, 1988
synthetic polymer
(Hardy, Megaw & Megaw 1992: Fig. 9.13)

A number of realistic motif types are not included in the NMA boab nut collections, some of which include Christian iconography. On occasion Christian iconography is portrayed on boab nuts and in other artwork such as acrylic paintings on canvas and depicted earlier on pearl shells (Berndt & Berndt 1988: 439; Akerman & Stanton 1994: 41, Plate 45) (Figs 3.51 & 3.52).

Image not
available
due to copyright
restrictions



Fig. 3.52: Incised image of crucified Christ
Derby, 1980
L 160mm x W 111mm
R. Kimber Collection
SAM 67035
South Australian Museum
(Lang 1999)

Fig. 3.51: Pearl shell with Christian symbols and text
Sunday Island, c. 1927
H 135 mm x W 100 mm
Description: Decorated on one side with finely incised design of a male figure wearing shorts and a broad-brimmed hat, the detail of which is in cross-hatched incised lines; he is holding a dugong in one hand and a dolphin in the other, either side of the figure is inscribed 'God is Love'. Each letter is filled with a cross-hatched pattern, while surrounding the inscription is a leaf pattern. Professor Adolphus Peter Elkin Collection
Macleay Museum ETA.2014
(see also Akerman & Stanton 1994: 39 Plate 33a)

The incised boab nuts of the late Jack Wherra, the best-known boab nut artist in Australian museums, are realistic narratives (Figs 4.8 & 4.11). Jebb (2006) who had access to hours of audiotape from the John McCaffrey collection, reflects upon his work, which she notes encompasses:

Indigenous regional history from the north Kimberley as well as part of a much larger Australian story. They are both general and particular, presenting community contact history from the north Kimberley as well as Jack Wherra's life story.

(Jebb 2006: 696)

Jebb (2006) further explains:

The carvings are also Wherra's personal struggle to explain how his past actions fitted in the context of major cultural shifts that he was able to see and express as an Aboriginal historian using boab nuts to tell Kimberley history.

(Jebb 2006: 714)

Decorated boab nuts convey a great deal of information about design and socio-cultural changes in relation to the context of their production¹¹⁹ and style changes over time – although never completely – from what could be described as a traditional Kimberley Aboriginal aesthetic to a more 'Western' convention. Smith (2003) describes style generally as 'an active participant in the negotiation of social strategies, and [is] tied by three major themes, social participation, resistance and social memory' (C. Smith 2003: 45), themes that will be discussed in Chapter 4. The characteristics of change in production and function can be seen in the large range of imagery, as well as in the technical aspects of incising types and paints.¹²⁰ Production of this art form is part of the visual, gestural, tactile and oral expression of Country; it is where the incising 'intertwines the relationship between Country and visual practice' (Martin 2013: 104).¹²¹

Changes to the type of incising with the advent of metal tool technology, combined with assimilatory pressures, have contributed to increasing Western realism on incised boab nuts. These innovations represent more than a technical change but are part of ongoing epistemological change undergone by all people historically, in terms of how things are seen and produced within a rapidly changing environment.¹²² Designs such as those illustrated in this chapter may be the result of a variety of tools, for example, penknives,

¹¹⁹ See Claire Smith (1989) for a discussion of the relationship between style, social structure, and the environment in Aboriginal Australia.

¹²⁰ This is discussed earlier in Chapter 1 and again in detail in Chapter 5.

¹²¹ Martin (2013) sees 'no distinction between art, culture and living ... bringing something into being through Country' (Martin 2013: 104). Martin (2013) created the term 'countryside' to reflect this.

¹²² See Chapter 4 for a discussion of cross-cultural influences. The difference for Aboriginal people is the speed at which these changes have been wrought as a result of colonisation and the accompanying assimilatory pressure.

wire, dentist's drills, and linocut tools for incising zigzag and linear lines. Scraping allows for three-dimensional effects such as shading and changes to hue, creating perspective to produce very realistic scenes. Nicholls (2012) notes that 'older desert [Warlpiri and Kukatja] artists ... did not and still do not attempt to create "shade" or "shadow" in these [art] works' (Nicholls 2012: 46). Further discussion of aspects of Western realistic style associated with incised and painted boab nuts is contained in Chapters 7 and 8. Common realistic imagery include kangaroos, emus and other birds, lizards and snakes, boab trees, spinifex and eucalypts juxtaposed on a background of escarpments, hills, termite mounds and skylines. Other motifs may include male and female figures hunting and gathering, retelling of historical events, as well as activities that reflect 'current' lifestyle habits and activities such as card games and rodeos.

Concluding comments

Australian Indigenous art and craft was very profitable in the period, 1980–1990s (Altman 1990, Altman 2005: 8), although not always for the artist. Aboriginal art was generating a great deal of interest for tourism during this time (Woodhead & Acker 2014: 25) and used as a point of difference from the other Commonwealth countries and previous British colonies. In many ways the portrayal of the Australian identity had moved away from the colonial bush settler myth, and Australian political and business concerns had embraced the unique symbolism of the various Indigenous groups throughout the country, for example, the Kimberley Wandjina, the Arnhem Land cross-hatching, the Central Desert dot designs, and Torres Strait Islander Dhoeri.

In many cases overt political and economic statements are made in the artworks, and over the last 100 years there have been numerous examples collected in museums of artists' observations of their times. From Aboriginal men in chains, pearling luggers and scenes from pastoral and mission life, the history of the Kimberley region can be charted through these visual narratives. Decorated boab nuts reinforce the same story – they too speak powerfully about Kimberley history. Prominent Kimberley icons such as the Wandjina, seen at the 2000 Sydney Olympics Games¹²³ (Fig. 3.53), also appear extensively on decorated boab nuts, both because of the importance of these Ancestor Beings in the region

¹²³ This Wandjina image of Namarali, painted by Donny Woolagoodja and Peter England, was used at the Opening Ceremony. This event was to 'provide opportunities for the veneration of these beings, an occasion for teaching younger people, and a political engagement with an Australian and world audience that asserts the value of the Kimberley perspective' (Taylor & Veth 2008: 2). Woolagoodja agreed to 'put Namarali's message and his spirit to the world to welcome and unify the millions of people who witness it' (Woolagoodja in Jebb 2008: 8).

and the contemporary Australia-wide identification of the Wandjina with this geographic area.



Fig. 3.53: The installation Wanjina¹²⁴ Awakening Spirit designed by Donny Woolagoodja and Peter England for the Opening Ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympics

Photograph: Peter England

Nearly 35 metres across, the sculpture is made of silk and other fabrics. Donny wanted it to appear as if the Wandjina is emerging from the ground, an effect that was accomplished with a complex system of pulleys (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 189; see also O'Connor, Barham & Woolagoodja 2008: 25).

In this chapter the presence of the boab tree in the landscape both physically and culturally, as the medium for the art form, and as an icon for the Kimberley region itself, has been described and examined. This background contextualises the discussion of the key concepts for the authenticity of the decorated boab nuts, and the development of a Western-style realistic genre as well as consolidating and expanding the principal arguments informing the previous chapters. The relationship between the Western-style realistic landscape designs and the ongoing practices of Country and Law will be discussed next, thereby developing the overall thesis argument about the persistence of Kimberley artists in terms of holding onto long term cultural practices.

¹²⁴ As noted in the Glossary there are a number of different ways of spelling Wandjina, in this case Wanjina was used in the original caption above for Fig. 3.53.

CHAPTER 4: KEY CONCEPTS FOR THE AUTHENTICITY AND STYLISTIC CHANGE IN DECORATED BOAB NUTS

Concepts of authenticity, realism and landscape art are used to assess the argument of this thesis that a realistic genre¹²⁵ in decorated boab nuts began to develop in the middle of the twentieth century as an Aboriginal response to the evolving social and political environment in Australia since colonisation. This chapter expands the thesis argument through discussion of the roles of innovation and exchange, the function of images as markers of identity and as visual text, the notion of legibility, and begins the examination of the resilience and overarching significance of Country within a colonised environment.

The settlement of the Kimberley and the resulting restrictive legislation and governance for Aboriginal people will be discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to their art practices. The nineteenth-century policy of ‘segregated protectionism and paternalism’ (Mowbray 1990: 20), linked to evolutionist thought, was beginning to be eroded by external pressure from anti-slavery groups, feminist alliances and citizen rights parties (Kerin 2007: 251; Elder 2009: 25, 27; Murphy 2013: 206). Discourses about assimilation developed over the period after the 1930s (Rowse & Nile 2005: 5; Murphy 2013: 206). Rowse argues for a definition of assimilation up until 1970s as a ‘selective “hearing” of a complex Indigenous protest voice’ (Rowse & Nile 2005: 6). Murphy (2013) defines assimilation as: ‘a set of policies that promised equal citizenship, assessed Aboriginal entitlement on sociocultural rather than caste grounds, but ultimately required the end of indigenous identity’ (Murphy 2013: 207).

The pressure on Aboriginal people in all aspects of their lives by protectionist and then assimilatory policies and practice was immense. Elder (2009) argues that following the Second World War ‘integration’ became a key concept for governments, stating: ‘Integration emphasised the sociocultural aspects of Aboriginal-white relations and was essentially a cost-measure. It shifted responsibility for assimilation from state and territory governments to the general white population’ (Elder 2009: 25–6).

¹²⁵ The differences between a ‘realist’ and ‘figurative/naturalistic’ and ‘geometric’ genres in decorated boab nuts have been illustrated in Chapters 1 and 3 and will be further discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. Rose (2002) describes genre as ‘a way of classifying visual images into certain groups. Images that belong to the same genre share certain features’ (G. Rose 2002: 19). Jebb (2006) provides a description of the ‘realist’ genre in Jack Wherra’s incised boab nuts and concludes that the historical narratives expressed ‘make it accessible across cultures’ (Jebb 2006: 697). Both ‘realistic’ (Akerman 1993; Lang 1999) and ‘representational’ (J. Green 1988; Juers 2003) are terms that are used to describe this genre.

The discourses of the 1950s and 1960s revolved around a ‘sameness/difference binary’ (Elder 2009: 31; J. Jones 2012: 2). Haebich (2008) notes that the prominent anthropologist, W.E.H. Stanner, reviewing the situation in 1965:

observed that history shows over and over again how Aboriginal people were required to ‘give up something as the price of good relations with us’ and to do this in advance with no promissory note of good to come in return...The application of the policy of assimilation is one more in the long line of approaches with a remembered history. Wherever aboriginal [sic] life now touches that of Europeans, which is virtually everywhere, old injuries still rankle. (Stanner in Haebich 2008: 189)

By the mid-twentieth century Aboriginal people all over Australia were challenging governments and their departments’ administrators; they wrote to newspapers and started their own newspapers; they gained the support of church groups, trade unions and feminist groups (Elder 2009: 27) and in doing so became part of ‘an international shift in what was considered progressive policy relating to indigenous peoples and largely resulted from increasing pressures to decolonise’ (Mowbray 1990: 20). The 1967 referendum pushed ‘calls for Aboriginal land rights, Aboriginal distinctiveness and autonomy’ (J. Jones 2012: 2). The 1970s response by governments to Aboriginal people was played out through the official policy of self-determination (Mowbray 1990: 20; Elder 2009: 26; Fisher 2012: 253) in the establishment of various commissions, councils and boards with control of funding and decision-making (Fisher 2012: 253).¹²⁶ The relationship of these bodies to Kimberley art practices is further discussed in Chapter 5. This political and economic assimilatory pressure was uneven across groups of people, geographic location and time, affecting all aspects of Aboriginal experience. At the same time the long and enduring forms of internal innovation remained in force for Aboriginal people; this is argued in the thesis in relation to Kimberley art practices as demonstrated through stylistic change in decorated boab nuts.

The decorated boab nuts held in museums, galleries and private collections not only reflect the collector/s and their respective institutions¹²⁷ but are situated within the general, to some degree, overlapping milieux of artefact and art, and tourist art. In this chapter these

¹²⁶ The end of the twentieth century into the start of the twentieth-first century saw the move away from self-determination to that of mainstreaming, for example, in 2005 ‘Indigenous-specific programs delivered by [about to be demolished] ATSIC were transferred to mainstream government departments’ (Hinkson & Smith 2005: 163). See also Mowbray (1990) for an earlier discussion on mainstreaming in the Northern Territory.

¹²⁷ See Chapter 7 for a discussion on collectors and collecting institutions.

fundamental issues will be discussed as the basis for an analysis of decorated boab nuts in the National Museum of Australia collection.

Issues of authenticity

The question of authenticity in/of visual art with specific reference to decorated boab nuts, which are most often viewed as tourist art and souvenir, will be discussed in this chapter. The theories of tourist art will be described and illustrated as these relate to a colonised Australia.

Graburn (1976) notes that the term 'traditional' has been used historically by colonial societies to project 'on to "folk" and "primitive" peoples a scheme of eternal stability, as though they were a kind of natural phenomenon out which myths are constructed' (Graburn 1976:13). Birrell (2006) argues that 'interpretations and re-interpretations are inevitable, in written as well as orally and graphically transmitted material' (2006: 24); therefore, 'even definitions of such terms as "tradition, traditional", belong within this projected dimension' (Berndt in Birrell 2006: 24). Further to this, Graburn (1974) has identified a number of categories of art, some of which are appropriate to Australian Indigenous art. In general, those categories are commercial fine art, of which traditional technique, content and aesthetic criteria are unchanged but production is for commercial purposes; and souvenir or tourist art, in which 'the aesthetic impulse is subjugated to the profit motive by the limitations of time and in which the tastes of the buyers [can] override those of the producers' (Williams 1976: 282). However, tourist art may draw 'directly on traditional precedents, revitalise and combine a variety of related artistic conventions, or totally abandon any attempt to preserve customary art forms' (Jules-Rosette 1984: 9).

With respect to this same issue, Shiner (1994: 227–8) describes ethnic art as adhering to traditional style, material and technique while being designed for sale in an external market. He notes that often these aspects may be modified to suit purchasers or save time and expense and thus their authenticity is always questionable. These characteristics may be further customised for adaptation to an external market and Shiner comments that while 'the line between ethnic art and tourist art is easily crossed, in practice many people lump everything made to be sold to outsiders under the often pejorative term, "tourist art"' (Shiner 1994: 227–8).

Jones (1992) identifies two other concealed categories of Aboriginal art, “‘traditional’ artefacts (including many objects rarely seen by Europeans) and maverick or innovative art and craft’ (P. Jones 1992: 138). Hume (2009) makes an argument for an artwork’s inclusion into a ‘Functional Fine Art’ or ‘Traditional’ categories based on identification of function by the maker, for example, as educative tools initially, with a view to eventually being sold (Hume 2009: 64–5).

The nature and meaning of ‘tradition’ is difficult to define. Generally imprecise, the word is often used to reinforce a static and stagnant view of a society.¹²⁸ ‘Traditional’ objects and images from non-Western societies are often embedded in rituals and used in conjunction with oral and gestural performances. Objects held within museums and galleries are usually detached or disembodied from this holistic experience. More recently ‘tradition’ has been used to describe societal characteristics pre-colonisation/settlement, in this case before the influx of Western European peoples, and as a contrast to post-settlement changes in both the material and ontological aspects of that society.

In this thesis, only the colonisation/settlement of European peoples is discussed in detail: though there had been some temporary settlement earlier by the Macassans and others (Lang 1999; Ganter 2006) and from the late nineteenth century by men classed as ‘Asiatics’ (Choo 1995). Recent scholarship appears to be reassessing the importance and long cross-cultural history of Asian peoples in northern Australia (Ganter 2006). Akerman (1995) describes this succinctly:

Any notion of ‘traditional’ must ultimately be seen as a baseline concept for a particular society recorded at a particular time. These records then become the basis against which post-contact change is evaluated. Changes clearly occurred with Aboriginal cultures prior to contact with other peoples. The mechanism for these changes may be referred to within the oral traditions of the society and will undoubtedly influence post-contact patterns. However, until recently, for anthropology in Australia, this change in its related processes have not been considered to be as important as more static analyses of structure.

(Akerman 1995: 43)

Equally, in this thesis it is argued that ‘tradition’ is socially constructed authenticity and as such is an ongoing response to *all* contemporary events. It is maintained and promulgated through long-term structures such as revelations

¹²⁸ For example see D. Rose (2000), Watson (2003) and Butler (2008) for discussion of this point in Australian Aboriginal society, Phillips (2004) for discussion within Canadian Indigenous society, and Hobsbawn (1992) for the United Kingdom.

via dreams, and exchange processes including the *wunan*. This will also be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Tourist art exists at the junction of art, economics and politics.¹²⁹ This is especially so with Indigenous tourist art because it exists in a colonised space, with much debate on this subject in the late twentieth century. In particular, with reference to the artworks of the Asia-Pacific region, Thomas has canvassed this matter at length in *Entangled Objects: Exchange, material culture, and colonialism in the Pacific* (1991) and *Possessions: Indigenous art/colonial culture* (1999). Thomas discusses the ‘processes of mutual appropriation and unequal exchange’ (Thomas 1991: 3); that is, the political discourse between the colonisers and colonised. Essentialist notions of value and the ‘uniqueness’ of art, and the scientific interest in artefacts were intrinsic to colonialism. Colonial politics engendered the production of tourist art, the souvenir.¹³⁰ Touristic consumption arose and maintained a dichotomy by transforming the objects and practices of the colonised into activities that obscured exploitation based on the imaginary ‘Primitive Other’ of savagery and sexual intemperance or of an idealised unspoiled humanity, as evident in phrases like ‘Children of Nature’ (Young 1995; Phillips & Steiner 1999; Price 2001).

Both views seemingly encompass a way of life more ‘authentic’ than the modern world with its increasing industrialisation and shifting power relations. A typical example of this attitude in twentieth-century non-academic literature is Mary Durack’s introduction in *The End of Dreaming* (c. 1974). Twenty years later, Mick Dodson, the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, in his 1994 Wentworth Lecture reflects upon colonial constructions of Aboriginality commenting that:

the definitions and constructions have not simply been for the control and management of Indigenous peoples. Our constructed identities have served a broader purpose of reflecting back to the colonising culture what it wanted or needed to see in itself. The constructions of Aboriginality, in all their variations, have marked the boundaries which define and evaluate the so-called modern world. Whether Indigenous peoples have been portrayed as ‘noble’ or ‘ignoble’, heroic or wretched had depended on what the colonising culture wanted to say or think about itself.

¹²⁹ For further discussion on this connection see Phillips and Steiner (1999), who claim that tourist art is ‘most obviously located at the intersection of the discourse of art, artefact and commodity’ (Phillips & Steiner 1999: 4). Australian examples of the interactions between Aboriginal art and politics can be found in Tamisari (2006: 65–72).

¹³⁰ See discussion on the souvenir later in this section.

At times, Indigenous people have been used to affirm the superiority of the colonisers, and to provide confirmation of the values of progress. By extension, the destruction or assimilation of the Indigenous cultures has become a necessary, and even morally correct, part of the battle to overcome ‘the primitive’, and thereby to save both Indigenous peoples and colonisers from a life that is ‘nasty, brutish, and short’. By our lack we provide proof of their abundance and the achievements of ‘progress’; by our inferiority, we proved their superiority; by our moral and intellectual poverty, we proved that they were indeed the paragons of humanity, products of millennia of development. (Dodson 1994: 8; cited in Choo 2001: xxii–xxiii)

The discourse about non-Western objects that developed during the nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth century can be divided into three major discussions: the historical classifications of fine/applied art and the ‘Great Divide’ (high/low art, art/craft); the anthropological theories of evolution and the origins of art based on the notions of progress and historical evolution; and the Victorian responses to mechanical reproduction of art/craft and its ensuing commoditisation.¹³¹ The term ‘Western’ is used as the accepted shorthand, to denote the cultural-political-philosophical framework and conventions that emerged from Europe and the United Kingdom post-Enlightenment and which is the basis of the dominant culture in Australia today.

Once the disciplines of art history and anthropology were formalised in the late nineteenth century, the binary schema of art and artefact was to prove a ‘predicament’ that persisted until recently. Non-Western objects were consigned to being labelled either ethnographic specimens or works of art, depending on an often fictitious analogy to categories of Western ‘art’.¹³² As Phillips and Steiner (1999) point out: ‘To be represented as “art”, in other words, the aesthetic objects of non-Western peoples had to be transposed into the

¹³¹ For a history of the appropriation of non-Western art into Western categories see Phillips and Steiner (1999), ‘Art, Authenticity, and the Baggage of Cultural Encounter’, in R. Phillips and C. Steiner *Unpacking Culture. Art and commodity in colonial and postcolonial worlds*. The classic text on the Victorian reaction to the industrialisation of art, the use of repetition, is *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936/1969) by Walter Benjamin. Benjamin (1969) observes that through mechanical reproduction the consumption of art is no longer limited to the privileged and, importantly for Australian Indigenous art and as discussed elsewhere, the ‘unique value of the “authentic” work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value’ (Benjamin 1969: 224; see also Steiner 1999: 87). Sutton and Anderson (1989) believe ‘Aboriginal paintings, carvings, and other works are art ... because they share with similar artefacts the act of representation and a particular potential for meaning’ (Sutton & Anderson 1988: 4).

¹³² See Fisher (2014) for a discussion on high/low cultural dichotomy and the relationship between ‘fine Aboriginal art’ and ‘Aboriginal mass culture’ historically (Fisher 2014: 233–41).

Western system of classification of fine and applied art' (Phillips & Steiner 1999: 7). Phillips and Steiner (1999), for example, illustrate this point with examples from the American experience. They note that:

The visual aesthetic traditions of the majority of these peoples are a particularly bad 'fit' with the Western classification system, for Western hierarchies of media, genre, and conditions of production rarely match those that have historically operated with Native American communities ... [which means that] scholars have often privileged objects of lesser status within their producing communities, arbitrarily promoting some regions of the continent over others and ignoring the indigenous systems of value and meaning attached to objects. (Phillips & Steiner 1999: 7)

Amongst Australian examples are those of the Western and Central Desert dot paintings and the bark paintings of northern Australia. These forms of artwork on boards and canvases, emerging from sand, rock and body paintings, are not a 'traditional' genre, in that there have been transformations of media, size, content and production. They have been elevated to fine art while, in general, other traditional forms have not, for example, smaller wood and stone carving.¹³³ Hidden behind this binary classification was the increasingly important process of commodification that was flourishing within the colonial enterprise.

Art and craft, as categories, have proven to be historically and contextually contrived. Western European usage until the eighteenth century was centred on skilled handicraft.¹³⁴ The modernist discourse developed in the nineteenth century, and continued into the early twentieth century, viewed art as works of 'elevated status' and the artist as an innovative individual with a 'devotion to Art as a vocation' (Shiner 1994: 225). Wolff's 'artist as genius' emerged from this division of high 'Art' and applied or decorative art (Wolff 1981). Shiner (1994) also makes the point that there are two types of spirituality involved in this discussion. He notes that 'Spirituality characterising Art in modern aesthetic discourse derives from Romanticism and Idealism is of a different kind to the spiritual which clings to certain works by virtue of their religious function' (Shiner 1994: 230).

Historically within Australian Aboriginal society, every adult was expected to participate in the application of body painting and the production of ritual and ritual objects. It is

¹³³ For Australian examples see Philip Jones (1992); for other regions see Jules-Rosette (1984) and Stewart (1993).

¹³⁴ For discussions on 'pre-modern' and 'modern' views of art categories see Appadurai (1986), Shiner (1994), and Phillips and Steiner (1999). See also MacCannell (1976) for discussion on the 'modern' view of tourism in the twentieth century.

important to remember that in Aboriginal society the objects produced are only part of the entirety, which may include songs, ceremonies etc. The anthropologist, Deborah Bird Rose (2000), defines such song and dance as both inalienably authentic and part of the ‘*geography of country*’ (my emphasis). She writes that the performance of ceremony ‘carries an extreme burden because here the politics of ownership converge with the poetics of the sacred to produce cosmogenic actions’ (D. Rose 2000: 289). The more recent labelling of ‘artist’ is in addition to their Aboriginally defined roles (Williams 1976: 270).¹³⁵ For example, Butler (2008) argues that for the Anmatyerre people:

there is no specific term for ‘art’, basically because art is interconnected with all aspects of their life. So they don’t actually have this discrete term ‘art’. But therefore nor do they have the discrete distinction between art and craft. So when there is craft making going on in central Australia, it is image making in an Aboriginal world view.

(Butler 2008: n.p.)

Although Morphy (1989) states the Yolngu people of northern Australia recognise that some people produce art that is judged as better than others and this ‘challenges conventional wisdom about Yolngu art which would have it that any, indeed *all*, Yolngu can paint, that no specialists are recognised and that none is considered better than others’ (Morphy 1989: 23). On Australian Aboriginal aesthetics, Morphy (1989) writes that for the Yolngu people:

there is little overlap between Yolngu ways of talking about the objects that Europeans call art and Europeans’ way of talking about the same objects. Yolngu are unlikely to say of a painting that it is beautiful or well balanced or that it conveys a particular emotion relative to another painting. The terms Yolngu use when talking about art do have some overlap with those Europeans employ but more often their critical focus seems different. Aesthetic motivations are seldom acknowledged by the Yolngu as a purpose behind the production of works of art ... Indeed I do not wish to exclude the possibility that Yolngu art may have certain expressive characteristics that are universal in their effects and which have been utilised by artists of many different cultures throughout time ... In the case of Yolngu art, what Europeans interpret at a general level as an aesthetic effect Yolngu interpret as a manifestation of Ancestral power emanating from the Ancestral past.

(Morphy 1989: 22–3)

Prior to the early twentieth century, assumptions by early ethnographers, anthropologists, and art historians echoed imperialist evolutionary views (Young 1995) with a belief in the

¹³⁵ For a more detailed argument see Morphy (1989: 22–4). Megaw (1978) believes the role of artists as ‘historically determined figure in European society... probably impossible – to define or find cross-culturally’ (Megaw 1978: xiii). Anthropologist Nancy Williams at Yirrkala in 1969–70 notes that ‘no ritual objects have ever been *manufactured* for sale’ (Williams 1976: 270, my emphasis).

‘universal validity of progress, freedom and art’ (Phillips & Steiner 1999: 8; see also Cohodis 1999: 145). These views support museum taxonomies and have led to categories such as decorative art, domestic art and ornament.¹³⁶ Shiner (1994) notes the Western modernist discourse leaves little alternative but to force non-Western arts into either ‘an alien mould of High Art or appear to denigrate them as mere crafts’ (Shiner 1994: 226). With regard to non-Western European art, both the modernist discourse of the early twentieth century and the earlier view held by cultural evolutionists were based on narrow definitions of what is art, and what is relegated to the field of applied art/craft. As Phillips and Steiner (1999) note that the:

exclusion of textiles, basketry, and beadwork, of the stylistically naturalistic, and of anything seen as artistically ‘hybrid’ meant that the most important aesthetic traditions of many peoples were denied the status of fine art. (Phillips & Steiner 1999: 8¹³⁷)

Phillips and Steiner (1999) argue that many non-Western objects were identified within this categorisation, with the historical labelling of the:

sculpted or graphic images on weapons, tools, fabrics and the human body as applied art because they were imagined to serve utilitarian purposes and were therefore insufficiently autonomous to be regarded as ‘purely aesthetic’ or a fine art object.

(Phillips & Steiner 1999: 8)

Acker and Altman (2007), in discussing the distinction between art, craft and ethnographia in Aboriginal objects, notes the ‘thinness’ of the ‘scientific western worldview’ definitions and the hurdle of: ‘crossing the boundary from ethnographia to art; and simultaneously seeking to cross the categorical boundary of craft to art (Acker & Altman 2007: 2).

Western notions of authenticity required a ‘Primitive Other’, a concept that denied artistic hybridity, as well as objects made for external markets; that is, refuting the ‘idea of style as an integral tradition’ (Shiner 1994: 230), which functions properly only within the creator’s society uncorrupted by foreign influences. The hypocrisy within this idea is the assumption that Western artists have a vocation, a spiritual expression, and are not influenced by market forces; and that Western artists may willingly accept non-Western influences in their work. For an example of this double standard, compare the art world’s acceptance of foreign influences in the works of Margaret Preston and Albert Namatjira. Much has been written about appropriation or otherwise of Aboriginal imagery by a number of artists. Opinions

¹³⁶ See Jones (1992: 131) on the theme of utility in museum categories.

¹³⁷ For example, see D.S. Davidson (1937) *Aboriginal Australian Decorative Art*.

have changed over time and with difference in audience. The use of Aboriginal figures on decorative objects reflects the philosophies of the times and has been used by a colonising society to signal a sense of regionality and purpose.¹³⁸ After the more ‘botanic’ portrayal of Aboriginal people themselves in the nineteenth century arose the twentieth century use of motifs on item such as ceramics and fabrics imagined through the lens of Primitivism ‘when the art of other cultures became a fertile new resource because of its different formal and aesthetic qualities’ (Lumby 2011: 10). There are still considerable differences in the discussion of this ‘appropriation’, for example, in response to the Margaret Preston exhibition held in 2005 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, art curator Djon Mundine equated:

Preston's use of Aboriginal imagery to crucifixes being used as decoration by heavy metal bands ... The works present a veneer of Aboriginality ... the veneer of someone who is still like a tourist in their own country. (Mundine in Moses 2005: n.p.)

While curator Hetti Perkins discussing the Art Gallery of New South Wales’ 1940 painting *The brown pot* (1940) by Preston states that:

The emphasis is not naively realist representation but an attempt to articulate a Euro-Aboriginal visual language, a panoptic 'National Art'. Quite subversively for the time, Preston's agenda was the infiltration of 'native' art into the domestic and fine arts. And, unlike others who followed her, she focused on Australia's unique cultural inheritance rather than employing Indigenous art as one of many world cultures apparently viewed as fair game in the amoral world of modernist appropriation. (Perkins 2005: n.p.)

Wolff (1981) in her influential text *The Social Production of Art* refutes the notion of freedom of the Western artist from market forces in the following terms:

the artist is subject to the tastes, preferences, ideas, and aesthetic notions of those who influence the market ... [and which] often affects the content as well as the form of the work of art. (Wolff 1981: 17–8¹³⁹)

In the Western world artists have historically received patronage from the church, and then the state and finally the capitalist and global economy. Phillips (1999) notes that:

Far from being either produced or consumed without regard to matters of money or mark, works of art, aesthetic valuations, and judgement of taste are

¹³⁸ Lumby (2011) points out that the classical architecture of Australian Institute of Anatomy (AIA) could situate the building in America or Europe during the 1930s but the ‘decoration explains the purpose of the building and ... makes extensive use of Aboriginal motifs as part of its embellishment’ grounding it in regionality (Lumby 2011: 11). For scholarly discussions on the history and theory of art appropriation, see for example, Jones (1989) and Coleman (2005a), and also Moses (2005) and Perkin (2005) for a more generalist discussion.

¹³⁹ As an example of how market forces operate on artists, Namatjira initially signed his work as ‘Albert’ but at the time of his 1938 solo exhibition in Melbourne he added a second name ‘Namatjira’ (C. Williams 2007: n.p.).

indeed highly dependent on an object's commodity potential and economic value. (Phillips & Steiner 1999: 15)

Multiple definitions of authenticity were proposed in the late twentieth century. Views on what constitutes the 'authentic' range from including only those artefacts made for ritual or traditional purposes (Shiner 1994: 226) to those objects handmade by the people they depict (Appadurai 1986: 45). However, the first view is problematic because deviation from the accepted tradition is often judged as inauthentic. This is an awkward notion as it implies that an outside group not only decides what is inauthentic but also what is acceptable. Shiner (1994) notes that the dominant idea of authenticity in the 1980s is that:

only those artefacts from small-scale societies which are made to serve some ritual or other traditional purpose within the society may be classed as Art, whereas artefacts which members of small-scale societies make to be sold for purposes of primarily visual appreciation are scorned as either fakes or tourist art. (Shiner 1994: 226)

If Western art were being discussed, the 'accepted canon' may be an appropriate descriptor here but in an oral culture this is not meaningful.¹⁴⁰ There is a further dilemma in that objects that are faithful to a traditional style are often judged inauthentic by collectors who maintain that as such artworks are not produced in the context of ritual needs then they are replicas. This uses the context of production to define authenticity. The categories of art, artefact and commodities are no longer well defined. Phillips and Steiner (1999) argue for the merging of the art-artefact-commodity tradition into one domain, 'where categories are seen to inform one another rather than to compete in the claims for social primacy and cultural value' (Phillips & Steiner 1999: 15–16).

In the latter half of the twentieth century there emerged two threads of thought in the cross-cultural art domain: a desire for a pre-colonised authentic culture based on the nature of authenticity as tradition and the myth of unspoiled traditional culture, which overlays the modern art/craft distinctions already mentioned; and the 'contemporary curatorial preference for deliberately postcolonial work' (Thomas 1999: 198) as part of a critique of 'essentialist' identities. Within the notion of essentialist identity imposed upon Aboriginal society is the belief that traditional objects are statically generated within strictly inherited designs, styles and technique. In regard to the exhibiting of Aboriginal art, there was still curatorial comment as late as 1982 that 'a chronological display ... is inappropriate, as it is

¹⁴⁰ In this case, some continuity of design elements must be incorporated; other examples can be examined in discussions on basketry (Cohodas 1999), Navajo weaving (McCloskey 1994) and oriental carpets (Spooner 1986).

for other tribal art' (Thomas in McLean 1999: 122). The post-modern notion that authenticity, which had historically resided more in the artwork itself, especially the iconographic ones, is now conferred on the artist, usually conveyed in the photographs, biography and exhibition notes attached to the artwork (Green 1992: 287; Jackson 1999: 101–2).

The more recent scholarly and curatorial categorisation of Aboriginal art from regional and remote Australia as contemporary art has its own pitfalls. It is important to note this is not a universally accepted notion, for example, internationally, France's museum for non-Western art established in 2006, the Musée du Quai Branly, extensively uses 'primal art' and 'primitive art' in their literature (Price 2007).¹⁴¹

Although some anthropologists, curators and artists have made claims for this art to be labelled as contemporary art, Thomas (1999) comments in regard to Rover Thomas, an artist from Warmun, that: 'Thomas's paintings are of the present, but they do not constitute "contemporary art" as it is usually understood; they are in no sense engaged in a critique of modernism' (Thomas 1999: 217). This attachment to the philosophic and historical underpinnings of the Western world view of the individual is in contrast to the 'social aesthetic' and the 'aesthetic locus' of ceremony, which is foundational to this Kimberley art. Sutton argues that art is 'readable' because of the embeddedness of the visual in their religion (Sutton in Sayers 1994: 5). Myers (1991) observes that art theory generally 'struggles with the local message' (Myers 1991: 50). For some Aboriginal groups,¹⁴² the Dreaming expression within artworks with the association with place as 'a historical struggle' (Myers 1991: 50) that is *not simply* an effect of colonisation. It is part of their long-term historical process of identity and to see this as only a response to colonisation 'as "our" product (as from colonialism) is to colonise doubly by denying them their own histories' (Myers 1991: 50).

Internal influences within Aboriginal art practices

What are often not recognised are the internal influences at work within Aboriginal society, for example, the systems of cultural and economic exchange in which these societies are historically embedded. These systems of exchange have, of course, been

¹⁴¹ Philp rightly points out that this museum has been subject to much criticism for its depiction of culture as timeless and anti-historical (Angela Philp, pers. comm., 6 September 2016).

¹⁴² Myers particularly notes Pintupi, Warlpiri and Anmatjira [Anmatyerre] (Myers 1991: 50).

extended further by the advent of the colonisers, with whom Aboriginal societies have set up additional systems of cultural and economic exchange. Historically, Aboriginal religio-cultural groups have been regionally situated, and Charlesworth (2005) comments that:

While different peoples may emphasise a unique ancestral inheritance, they nonetheless practise their religions in the setting of ceremonial performances that require members of the different groups to come together, and even to ‘trade’ in ceremonies. (Charlesworth 2005: 2)

In the Kimberley, the public performances that come from specific types of dreaming¹⁴³ (Glaskin 2005: 299, 306) and the *wunan*¹⁴⁴ exchange processes underpin internal innovation. This is a deeply historic process of ongoing innovation,¹⁴⁵ one that is inclusive of contemporary events through the reworking of ‘dreamt revelations’ (Redmond 2008: 256); for example, the Ngarinyin’s *Captain Cook jurnba*,¹⁴⁶ composed by Alec Wirrijangu at the Munja ration depot in 1942. As discussed by Redmond (2008), this involves ‘intertwined three cataclysmic events’ – European contact in the nineteenth century, the then current Second World War, and ‘the vengeful destruction of humans during *lalarn* (the cosmogenic epoch) by the autochthonous *Wanjina* rain-beings, at a site known as Wanalirri/Dunbeyi on the central Kimberley Plateau’ (Redmond 2008: 256).¹⁴⁷ This *jurnba* was performed before American troops at Munja, and more recently at Mowanjum in 1996 (Redmond 2008: 257).

Treloyn and Emberly (2013) describe this type of public performance in the Kimberley as sustaining group and individual identity and cultural values, as:

Conception, composition, performance and transmission [of the performance] provide opportunities and material for participants to articulate and negotiate relationships with living, deceased and yet-to-be-born kin – and with neighbouring and distant groups – in relation to local and hereditary country and ancestral foundational events and stories. Junba plays an important role in sustaining core personal and cultural values, and knowledge about family, place and history in the

¹⁴³ See Chapters 5 and 6 for a more detailed discussion of this Dreaming connection between the public performances and innovation. See also Redmond (2008: 256) for an explanation of Ngarinyin Dreaming types.

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of the *wunan*.

¹⁴⁵ Treloyn and Emberly (2013) note that ‘The earliest repertoires recalled by older people of the Ngarinyin, Worrorra and Wunambal language groups (in the northern region of the Kimberley) date back to the early 1900s but the tradition predates this by hundreds, if not thousands, of years’ (Treloyn & Emberly 2013: 165).

¹⁴⁶ *Jurnba* or *joonba/junba* is a form of public performance from the north-west Kimberley; see Chapters 5 and 6 for a discussion on this performance type by Worora, Ngarinyin and Wunambal peoples.

¹⁴⁷ *Larlarn* is usually recorded as *Lalai* (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005).

Kimberley ... a vehicle to sustain social and emotional well-being, to articulate and establish individual and group identities, and to negotiate the changing circumstances of modern life.

(Treloyn & Emberly 2003: 165–6)

Many examples of such cultural exchanges exist outside the Kimberley. For instance, McBryde (1984) in her discussion of exchange in south-east Australia gives an early example of internal exchange practices from the diary of William Bradley of Costerfield District, Victoria, in 1838, in which he observed:

Today two groups of blacks met at the encampment by the deep hole in the creek ... Both groups it would appear were happy to see each other ... The stranger group as I will call them had travelled from the south and they carried with them a number ... [of] ... stone hatchets ... Some of these hatchets were polished while others were still quite rough and I imagine still require further work. The groups of blacks who are camped on the creek were eager to obtain these hatchets and in return for one polished axe they gave two of their opossum skin covers. For a hatchet still in a roughened state they gave in return a number of their light bamboo spears.

(Bradley in McBryde 1984: 142)

McBryde comments of this phenomenon that:

Such meetings provided foci for the dissemination of ideas, of new materials and new items of material culture ... They also suggest potential routes by which goods move across a landscape.

(McBryde 1984: 142)

Furthermore, Poirier (1992) notes in an examination of Western Desert ceremony at Balgo in Western Australia, that:

the circulation of 'nomadic' rituals, sometimes over wide stretches of land, has been a continuous practice in Aboriginal Australia and what seems to be a necessary one in maintaining interconnexions [sic] between groups of different cultural areas.

(Poirier 1992: 757)

Poirier goes on to describe the process of circulation and how a group might reinterpret/adapt the newly received ritual to their existing land narratives (Poirier 1992: 758). It is the tension between 'forms of permanence' and innovation or 'openness' (Poirier 1992: 757) seen in the circulation of ceremony between different groups and the rights/obligations inherent in these exchanges¹⁴⁸ that has allowed the innovation and transformation of artefact/art in function, style and production to be expressed while maintaining the underlying structure as the 'forms of permanence'. One example is the

¹⁴⁸ See further examination of this point later in this section regarding reciprocity and non-Indigenous relationships.

movement of eastern rituals to the western part of the Kimberley. The anthropologist Helmet Petri recorded in 1938 that the prevailing initiation laws of this area were from the eastern Kimberley and were not related to the older Wandjina initiation practices of circumcision and subincision, and, that he was led to believe these had been superseded by desert practices (Petri in Crawford 1968: 35–6). During the twentieth century, the rock art and tree-carving Wandjina motif began to be found as decoration on objects such as boab nuts, with the motif later adapted to represent the Kimberley region in tourist art (Lang 1999). Post-contact, the rate of exchange has accelerated with the increase of technology, for example, car mobility and the internet. This is further discussed in Chapter 5.

Commodifying forces within Aboriginal art practices

The preference for ‘traditional’ by the general public has carried over into the present; for example, the romanticised new age/environmentalist movement stereotyping Indigenous peoples as sources of ancient wisdom, and mythical/cosmic and archaic knowledge. The taint of the primitivist inclination¹⁴⁹ for ‘traditional’ works, which is grounded in tribal or ancestral spirituality, remains, although Thomas (1999) argues that, as this is a reality for some Indigenous communities, the notion cannot be dismissed as ‘merely an extension of an imperialist cult’ (Thomas 1999: 198). The colonial ambition of ‘civilising’ Indigenous peoples and encouraging their conversion into consumers of Western manufactured goods produced ambivalence about commodified Indigenous art, which was:

displaced onto a special category of exotica, tourist art, which was constructed not just to represent the idea of the handmade, but also to display iconographic motifs and forms that signified ‘old’ ways of life imagined as simpler and more satisfying.

(Phillips & Steiner 1999: 13)

In brief, MacCannell (1976) notes that Veblen in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* argued that the way leisure is consumed reflects social structure, while Karl Marx modelled his theory of social class on the value of commodities. MacCannell takes these ideas further and his analysis of tourism uses differentiation between ‘social classes, lifestyles, racial and ethnic groups, age grades, political and professional groups and the mythic representation of the past to the present’ (MacCannell 1976: 11) as a systematic variable that is not a ‘specific institution of society’ but is the ‘origin of alternatives and the feeling of freedom in modern society’ (MacCannell 1976: 11).

¹⁴⁹ There has been much written about the history of primitivism and art. For a detailed discussion, see Sally Price (2001) *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*.

The ideology of authenticity was underpinned during the later nineteenth century by a belief in a linear and evolutionary progression of social and technological improvement among peoples and their objects.¹⁵⁰ It is interesting that, while it was believed by many at that time that colonial cross-fertilisation produced advancement for the colonised, in matters of art there has been, until recently, a general rejection of ‘hybridity’, based on the nineteenth-century arguments of the degeneration caused by mixed race (Young 1995). Even into the twentieth century Indigenous peoples of colonised countries were categorised as pre-modern or ‘primitive’ peoples, preserved in a more ‘authentic’, ‘pure’ and spiritual past in the modern industrialised state.¹⁵¹ A crucial shift in this model began with its replacement by a relativist construct, the modernisation paradigm. Jones (1992) comments that:

Only with the radical shift engineered at the turn of the [twentieth] century by cultural relativists led by Franz Boas, did ethnographic objects begin to be described according to criteria of use and function operating within the cultures which produced them. (P. Jones 1992: 131)

More recently, it has become obvious that cross-cultural contact is reciprocal, although not necessarily equal. For example, in *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (1994) presents an argument for resistance through mimicry and the appropriation of the dominant society’s forms, materials and tools. Jones (1995) observes that Albert Namatjira, the famous mid-twentieth century Aboriginal landscape artist and at least nominally a practising Christian¹⁵², had previously made replicas of *tjuringa*¹⁵³ as souvenirs (Jones 1995: 90). These mulga wood plaques¹⁵⁴ with pokerwork Christian motifs in form and size resembled a *tjuringa* (Fig. 4.1) and Jones argues that Namatjira ‘was quite aware of the ambiguous message carried by these objects’ (P. Jones 1995: 91). As an example, Jones (1995) comments on the Palm Valley plaque that:

¹⁵⁰ See also Price (2001).

¹⁵¹ Blundell lists these as ‘primitives, peasants, ethnic and rural folk’ (Blundell 1994: 258).

¹⁵² For further examination of Namatjira’s religious practices as they relate to his art see *The Heritage of Namatjira: The watercolourist of Central Australia* (Hardy, Megaw & Megaw 1992). Namatjira’s family background of marriage transgressions and the resultant issues of access to traditional narratives may have facilitated the embrace of non-traditional media (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 24 April 2012).

¹⁵³ *Tjuringa*, *tjurunga* or *churinga* are spelt differently by authors although *tjuringa* is more common in research undertaken for this thesis (see for example Basedow 1925; Davidson 1949; Black 1964; Kubler 1971; Anderson 1995; P. Jones 1995).

¹⁵⁴ A number of these plaques are held in major museums and galleries including SAM, NMA, MV and the Araluen Centre, Alice Springs.

The positioning of one of the palm trees at the centre of concentric rings occurring naturally in the mulga wood gives an impression that one is looking at an image carrying more than a single message. (P. Jones 1995: 91)

Namatjira was *kwertengerl* for Palm Valley, which was inherited from his mother's side (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 26 April 2012) and this allowed him to depict the appropriate associated narratives. In the late 1920s Pastor F. Albrecht developed a craft industry, which included pokerwork designs on wooden plaques, coat hangers, boomerangs and woomeras, and in 1932 Namatjira's first commission was from Constable W. MacKinnon for 12 mulga wood plaques at five shillings each (Mackenzie 2000: n.p.). Mountford 'dismissed his paintings as "curios" [noting in his personal journal, that] "this is, of course, not Aboriginal art"' (Newstead 2014: 101).

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Fig 4.1 *Other Refuge Have I None*
Albert Namatjira
Hermannsburg, c. 1930s
49.8mm x 20.8mm x 19mm
pokerwork on mulga wood plaque
Gift of Helene and Dudley Burns 1988 (from the collection of the late Reverend and Mrs F.W. Albrecht)
2740
Flinders University Art Museum

In 1934, Reverend Albrecht in the annual report on the Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission, reported:

We noticed how some of the Natives [sic] had decidedly artistic inclinations, and as there is a fair growth of mulga on the Reserve, we thought of commercializing this for pokerwork ... The first pieces, where we used old engravings of tjuringas as a design, did not sell. But then one of the Natives started making free-hand drawings of local animals, palms, etc., which appealed and sold well.

(Albrecht in P. Jones 1995: 91)

Tunncliffe (2014) and Newstead (2014) also notes this juxtaposition of cross-cultural meanings in the work of Otto Pareroultja, a younger artist working in watercolour landscapes from Hermannsburg and influenced by Namatjira and Rex Battarbee¹⁵⁵ (Tunncliffe 2014) (Fig. 4.2). Newstead (2014) cites Ted Strehlow, a ‘privileged outsider’ with a ‘special relationship with the Arrernte’ and anthropologist, on the ‘connections between the swirling parallel lines and concentric circles of Pareroultja’s paintings and the designs found on the sacred *tjuringa* stones associated with the men’s ceremonial life’ (Newstead 2014: 106–7; also Morton n.d.).

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Fig. 4.2: Untitled landscape
Otto Pareroultja
Hermannsburg, c. 1950s
33.5cm x 28cm
watercolour on paper
359.2001
Art Gallery of New South Wales
<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/359.2001/>

In Australia, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the appropriation of media and techniques allowed Aboriginal people to overcome problems of reciprocity with the colonists and others as objects were taken out of context by being produced for sale, that is, by commodification, and thus socio-cultural reciprocal relations could be avoided. Prior to British colonisation, the movement of objects was through gift, exchange or

¹⁵⁵ Tunncliffe (2014) notes that Battarbee ‘claimed that elements of Otto Pareroultja’s work were derived from Aboriginal rock art and from the designs on *tjuringa*’ (Tunncliffe 2014: n.p.).

theft.¹⁵⁶ In the process of object commodification people are permitted to own and control objects and relationships in a way quite different from gift giving and receiving, in that ‘the residual interests of other people in things, people or knowledge can be denied’ (Thomas 1991: 48). When settlers and missionaries developed a more permanent relationship with the Aboriginal people, the exchange of items such as tobacco for work or belief changed the way exchange conventions had been used (Anderson 1995a: 102–3; see also Rowse 1998). Jack Wherra, the well-known boab nut artist, gifted boab nuts to prison warders while in prison, which initiated:

dynamic, two-way relationships inherent in the gift offered to cement social relations and probably did much more as far as Wherra was concerned. It did not give the owners the rights or authority of senior men or women to make decisions in their culture or communities, or give them rights to enter land. (Jebb 2006: 712)

Anderson (1995) makes the observation that in Central Australia as the Aboriginal population declined in the early twentieth century, the ‘surplus’ *tjuringa* were directed towards non-Aboriginal people for strategic purposes (Anderson 1995: 13).¹⁵⁷ It is this strategic use, one aspect of which Anderson (1995a) terms ‘engagement’ between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people, which is based on social currency (Anderson 1995a: 103).

Pre-contact uses of certain categories of objects as part of the societal milieu, including politics and economic processes, and underpinned by religious ceremony, allowed for movement of these objects with the corresponding creation of rights and obligations (Anderson 1995a: 103). The ‘loaning’ of these objects to non-Aboriginal people was an attempt to bring them into, by social currency, the Aboriginal exchange system (Anderson 1995a: 104) with a view to future claims on non-Aboriginal resources. Anderson (1995a) mentions that, in the 1960s:

¹⁵⁶ The classic text on the gift is Mauss’s *The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies* (1990 [1924]). For insight into the circulation of sacred objects in Western Europe see Geary’s ‘Sacred Commodities: the circulation of medieval relics’ (Geary 1988). For the circulation of Indigenous objects see examples such as ‘Trade and Change in Australian Aboriginal Cultures: Australian Aboriginal trade as an expression of close culture contact and as a mediator of culture change’ (Micha 1970); ‘Exchange in South Eastern Australia: An ethnohistorical perspective (McBryde 1984); and ‘Weapons and *Wunan*: Production, function and exchange of Kimberley points’ (Akerman, Fullagar & Van Gijn 2002). For further research on ceremonial movement see ‘The Mobility of Aboriginal Religion’ (Kolig 1984); and also Akerman, Fullagar and Van Gijn (2002) and Blundell (1980).

¹⁵⁷ It is noted that *tjuringa* are in a secret-sacred category. On the later appropriation of their concentric circle motif within Western art, Kubler notes that: ‘When the offending objects and monuments finally cease to correspond to any living behaviour, they become symbolically inert. They then are ‘safe’ to play with in recombinations emptied of previous vital meanings, as in tourist souvenirs, antiquarian reconstructions, or archaizing revivals’ (Kubler 1971: 213; also cited in P. Jones 1995: 90). For a discussion of how the notion of the gift-exchange relationship works between collector–donor and museum, see Bergeron (2012).

there was considerable trade in what we could call ‘tourist-aimed’ *tjuringa*. These were sometimes ‘fakes’, or else small *tjuringa* or bullroarers which had had their religious designs modified so as to de-sanctify the objects. (Anderson 1995a: 103)

There was a belief that these desanctified sorts of *tjuringa* would become invisible to the Aboriginal system and would no longer support any further obligations. While these were produced by Aboriginal men, the authenticity issue remained, as there was still at this time ambivalence about commoditised Indigenous art and concern about the degradation of ‘primitive’ culture (Phillips & Steiner 1999: 12).

Appadurai’s (1986) work focuses ‘on the things that are exchanged, rather than simply on the forms or function of exchange, [and this] makes it possible to argue that what creates the link between exchange and value is politics, construed broadly’ (Appadurai 1986: 3), which is different from the mid-twentieth century trend to focus scholarship on production and consumption. Highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination are often inherent in the spaces where cultures meet. Starting from a different supposition, Steiner (1999) argues that:

if one accepts mass production or mechanical reproduction as legitimate forms of cultural expression – worthy of the same attention and intellectual respect as other categories of so-called art – the burden of proof necessary to rationalise tourist art as an ‘authentic’ art form requires one to demonstrate only the logic of production and consumption that it shares with other classes of mass-produced things. (Steiner 1999: 89)

Tourist art then becomes part of a more universal model of producer–consumer interaction.

Tourist art, innovation and authenticity

Tourist art reinterprets and politicises the past via a large and varied audience. Wollen (1990) makes the important point that:

Tourist art has existed as long as there have been trading contacts ... but the great shift from ‘authentic’ or ‘tribal’ art to ‘tourist’ art as the main focus for contact with the west has taken place [in the last sixty years].

(Wollen 1990: 47)

Tourist art is an economic commodity reflecting the social organisation and market demands of the new environment in which it is produced and demonstrates the expressive and adjustive relationship between popular culture and economic change. Appadurai (1986) extended this relationship into a ‘social relationship’ over the life of the commodity, with meaning interchanging and interacting through changing form, use and environment.

Historically there has been a widespread notion that pre-capitalist societies are not open to innovation. Van den Breemer defines innovation as:

crops and animals, tools and equipment, techniques, behavioural and organisation patterns or combinations of these which at a specific moment are regarded as new or, at least as different from those habitually used. (van den Breemer et al. 1991: 2¹⁵⁸)

The new or different may be either totally or partially accepted and diffused throughout a society, or rejected. As an expression of the socio-economic order and indicative of processes such as protest, the acceptance or rejection of innovation either reinforces the existing social order or challenges it. It is important to note that innovation usually also contains a non-material component. This 'element implies a conscious discontinuity in the traditional lines of thinking: a particular object, behaviour or idea is to be viewed in a different perspective, and as something new' (van den Breemer et al. 1991: 2).¹⁵⁹ This may not necessarily contribute to any diminution of cultural identity, although incorporation into the politicised monetary economy has initially had dire effects for many colonised peoples. The power relationships between the coloniser and the colonised were based on economic, political and technological differences and were underpinned by an ontological belief in the hierarchy of race and gender (Young 1995).

The idea of the 'authentic' is especially ambiguous in the souvenir arena. Stewart (1993) sees the souvenir as 'emblematic' of that which narrative reveals, which according to her, is:

the longing for its place of origin ... The souvenir seeks distance (the exotic in time and space), but it does so in order to transform and collapse distance into proximity to, or approximation with, the self. The souvenir therefore contracts the world in order to expand the personal ... Significantly, the [souvenir] collection marks the space of nexus for all narratives, the place where history is transformed into space, into property. (Stewart 1993: xii)

Stewart goes on to argue that 'traces of authentic experience' are exemplified by the souvenir and that unrepeatable events exist only through the narrative inherent in this metonymic object, it is in a sense the 'second-hand' experience (Stewart 1993). For

¹⁵⁸ This statement contains ethnocentric bias in that van den Breemer is concerned predominantly with agriculturalist societies, rather than hunter-gatherer communities.

¹⁵⁹ Throughout this thesis it is argued that the Aboriginal peoples of the Kimberley and elsewhere use ceremony as a way of incorporating contemporary experiences and innovation into the Dreaming narratives. See especially Chapters 5 and 6.

example, in the latter part of the twentieth century, most of the incised boab nuts went directly overseas to European countries during the tourist season, between June and September (Kevin Kelly, pers. comm., 22 August 1997). As many European tourists are 'unfamiliar with traditional arts, [they] only want something to remind them of superficial aspects of their experience' (Graburn 1982: 8). The demand is for a souvenir which is easily portable and relatively cheap. This is demonstrated by the account given by the Waringarri Aboriginal Arts advisor, Kevin Kelly, that:

visitors to the place see them as like a Kimberley icon and something they can take home and so many people who come to the shop walk out with a boab nut as a memento from the trip because they have seen the [boab] trees.

(Kevin Kelly, pers. comm., 22 August 1997, in Lang 1999: 54)

Benson (2001) agrees that these replicated forms 'predominantly represent sites and events situated away from the everyday domestic space of home' (Benson 2001: 5) but unlike Stewart, argues that souvenirs are generally held to 'occupy a position as merely kitsch: the "bad" and artificial counterpart of tourist art' (Benson 2001:5). However, Benson concludes in her research on the souvenir and nostalgia that a souvenir 'stands in for personal experiences' (Benson 2001: 87) and: 'It is only when external forces impact on such association, like proving the provenance of a museum collection, that such onerous disputes regarding authenticity are presented' (Benson 2001: 88).

Such authenticity disputes revolve around the notions that commodified artworks themselves are not used by the communities that made them, and that increasing participation in the commodification process itself has altered the aesthetic expression of these Indigenous communities. Both positions ignored the fact that colonised peoples, in their daily lives, often used the same kinds of objects they later sold as souvenirs and that internal innovation¹⁶⁰ had been happening throughout history in response to changing situations. Utemorrhah and others have commented on internal change and she observes that many of the: 'patterns and designs which have come down from the Dreaming ... have a limited life, which makes it difficult to ascertain how long the art form has been in existence' (Utemorrhah et al. 1980: 36). There is evidence that many objects collected as ethnological specimens in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were, in fact, commercially manufactured replicas.¹⁶¹ Nicholls raises a further point that is often ignored in the literature:

¹⁶⁰ See Chapter 5 for a discussion of 'innovation' within cultural repertoires of the Kimberley (Glaskin 2005).

¹⁶¹ See Phillips and Steiner (1999: 10) and Cohodas (1999: 147) for further discussion on replicas.

these exchanges always occurred in terms of ceremony design use etc. by Aboriginal groups and not just internally but externally too. Nothing was ever ‘given’ without a cost involved so while the exchange might not have occurred within a capitalist framework, it was economic in nature. (Nicholls, per. comm., 23 April 2013)

One of the earliest Australian documented examples took place during Captain P.P. King’s explorations along the Kimberley coast between 1818 and 1822. King noted in his journal in December 1821 that he had collected:

about 100 spears, 30 throwing sticks, 40 hammers, 150 knives and a few hand clubs, the value of each being at from half to 1/8th of a biscuit [and he writes that the Aboriginal men on] finding we took everything, were not very particular in the form or manufacture of the articles they bought to us.

(King 1969 [1827]: 136–7)

King also notes that they made spears and other items that were no longer functional and were suitable only for trade. Within this anecdote of cross-cultural encounter arise issues of authenticity and innovation, along with illustrations of colonial infrastructures such as commodification, exploitation and the science/philosophy of the ‘primitive’. Likewise it points to the expectation on the part of ‘the natives’ that they get something in return.

In Australia, quite a number of historical examples of problematic authenticity endure into the present day. The bark paintings from Yirrkala in Arnhem Land, as we know them, evolved in the 1930s from designs on hut walls to large sheets of bark and finally to the use of split branches to hold the work flat and increasingly smaller more portable sizes (Williams 1976). The Papunya dot paintings of the 1970s involve the transfer of sand drawing and body painting motifs to canvas and were not a traditional medium (Thomas 1999). In this instance, the materials and function are not traditional, however, structural continuity¹⁶² with the past can be argued. Thomas (1999) comments that:

the marketing of this type of art has consistently emphasised the images’ grounding in mythical and ancestral spirituality, [and thus authenticity but maybe] this is fair enough, given that in general these paintings are indeed a vehicle for narratives that remain central to ritual, landholding, and other aspects.

(Thomas 1999: 197)

Many commodified non-Western objects ‘have been shown to exhibit all the communicative and signifying qualities of “legitimate” or “authentic” works of art’ (Phillips & Steiner 1999: 15). In these Australian examples, these unquestionably

¹⁶² See Chapter 3 for a discussion and demonstration of the relevance of this point to decorated boab nuts.

traditional design elements were consistently transferred to new media and fall within Noyes and Abrahams's (1999) argument regarding the use of 'custom' and innovation as a means of preserving and promoting identity, as discussed throughout this thesis.

In 1998 in the Kimberley, for example, the Federal Court of Australia determined that the Miriwoong and Kadjerong peoples held Native Title to an area of the East Kimberley into the Northern Territory (Lane & Waitt 2001: 386). During this process 'traditional' rock art and the more recent and contemporary paintings and 'artefacts' were produced as evidence before the Court to demonstrate the continuous and ongoing relationship to Country. The use of local materials and the resource environment were considered and used as evidence of authenticity (Lane & Waitt 2001: 397). In the same publication, Lane and Waitt demonstrated that Aboriginal people confirmed the authenticity of their artworks, including decorated boab nuts, and they also acknowledged the difficulties involved with concepts of authenticity and tradition for non-Indigenous groups. A Federal Court transcript on this subject is worth quoting at length:

Notions of authenticity were central to the debate over what constituted material evidence of continuity of traditions. At one stage, Nida Bidwee, a Miriwoong woman from the Emu Creek Community, presented the court with a carved boab nut and a painting made of ochre on slate, which she explained were produced for sale to tourists. While she presented these artefacts as evidence of cultural maintenance and survival, Mr Witthuhn, a lawyer representing the Northern Territory Government, objected:

Mr Witthuhn: Your Honour, it's been put forward, in my submission, by the applicants that the practice of carving boab nuts and other artefacts represents an expression of traditional culture. The questions that I would seek to put may well show that that's been a recent innovation.

His Honour: A recent innovation? You mean an innovation?

Mr W: An innovation, certainly – an innovation within perhaps the last 20 or 25 years.

HH: Well, what if it is?

Mr W: Well, if it is, Your Honour, then –

HH: I mean, I haven't got a boab nut before me. It's nothing more than a statement of occupation saying that it's a carving slate or doing anything else. I don't know that anything turns on it, does it?

Mr W: To the extent, Your Honour, that it's put forward as being an indicator of continued spiritual affiliation with the land through the carving of, for example, Dreamtime figures. It may well emerge that the carving of Dreamtime figures was a recent innovation.

HH: Yes. But so what? I mean, culture isn't an immutable thing even if you were right in that. If there were means of expression that developed as influences came in, so what?

Mr W: Your Honour, my questions may also be directed to the reason why that particular innovation came about, and if there's been some external influence, then it may be the case that it doesn't represent an authentic expression of a naturally developing and evolving culture.

...

HH: But so what? I mean, it's the same as artwork of any description that now has a market and may be regarded as a commodity. But the fact that this person or others are engaged in it doesn't really have much bearing upon the existence of a community structure or the maintenance of links with the land that the community group has. Why do you need to go down this path, the path being the whole of the access to, if you like, western means of acquisition of money through the marketing of artistic commodities?

Mr W: I won't persist with that line of questioning, you Honour.

(Federal Court of Australia transcripts 1997: 3878–9, cited in Lane & Waitt 2001: 397–8)

This attempt to argue that the sale of these artworks to tourists made them inauthentic and were evidence of the loss of traditional culture was unsuccessful. However, at the same time both His Honour and Mr Witthuhn refused to accept:

the witness's contention that they *represented evidence of cultural maintenance* and survival in the same way that rock art did, or the large paintings on canvass produced by well-known older artists who employed more complex traditional symbolism in the work.

(Lane & Waitt 2001: 398, my emphasis)

Countering this point is the argument presented in Chapter 6, whereby for the Mowanjum community Dreaming narratives and their associated cultural meaning are depicted on artworks for sale, for example, Woolagoodja's didgeridoos and Wherra's boab nuts. By the making and doing of incising and painting, community members are fulfilling obligations to maintain Country at a time when people were no longer necessarily living on their Country and enabling the transmission of tradition to younger generations.

‘Realist space’ and the Western realistic genre

Cosgrove (1985) contends that historically in the Western European tradition, landscape ‘was a “way of seeing” that was bourgeois, individualist and related to the exercise of power over space’ (Cosgrove 1985: 45). Taylor (2008), however, argues that for *all* people there is a ‘human attachment to landscape’ beyond what we see with our vision as we ‘interpret it with our mind and ascribe values to landscape for intangible – spiritual – reasons’ (K. Taylor 2008: 1). Cosgrove’s (1985) discussion of ‘realist space’ in relation to the development of landscape and landscape art emerges from a history of the development of linear perspective¹⁶³ as the foundation of Western realism in the visual arts (Cosgrove 1985). It is this use of geometry as a hierarchical and powerful representation in the revisioning of the physical landscape into art that has entwined the appropriation of space with, in the Australian context, colonialism and the idea of ownership (Figs 4.3a & 4.3b).

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Fig 4.3a: A European example of Western linear perspective
The Avenue: Middelhamis, 1689
Myndert Hobbema (Dutch, 1638–1709)
103.5cm x 141cm
oil on canvas
National Gallery of London
<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/meindert-hobbema-the-avenue-at-middelhamis>

¹⁶³ Linear perspective as it relates to Western realist representation and decorated boab nuts is discussed throughout this chapter and Chapter 8.

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Fig. 4.3b: An Australian example of Western linear perspective
Down on his luck, 1889
Frederick McCubbin (Australia, 1855–1917)
oil on canvas
114.5cm x 152.8cm
State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia
Purchased 1896
<http://www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/collections/AGWA-Historical.asp>

Cosgrove (1985) argues that linear perspective was contemporary with ‘oils, framing and production of a market of mobile, small canvases ... which allowed for the visual representation of a bourgeois, rationalist conception of the world’ (Cosgrove 1985: 49). The use of different media and production practices, and the mobility of artwork no longer confined to places of privilege, was in conjunction with the rise of the middle classes, and was echoed in the nineteenth century, as previously discussed in the section on the authenticity of tourist art. In the later twentieth century the ‘Western style’ landscapes by Aboriginal artist Albert Namatjira¹⁶⁴ were re-evaluated by the National Gallery of Australia (NGA). There was increasing outside recognition that Western-style landscapes painted by Aboriginal artists: ‘are not merely “pretty pictures”, but are an assertion of Aboriginal culture and the relationship between the artists and their country’ (J. Green 1988: 3) (Figs 4.4a & 4.4b).

¹⁶⁴ As Philp (2007) observes: ‘The art world meanwhile condemned Namatjira’s painting [in the 1940s–1950s], considering it derivative and inauthentic, neither European nor Aboriginal, and dismissing it as merely clever copying of an already outdated European landscape style’ (Philp 2007: 52).

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Fig. 4.4a: An example of 'Western style' landscape painting by Namatjira
Ghost Gum, Mt Sonder, MacDonnell Ranges, c. 1953–57
Albert Namatjira (1902–1959)
36.8cm x 53.8cm
watercolour and pencil image
National Gallery of Australia
<https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/Detail.cfm?IRN=47097>

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Fig. 4.4b: An example of 'Western style' landscape painting by Namatjira
Mount Sonder, MacDonnell Ranges, c. 1957–59
Albert Namatjira (1902–1959)
25.3cm x 35.6cm
watercolour and pencil on paper
National Gallery of Australia
<https://nga.gov.au/namatjira/looking.cfm>

Albert Namatjira visited the artist William Dargie in Sydney during 1956¹⁶⁵, and Dargie recalls ‘Namatjira’s critique of a well-known Australian painter, which revealed Namatjira’s own commitment to pictorial realism, and his knowledge of the techniques needed to achieve it’ (National Gallery of Australia 2015). Dargie recounted Namatjira’s question about this particular painter:

He does not know how to make the side of a tree which is in the light look the same colour as the side of the tree in shadow. If you turn that picture upside down the mountain in the distance would look closer to you than the tree. That is not right, I know how to do it better.

(National Gallery of Australia 2015)

Namatjira was well acquainted with the camera’s viewfinder as an instrument for looking at the landscape, and his paintings ‘explore boundaries to vision, particularly where distant vistas are contained by geological forms or framed by trees’ (National Gallery of Australia 2015). His work was also recognised for placing a detailed tree on the side of the picture, and for using ‘complex juxtaposition of coloured shadows’ (National Gallery of Australia 2015) to achieve three-dimensionality in his landscapes. A discussion of realist representation of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface follows. Chapters 7 and 8 include a discussion of the impact of Western realism on designs depicted on decorated boab nuts.

Western realist representation and the different ‘way of seeing’ County

The history of linear perspective as the basis of Western realism in art¹⁶⁶ has been outlined in many books and articles and there is no intention in this thesis to develop a narrative on the theme of linear perspective in Western European history.¹⁶⁷ It is not suggested that it is *only* the development of perspective that informs a realist space, but as Cosgrove argues the ‘realist illusion of space’ was a technique that ‘aligned to the physical appropriation of space as property, or territory (Cosgrove 1985: 55). With the eventual settlement of Australia by Europeans, these connections of property and hierarchy are part of the

¹⁶⁵ Dargie was painting a portrait of Namatjira, which won the Archibald Prize in 1956; for an image and background to this portrait see ‘William Dargie’ (Artists Footsteps n.d.).

¹⁶⁶ It is important to understand that this is not a universal model in art traditions worldwide.

¹⁶⁷ For a brief history of the development of linear perspective see Cosgrove’s ‘Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea’ (1985: especially pages 54–6). Other researchers who have written about this include Clarke (1949), Appleton (1984) and Andrews (1999). For the history and application of linear perspective to Aboriginal art see ‘The Visual Art of Central and Western Desert Australian Aboriginal Schoolchildren: Continuity and change’ (Nicholls 2009).

colonialist worldview and are entangled in the development of a ‘realistic’ landscape genre in decorated boab nuts as a retelling of historic narratives.¹⁶⁸

Cosgrove (1985) describes how the realist space in art is produced:

Realist representation of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface through linear perspective directs the external world towards the individual located outside that space. It gives the eye absolute mastery over space. The centric ray moves in a direct line from the eye to the vanishing point, to the depth of the recession plane. Space is measured and calculated from this line and the rest of what is seen constructed around the vanishing point and within the frame fixed by external rays. (Cosgrove 1985: 48)

To create a three-dimensional sense, techniques include overlapping placement in a manner to converge to a vanishing point, and changing size and colours, for example, assigning objects further away less detail and hue.

Linear perspective, using concepts of a fixed point of view, vanishing and distance points and the intersecting plane, ‘establishes the arrangement or composition, and thus *the specific time*, of the events described, determines – in both senses – the “point of view” to be taken by the observer, and controls through framing the scope of reality revealed’ (Cosgrove 1985: 48; my emphasis). This was contested in the nineteenth century, as other ‘ways of seeing’ were incorporated/appropriated by Western artists.¹⁶⁹ The new techniques of reproduction, according to Benjamin in the 1930s, were negating this idea of ‘specific time’, with the *possibility* of paintings as historical documentation diminishing within Western European art as the image–text nexus became more important (Benjamin 2006 [1936]). He states that:

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence.

(Benjamin 2006 [1936]: 3)

¹⁶⁸ Weichart (2004) discusses the relationship between property, hierarchy, and the settler vision of assimilation in regard to the landscape painters of the Hermannsburg Mission.

¹⁶⁹ Cosgrove (1985) notes the relationship between modernism and the development of modern photographic printing techniques (Cosgrove 1985: 54). The issues of reproducibility have been discussed in the previous section on the authenticity of tourist art. The seminal work in this area is ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (Benjamin 2006 [1936]).

Nicholls (2009a) makes the argument for *a different way of seeing country* for many older Aboriginal artists.¹⁷⁰ They:

possess what seems to many outsiders an extraordinary spatio-temporal compositional ability. This derives directly from their upbringing and socialisation and as such it is a learned skill. (Nicholls 2009a: n.p.)¹⁷¹

She further clarifies this:

In the ‘old days’ (i.e. pre-contact times) people moved around vast tracts of their desert country via a system of rotational navigation (as opposed to ‘nomadism’, which suggests aimless wandering), moving from food source to food source as each food came into season, and from water hole to water hole or soakage, in order to survive. Such systematic, seasonally repetitive travel on foot meant that desert people often covered a lot of ground in a relatively short period of time. Over the course of a lifetime such journeying over ‘country’ resulted in encyclopaedic knowledge of the country.

(Nicholls 2009a: n.p.)

This behaviour results in a constant need to reposition the self in the landscape and produces the ‘travelling eye’ way of seeing and viewing art (Nicholls 2009a: n.p.). In the older art and artefact designs the focus is on the specific, that is, *the locational*, motifs and the associated figurative aspects.¹⁷² There is no correct way of viewing these objects as:

the spectator’s eye is compelled to ‘dance’ across the canvas [or boab nut] and constantly re-position itself by moving up and down and across the surface of the artwork in order to engage visually with the subject matter.

(Nicholls 2009: n.p.)

In the Kimberley, designs on incised and painted boab nuts, on canvas, and on wooden sculpture have been translated from designs found on boab trees, rock walls, wooden artefacts, and in body painting and ornamentation.¹⁷³ The use of zigzag incising on boab nuts further highlights this sense of motion and of travelling. The tactile experience of incising, not just in the making but in the touching, interconnects with the narrative. In earlier decorated boab nuts (Figs 3.22a & 3.24b), the salient designs are not necessarily indicated figuratively, although they can be, but rather metonymically as signifiers of

¹⁷⁰ A different way of seeing becomes apparent when viewing the 1947 film *Namatjira The Painter* re-edited in 1974 to remove sacred ceremony/art. *Namatjira* is filmed showing one of his landscapes to a group of younger men. He places the picture on the ground and they all look down at it from above (Film Australia Ltd. 1974 [1947]: 13:05).

¹⁷¹ Nicholls notes that these artists also work from the outside edge when making paintings; therefore from the whole to the part (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 18 November 2015).

¹⁷² Awareness and understanding of figurative and iconographic motifs and the cultural landscape in relation to decorated boab nuts will be discussed throughout this thesis.

¹⁷³ See Chapters 3, 5 and 6 for discussion on Kimberley artefact and art forms.

segments of Dreaming narratives (Nicholls 2009a: n.p.; Cataldi 1992: n.p.).¹⁷⁴ Nicholls (2012) defines metonymy, as involving:

the substitution of one part to denotes, or connote, a whole. Metonymy can occur in language as well as in visual systems. Examples of metonymy that are often given include ‘the Crown’ or ‘the Throne’ to denote a monarchic system, or ‘the Head’ to denote the principal person within an institution. Such ideas can also be expressed visually. (Nicholls 2012: 50)

While metonymy in Central and Western desert art is a well-documented phenomenon, its use in the linear designs of Kimberley wooden and shell artefacts has been less researched. This metonymic function is also embedded in figurative genre motifs (Figs 4.5a & 4.5b) and continues in the more recent art practice of depicting Western-style realistic scenes by revealing the narrative according to what is or is not included. It could be a case of cross-cultural legibility in that what is figurative from one cultural point of view may not be so from another cultural point of view. As David Mowaljarlai explained to the photographer Jutta Malnic:

[Malnic] ‘How can anybody understand all those stories, what they mean? All the time they are saying di-di-di-di-di. It’s like sand between stones in a dry river – no water, no flow, no direction. You can’t see it’s a river.’

[Mowaljarlai] What I am really saying: we walked together over many places and areas, travelled long distances around. Every day we were learning. We got closer and we were understanding it more – the country. It came out to us. Di-di-di-di-di-di – that’s travelling across the large spaces, talking, listening, all that. That’s learning to understand.

(Mowaljarlai in Mowaljarlai & Malnic: xiii)

¹⁷⁴ See, for example, Clements (1903), Davidson (1949) and Akerman and Stanton (1994).

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Fig 4.5a: Geometric incised boab nut with figurative emu tracks
Kimberley region, c. 1927–28
L 150mm x W 105mm x D 90mm
Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection
NMA 1985.0073.0043

Fig. 4.5b: Figurative incised boab nut¹⁷⁵
Figurative motifs such as yams can mimic geometric designs to an inappropriate audience
date unknown, [North Western Australia]
L 107mm x W 47mm
Anglican CMS
SAM 65919
South Australian Museum (Lang 1999)

Nicholls (2009a) further speculates that, as it is often possible to see uninterrupted 360-degree panoramas, it is the unimpeded view that gives rise to the ‘aerial view’, especially in artworks from the desert artists (Nicholls 2009a: n.p.). This aerial view of country *cannot*:

be equated with western road maps or satellite images in any simplistic manner. These ‘mental maps’ are cognitive as well as physical and geographic in nature and also include other significant, sometimes abstract, sacred features. Sites of socio-cultural, environmental and symbolic significance are included and often they act as major points for orientation in space. The quasi-geometric designs comprising these ‘maps’ are imbued with levels of meaning, including the sacred. The overall effect is to draw the viewer’s eye more or less evenly across the canvas, distributing our attention, as it were, to the work’s holistic nature. (Nicholls 2009a: n.p.)

¹⁷⁵ This SAM boab nut depicts yams, which are associated with *Djangarr* ‘who makes forked lightning at the onset of the rainy season when yams may be dug’ (Utemorrah & Vinnicombe 1992: 26) and in rock art images are repainted to increase fertility (Utemorrah & Vinnicombe 1992: 25–6). Yams are associated with women’s magic and Thomas (1906) noted that yam-stick magic is used by women against women (Thomas 1906: 234).

In the context of artwork further south, in the desert bordering the East Kimberley, Stanton (2009) comments:

Strong stylistic variation between northern and Western Desert influences are typified by, in particular, the mixed use of both ‘map’-like and lateral perspectives, including figurative imagery and the introduction of alien elements such as windmills and pastoral fences introduced by Europeans. By his own account, Ronald Berndt (personal communication [to Stanton]) made no attempt to suggest, much less, to delimit what the men chose to draw. He simply asked them to draw their own ‘country’, in order to teach him about it and the places there. This was a very different experience to that which was later to take place at Papunya where ... Bardon used to tell them: ‘Nothing whitefella. No whitefella colour, no whitefella perspective, no whitefella images’. The presence in the drawings of the human form, both realistically and in a highly conventionalised style, emphasises the presence of people in the landscape, their relationships to each other and to particular.

(Stanton 2009: para 24)

Morven (2014) explains that in the East Kimberley landscapes are ‘not painted from a fixed side view, but can mix a planar perspective and a frontal/profile or lateral view (Figs 4.6a & 4.6b). An object can be depicted from several angles at once’ (Morven 2014: para 16). Likewise there are many examples of aerial or planar view, and mixed frontal/profile and/or lateral designs or flattened perspective, or a mixture of these styles, in decorated boab nuts and other artworks (Figs 4.7a, 4.7b, 4.7c & 4.7d).

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Fig 4.6a: Untitled
Patrick Mung Mung
120cm x 120cm
natural ochre and pigment on linen
Courtesy Paul and Elissa Everingham
Art Gallery of Western Australia
<http://www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/exhibitions/MungMung.asp>

Fig 4.6b: ‘Doogoorringiniyin – Reed Butte’ 2007
Betty Carrington
80cm x 100cm
natural ochre on canvas
Gallery Gabriele Pizzi
http://www.gabriellepizzi.com.au/exhibitions/gallery_gabrielle_pizzi_0710mungmung.html

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

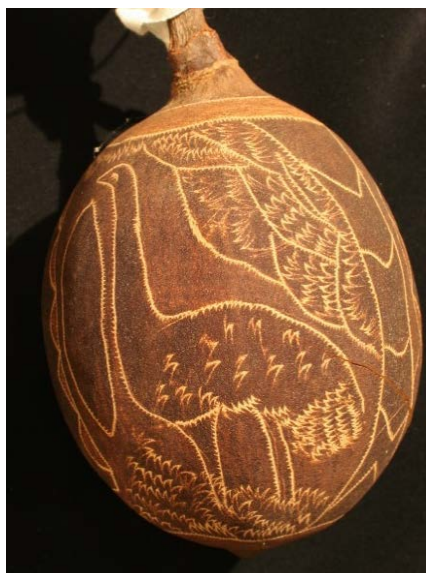


Fig. 4.7a: Use of frontal and lateral design
Forrest River Mission, c. 1953-4
L 170mm x W 110mm x D 110mm
Bruce Coaldrake Collection
NMA 1985.0066.0056

Fig. 4.7b: Use of frontal/profile and lateral design
Kimberley, [c. 1970s]
L 175mm x W 110mm x D 95mm
Edith Bowden Collection
NMA 1987.0050.0318



Fig. 4.7c: Use of frontal/profile and superimposed design
Mowanjum, 1974
L 170mm x Dia 88mm
Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2
NMA 1991.0024.4569



Fig. 4.7d: Use of frontal/profile design with flattened perspective¹⁷⁶
Kimberley, [c. 1970s]
L 270mm x W 100mm x D 90mm
Enid Bowden Collection
NMA 1987.0050.0320

Finally, the use by Aboriginal artists of the realistic landscape style in the production of decorated boab nuts and other artefacts such as boomerangs¹⁷⁷ became more prevalent in the mid-twentieth century, partly in response to increased tourism and the rise of an Aboriginal art market, which allows for the possibility of decorated boab nuts being an

¹⁷⁶ Scale of bird motifs indicated importance in narrative (Nicholls 2009a: n.p.; Nicholls 2012: 45)

¹⁷⁷ See Taçon, South & Hooper (2003) for an analysis of figurative designs from south-east Australia.

historical document, a textual narrative (Fig. 4.8).¹⁷⁸ Mitchell (1994) and Rose (2002) observe that the ‘visual experience’ might not be ‘fully explicable on the model of textuality’ (Mitchell 1994: 16) and that objects are always ‘embedded’ into both text and images that intersect each other (G. Rose 2002: 10), and these are ‘palimpsests of past and present, outcomes of social practice, products of colonial and post-colonial identities and the western gaze’ (Tilley 2006: 67–8). To use an image as ‘text’ is a way of looking at the social construction of the visual and, in conjunction with ‘references in books, archival notes’, can, in the instance of Aboriginal artworks, be translated into a powerful sense of place (Taylor in Bonyhady & Griffiths 2002: 10).



Fig. 4.8: The Card Game

Jack Wherra

Mowanjum, c. 1964–66

H 210mm x Dia 90mm

NMA description: Tremolo engraved unpainted boab nut decorated with two rows of inscribed scenes in a series of frames, like a cartoon. Top row; f.1; men and women playing cards, f.2; arrested man and woman, f.3; man and woman in court. Bottom row; f.1; woman being jailed, f.2; two policemen interview a third man,

Jack Wherra Collection No. 1

NMA 2003.0057.0020

Photo: George Serras, National Museum of Australia

Rosenthal, a landscape art historian, argues for the contextual placement of landscape paintings as indispensable for all historical documents, otherwise:

it is wilful to ignore any leads which might bear on the work. These may range from seeing to what extent, if any, the landscape painting may relate to some site ... to comparing it with other pictures to see how typical or atypical it may be of its period. It may be useful to have biographical data for the artists. Or the historian might read through pages of nature poetry contemporary with the painting ... All the time, though, it is accepted that any historical account of a picture must be approximate and, therefore, that anything which may tighten the focus must not be ignored. (Rosenthal in Osborne 1994: 175–6)

¹⁷⁸ For a discussion on the use of visual images as text see *Visual Methodologies: An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials* (G. Rose 2002).

Other research into the contextual placement of specific tourist art and artefacts (Jules-Rosette 1984; Kleinert 1992; Phillips 1999 & 2004; P. Jones 2007) has investigated this point, and this thesis will examine this aspect of incised and painted boab nuts and art practice in Chapters 5 and 6.

This chapter assembled the arguments for the authenticity of decorated boab nuts and the inherent notion of Country in the Western-style landscape genre used by Aboriginal artists, which has enabled the formulation of the proposition that the development of the Western-style landscape on decorated boab nuts in the mid-twentieth century was both a reaction to post-settlement changes and an innovative internal response to change in the contemporary Aboriginal lifestyle and environment.

From the art of Country to ‘landscape art’

In this section the relationship between the physical landscape and the landscape genre in the visual arts will be discussed. The relationship between cross-cultural representations of landscape in art and on objects and the possible use of these representations as historical ‘documents’ of an Australian narrative will be explored in this thesis; the decorated boab nuts in the National Museum of Australia collection will be used for this purpose.

The *Macquarie Dictionary* defines landscape as ‘a view or prospect of rural scenery, more or less extensive, such as is comprehended within the scope or range of vision from a single point of view’, and landscape painting, within which other forms of landscape art is subsumed, as both ‘a picture representing natural inland or coastal scenery’ and ‘such pictures as a category’ (Macquarie 1982: 990).¹⁷⁹ This constitutes a very general description of Western European landscape art from the late eighteenth century onwards. It describes a visual art genre that emerged from the late eighteenth-century depiction of objects in the picturesque landscape as immutable and linked hierarchically with an *a priori* link to the ‘Great Chain of Being’, to a landscape genre¹⁸⁰ that appeared with the development of new scientific theories¹⁸¹ about the physical world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

¹⁷⁹ For a history of landscape painting in Western Europe see *The Oxford Companion to Western Art* (2001: 404–6). For a history of realism in Western art see Tuan (1990).

¹⁸⁰ Robert Smith (1961) comments that emerging from the expeditions of discovery ‘the South Pacific artists created a new type of landscape, specific rather than conventional, what he [Robert Smith quoting Bernard Smith] calls “typical landscape”’ (R. Smith 1961: 194).

¹⁸¹ B. Smith (2005: 11) mentions specifically botany, geology and meteorology.

The new ‘descriptive’ sciences, in combination with the colonial explorations worldwide, worked synergistically upon each other (B. Smith 2005: 11; McLoughlin 1999). This change in the function of landscape imagery in response to the new sciences had produced a genre where the accuracy of the forms within the picture, if not the geography, was assumed.¹⁸² In nineteenth-century England, landscape painting was becoming more popular as the land-owning middle classes¹⁸³, as well as the privileged class, were developing new aesthetics in a move from the Picturesque to the Romantic styles. However, as will be discussed below, by ‘simply *look*[ing] we are already shaping and interpreting’ (Andrews 1999: 1; see also Jenks 1995: 1).

As Nassauer (1995) writes, ‘Human landscape perception, cognition, and values directly affect the landscape and are affected by the landscape’ (Nassauer 1995: 229), and the cultural conventions play an integral part in the patterning of *all* landscapes. Nassauer in ‘Culture and Changing Landscapes Structure’ concludes that the ‘appearance of landscapes communicates cultural values’ (Nassauer 1995: 229). She notes the importance of looking at landscape includes the decisions that humans make based not only on vision but on knowing and feeling. As we move through our landscape, we are in fact ‘the instruments of our culture working within the fundamental ecological framework of the land’ (Nassauer 1995: 230). Nassauer also examines the difference between cultural concepts of nature and scientifically determined ecological functions. Many other scholars have written on this subject, including Philip Clarke in his 2003 book *Where the Ancestors Walked Australia as an Aboriginal Landscape*. Taçon (1999) argues that ‘Landscapes are socialised, landscapes are conceived’ (1999: 78); they can only be seen and described from a human perspective, whether that is deified and/or explained in terms of human utilisation.

Rose (1996) believes, however, that ‘Aboriginal relationships to land link people to ecosystems rather than giving them dominion over them’ (D. Rose 1996: 10–11), as ‘country has its own life, its own imperatives, of which humans are only one aspect’ (D. Rose 1996: 10). It is the ‘tracks and sites’ of the Ancestral Beings that:

Make up the sacred geography of Australia: they are visible in paintings and engravings; they are sung in the songs, depicted in body painting and sacred objects; they form the basis of a major dimension of the land tenure system for most Aboriginal people.

(D. Rose 1996: 36)

¹⁸² For further discussion on the question of the extent to which the early art of the Australian colonies were an accurate record of a new land or just ‘fashionable’ taste see O’Loughlin (1999).

¹⁸³ Increasing prosperity led to a middle class desire to show off newfound wealth through this landscape art.

Faulstich (1998) contends that:

Landscape is an active medium of communication, embodying not only values and ideas, but directly influencing perception and behaviour. As a matrix of meaning, a landscape comes to embody the sensibilities of those who inhabit it. The social significance of landscape can only be discovered through consideration of the cultural processes to which it is linked. (Faulstich 1998: 201)

Perception of the environment and the psychology of values and knowledge underpin an individual's preference for landscapes.¹⁸⁴ In relation to this, Nassauer (1995) examines perception, cognition and evaluation with regard to a number of evolutionary, psychological and anthropological perspectives, leading to the conclusion: 'the consistency of human preference for natural looking landscapes that include canopy trees or water features, and that allow views out across the landscape' (Nassauer 1995: 231). Western scholars¹⁸⁵ in the later twentieth century began to examine both the landscape and the landscape genre in art, taking a quantitative approach. From these evaluations of landscape, Appleton (1975)¹⁸⁶ developed his 'prospect-refuge theory', which modelled 'the idea of preference to a typology of landscapes through the medium of the biological, and more particularly the behavioural sciences' (Appleton 1984: 92). Appleton discusses his underpinning 'habitat theory', which concludes that self-preservation from sudden danger is a dominant motivation in human life and thus we pay *attention* and gain aesthetic satisfaction in *seeing* the environment and thus being able to conceal ourselves from predation. This theory attempted to give evolutionary explanations for our aesthetic judgement of landscape; for example, panoramic vistas (prospect) allow predators to be located; protected settings (refuge) prevent us from being seen and/or allow other protection and to recognise the dangers, both animate and inanimate, which constitute hazards. Appleton uses evidence from both the arts and sciences to support his theory (Appleton 1975, 1984).

A criticism of this argument is the determination of meaning and symbolism of objects to individuals or communities. Demographic differences such as gender, ethnicity and

¹⁸⁴ See Chapter 6 for further discussion on psychological responses to landscape. See also Jorgenson, Hitchmough and Calvert (2002), and Taçon (1999: 79-80) for four general areas of landscape features that invite common psychological responses, which includes a category of panoramic views which tie into Appleton's prospect/refuge theories (1975).

¹⁸⁵ For examples of this approach, see Appleton (1975, 1984), Cosgrove (1985), and Jorgensen, Hitchmough and Calvert (2002).

¹⁸⁶ I gratefully acknowledge Associate Professor Clive Forster, School of Geography, Population and Environmental Management, Flinders University, for directing me to Appleton's research on the interface between landscape and art.

population density affect the perception of landscape (Jorgensen, Hitchmough & Calvert 2002). In Bergman's (1998) review of *The Experience of Landscape*, he uses by way of example a cave, which may be either a refuge in which to hide or a hazard in which to be afraid at the same time (Bergman 1978: 107) and therefore not falling into the binary proposition of either/or construction of Appleton's theory. Bergman (1998) makes a most important point that there is an 'essential difference' between the environmental landscape and landscape art, insofar as 'Artists do not record reality; they create a reality' (Bergman 1978: 107). Andrews (1999) highlights the relationship between artistic representation and the physical environment as the ongoing habit of 'mental conversion' of land into landscape and from there into art (Andrews 1999: 3). Harrison (2002) notes the 'withhold[ing]' from vision within each painting being as significant as that which is recorded (Harrison 2002: 204). Appleton uses the term 'locomotion' for the movement of the eye through a landscape and notes:

In contemplating the pattern of communications in a landscape the eye tends to fit together the visible components in such a way as to construct imaginary paths between its various parts. A carriage drive in a park, for instance, which dips out of sight into dead ground and reappears on a rising surface farther off, suggests a continuous channel of movement, even though its continuity cannot be perceived.

(Appleton n.d.)

Artworks are an artifice; they are products of their time and contexts, and as such are seen at once removed but underpinned by the physical landscape, the landscape which must also be *legible* to the observer. It is 'to use one's eyes and intellect out there, to read the landscape as document of human history with its fascinating sense of time and layers replete with human values which inform the genius of the place' (K. Taylor 2008: 6).¹⁸⁷ It is landscape in art which is used as a document or visual text that will be integral to the argument that incised and painted boab nuts are not merely tourist art but are an inherent part of the continuity of Kimberley art practices.

Western-style landscape boab nuts as 'visual texts'

For the *observer* there is 'always a cultural narration – writing and reading – involved' (Jokinen & Veijola 2003: 259). Jokinen and Veijola (2003) argue that the creation of an image 'has a grammar and a glossary, and it bears intertextual references' (Sironen in

¹⁸⁷ The concept of 'reading' the images as text is underpinned through the scholarly use of book titles such as *Reading Images: The grammar of visual design* (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996) and *Iconology: Image, text, ideology* (Mitchell 1986).

Jokinen & Veijola 2003: 259)¹⁸⁸ and, in the example of the making of photographic image/s, that ‘there is an off-screen space in the scenery ... The camera recites the human eye: both create the point of view of the subject, the one who *sees*’ (Jokinen & Veijola 2003: 259; my emphasis). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) comment on this narration that:

Our insistence on drawing comparisons between language and visual communication stems from this objective. We seek to break down the disciplinary boundaries between the study of language and the study of images, and we seek, as much as possible, to use compatible language, and compatible terminology in speaking about both, for in actual communication the two and indeed many others come together to form integrated texts. (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 183)

The concept of legibility stretches beyond landscape theory and is a crucial component in the theories of tourist art, as discussed in the previous section on authenticity.¹⁸⁹ For Aboriginal art, Sutton argues that this, which he terms readability¹⁹⁰, is embedded in the visual logic of their Law or Dreaming in both representational and, to our eyes, abstract works (Sutton in Sayers & Cooper 1994: 5). Sutton (1988) uses the term ‘readability’ for the interpretation of Aboriginal art from the Central Desert. The ‘legibility’ or understanding of the motifs cross-culturally is intrinsic in the ‘readability’ of an artwork’s visual logic and morphology (Sutton 1988: 81).¹⁹¹

Notably, Mountford had earlier recognised that non-traditional drawings from south-eastern Aboriginal artists ‘possessed readable meaning both to the artists and to ‘outsiders’” (Mountford in Sayers & Cooper 1994: 92). In 1944–5 Ronald Berndt collected 600 crayon drawings by Aboriginal men¹⁹² at Birrindudu, Northern Territory, which when analysed by Stanton (2009) and were found to:

depict historical events, and some works depict elements such as fence-lines, windmill water pumps, and other features recording interactions with non-Aboriginal people. For the most part, though, the drawings focus on depicting elements of narrations associated with the activities of the Dreaming beings themselves. (Stanton 2009: para 14)

¹⁸⁸ For discussion of the history of the Western cultural bias towards a superiority of the non-visual and the use of linguistic terms to explain the visual, see Stafford (1994). For a discussion on Australian Aboriginal literacy and the relationship of art with legibility, see Biddle (1996). For a hermeneutic interpretation of landscape, in which the meanings of ‘tangled subtexts’ are never clear, see Tuan (1991). Also see Hall (1997) for an overview of the theories of making meaning and representation.

¹⁸⁹ For influential research in this area see *The Messages of Tourist Art: An African semiotic system in comparative perspective* (Jules-Rosette 1984), and *Ethnic and Tourist Art: Cultural expressions from the Fourth World* (Graburn 1976).

¹⁹⁰ Preference is given in this thesis to the term ‘legibility’ because of the implicitly cultural Western bias inherent in writing/reading for non-literate cultures.

¹⁹¹ Harrison’s (2004) ‘active unremembering’, what is not included visually, is part of the legibility to the producing culture while not apparent to the consumer.

¹⁹² These 42 x 61 cm crayon drawings on brown paper are held by the Berndt Museum of Anthropology.

What is important about this collection of drawings, like McCaffrey's recordings of interviews with Jack Wherra, is that Berndt recorded the artist's name and date of collection, and the *interpretation by the artist*, which could include imagery of their contemporary life.

Like the crayon drawings, decorated boab nuts are 'visual texts'. Sculthorpe (1990) observes that 'some carved nuts serve to document historical events' (Sculthorpe 1990: 45) and describes a c. 1890 boab nut held by the Ulster Museum depicting two horses with jockeys and three Aboriginal men in ceremonial clothing that bear the inscriptions 'Native corroboree of Derby' and 'Derby Race Club', thus serving 'as an historical indice to local events' (Sculthorpe 1990: 45). Mary Ann Jebb (2006) in her article *Jack Wherra's Boab Nut Carving: A cross-cultural history*, which researched the 54 boab nut carvings created by Jack Wherra in 1964–65 and collected by the late American anthropologist John McCaffrey, makes the argument that: 'As well as depicting historical events, these visual narrative carvings also have the potential to engage their non-Indigenous owners in a relationship of cultural exchange with Indigenous culture' (Jebb 2006: 697).¹⁹³ Jebb (2006) also proposes in this article that: 'the idea that Wherra carved boab nuts to convey historical narratives and cultural knowledge in a medium that, whether gifted, exchanged or sold, could make it accessible across cultures' (Jebb 2006: 697).

Legibility¹⁹⁴ to the *observer* in both inhabited and natural landscapes is vital to landscape preference and cultural conventions, it 'affect[s] what people notice, find interesting and prefer about the landscape' (Nassauer 1995: 233). Nassauer (1995) makes the important point that where there are humans interacting with the landscape, the landscape is only 'apparently natural'. Rose (1996) also makes this point, arguing that there is nothing 'natural' about the continuity of life (D. Rose 1996: 44). It is because humans 'are conscious moral beings participating in the lawful processes through which the continuity of life is assured', and this is the Law (D. Rose 1996: 44). Examples in the Australian context are animal and plant management practices such as burning off, which are not necessarily obvious to an observer of a landscape (D. Rose 1996: 3 & 9; Taçon 1999: 50–2) or the more recent public debate on the extinction of the Australian megafauna

¹⁹³ Jebb (2006: 713) notes research underpinning this conclusion by Gay Sculthorpe (1990), Kim Akerman (1993, 2003), John Stanton (Akerman & Stanton 1994), and Michele Lang (1999) amongst others.

¹⁹⁴ *The Macquarie Dictionary* defines 'legibility' as that which may be deciphered or discerned (1982: 1005). See also *Reading Images* (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996) and *The Visual Culture Reader* (Mirzoeff 2002) for a more comprehensive analysis of the legibility of visual arts. Legibility and readability are entwined terms about both manner and content.

(Flannery 1994). This discussion, initiated by Flannery in the mid-1990s, is still ongoing in public, and has been more recently refuted by Drs. Stephen Wroe and Judith Fields at the Australian Key Centre for Microscopy and Microanalysis, University of Sydney.

Worldwide, from the earliest times, the process of transforming the environment to make physical and socially determined cultural space has also occurred through narrative/myth and art/markings (Harley 1994; Taçon 1994; Schama 1995: 14–5; Taçon 1999: 33–4 & 50; Hirsch 2006). In the Australian context, it is important when considering cross-cultural notions of landscape that we do not reify an idea of landscape as Western European versus Aboriginal constructs, but instead view the different cultures as being on a continuum and ‘having special features in terms of their understanding of local landscapes’ (Christine Nicholls 2009, pers. comm., 24 April 2012; also Myers 1991: 50).

Taçon (1999: 52) makes an argument for Western cultures having transformed their landscape into artificial spaces, described in archetypal categories such as ‘wilderness’ and ‘garden’, and that economic desire for what is understood to be waste-less space, that is all space under some form of productive use, has historically been imposed on Indigenous landscapes. For example, Clarke (2003) makes an important point that until recently the assumption was that the ‘first Europeans in Australia had occupied a “wild” and “untamed” landscape’ (Clarke 2003: 221) and concludes that this has marginalised Aboriginal people in the Australian national narrative as part of the ‘background of the Australian wilderness as the first European settlers experienced it’ (Clarke 2003: 222).

In Western cultures, maps, with their artificial division of space and with distortions of content, are no longer understood to be ‘true’ images but are communicants of societal values (Harley 1994: 277; see also Tuan 1990: 441). Even the settler/colonist language underpins a colonial way of seeing in Australia, with descriptive terms such as ‘flat, desolate and outback’ being used as a comparison with English landscapes, as imparting an absence of something (Arthur in Davies 2005: 30).¹⁹⁵ Further, Tuan (1991) observes that language is used to make the ‘unattended’ visible, that is: ‘a mere rise on a flat surface becomes something far more – a place that promises to open up to other places – when it is named ‘Mount Prospect’ (Tuan 1991: 684).

¹⁹⁵ Davies (2005) explores Arthur’s linguistic theory of ‘double vision’ to develop arguments on landscape, power and identity.

This relationship of power, the right to name and maintain it, is at its most visible in cartography and other works of art. It is embedded in both Western landscape art and in Aboriginal art. As Sarris (1992) observed in an interview with the American Navajo weaver, Mabel McKay, regarding the non-Indigenous accounts of her rug designs, the act of naming/appropriation silences the individual creator. Power is held through both the *seeing* and *naming*.¹⁹⁶

Other scholars, such as Schama (1995) in *Landscape and Memory*, have attempted to re-envision Western European cultural notions of landscape, to excavate below the surface to the ‘cultus which we are told to seek in other native cultures – of primitive forest, of the river of life, of the sacred mountain – [which] are in fact alive and well and all about us’ (Schama 1995: 14). Like Australian Aboriginal ‘Country’, this is a place of narrative/myth, memory and socio-cultural spaces. This is not just a technology-driven landscape; this is also a values-driven landscape, where societies communicate their belief systems. This communication can be unconscious and/or can be ‘self-consciously designed to express the virtues of a particular political or social community’ (Schama 1995: 15), and it ‘may indeed be a text on which generations write their recurring obsessions’ (Schama 1995: 12).¹⁹⁷ Further, Schama asserts that his ‘way of looking’, the finding and understanding within landscape of ‘rich deposits of myths, memories, and obsessions’ (Schama 1995: 14), is vital if we are to escape from notion that:

the entire history of landscape in the West is indeed just a mindless race towards a machine-driven universe, uncomplicated by myth, metaphor, and allegory, where measurement, not memory, is the absolute arbiter of value. (Schama 1995: 14)

This emphasis on the physical landscape as a repository of previous lives and events highlights the connection between individual and collective memory and the construction of identity and history.¹⁹⁸ Harrison (2004), reflecting on research by Kuchler (cited in S. Harrison 2004) and others on ‘ephemeral monuments’; that is, impermanent ritual objects of remembrance within indigenous societies, suggests that this practice is selective in remembering and forgetting and is ‘thus a means not only of honouring history but also of eliding, erasing – even exorcising – parts of it’ (S. Harrison 2004: 135). For example, many landscape designs on decorated boab nuts after the early twentieth century involved

¹⁹⁶ This naming may be orally through narrative, song or in performance; or textually through descriptive attachments to an artwork (J. Green 1992: 287).

¹⁹⁷ Schama (1995) uses as one example the expansive landscape lyrics of *America the Beautiful* (Schama 1995: 15). See also Harley (1994) for the connection between maps, knowledge and power.

¹⁹⁸ For a discussion on the politics of identity, place and re-presentation see Tilley (2006).

'bush' scenes depicting either native animals and/or Aboriginal people hunting, and, while many scholars¹⁹⁹ have generally accepted a 'touristic art' response of legibility for the intended consumers, it may also be that the absence of colonial motifs and non-Indigenous people in these designs may be part of the 'active unremembering', the 'purposeful amnesia', of Aboriginal/settler interactions in the Kimberley. Olijnyk Longley (1992) makes the point that during the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries the narratives recorded were 'constructed as mythology rather than as life stories' and that this view may well have influenced this ongoing perception of a 'touristic art' response to explain the development of realistic scenes in Aboriginal art rather than as an 'observation of contemporary life' (Olijnyk Longley 1992: 383) by the artist. Harrison (2004) concludes that the landscape may also be used as a means to manipulate the 'forensic evidence' of everyday life and that different culturally specific ways of everyday interactions with the physical environment are in fact the management of knowledge (Harrison 2004: 150).

Noyes and Abrahams (1999) have argued that the physical experience, the incorporation into memory, held in common, 'creates bounded groups of people connected over time to a bounded place' (Noyes & Abrahams 1999: 79). They examine 'practical traditionalising', the reshaping of identity, through a 'consensual account of the community past [which] becomes the interpretive authority for present actions and events' (Noyes & Abrahams 1999: 85). They argue that, through 'practical traditionalising', unsettled times in specific locations are manipulated by notions of 'custom' since 'time immemorial' (Noyes & Abrahams 1999).²⁰⁰ In Australia, this is illustrated by the resurgence of the didactic use of Aboriginal art in the 1980s for the wider Australian community (L. Taylor 2008). The regionalism of Aboriginal art became apparent as a movement against the homogenising influences of white dominance.²⁰¹ Apart from the more general influences of white dominance, the conventions of colonial collecting, transcription, and archiving, in the case of art and artefacts, removed the specificity of objects both in terms of the locational and the typological. Consequently, local communities attempted to emphasise difference by accentuating 'custom/tradition'²⁰² and innovative practices, thus 'asserting the community's wholeness and its continued agency against external threats' (Noyes & Abrahams 1999: 88).

¹⁹⁹ See my discussion on tourist art above regarding Graburn's typology and Stewart's tourist art.

²⁰⁰ Although Noyes and Abrahams (1999) are writing about European society, this argument has a general application to communities elsewhere. See also Tilley (2006) regarding temporalities and landscape.

²⁰¹ See Chapter 7 for a discussion on this point in regards to the National Museum Art collection.

²⁰² A Kimberley example of this is the developing dominance of both the Wandjina and boab tree motifs from the 1980s onwards as icons, a mnemonic construction, for the Kimberley region.

Nassauer (1995) has examined the use of cultural conventions and the way by which they 'direct human action to make landscapes' (Nassauer 1995: 233) and concludes that landscapes are 'resistant cultural artifacts' due to their legibility – the ease of interpretation (Nassauer 1995: 233). Andrews (1999) recognises that 'we are not passive consumers of landscape images ... the sense of our own identity and relationship to our environment is implicated in our response' (Andrews 1999: 8) and that landscape is a cultural artefact rather than, as historically understood, simply assemblages of physical objects. Further, Cosgrove (1985) suggests that there is 'an inherent conservatism in the landscape idea, in its celebration of property and of an unchanging status quo, in its suppression of tension between groups *in the landscape*' (Cosgrove 1985: 58).

Relationships between the physical environment, Country and Aboriginal artists

For Aboriginal groups the relationship between the physical landscape, Country, and art is embedded in the 'ancestral law associated with particular named places within a clan's territory' (Morphy 1991: 101; see also Morphy 1995: 204; D. Rose 1996: 38–9). Bell (2010) in a discussion of Ngarinyin reality sees Law as a 'living action; a verb rather than a noun (Bell 2010: 5). The Dreaming is a cosmogony, an account of the systematic and orderly, and a moral system (Stanner in Kenny 2007: 155). Ceremonies encoding this ancestral Law consist of oral, gestural and corporeal elements and it is within this expression that designs in the Kimberley, either painted or incised, are connected to locational narratives, as well as to those outside their territory. Kenny (2007) describes the *Dreaming* in his book tracing the relationship between the Wotjobaluk people and the first pastoralists in Victoria's Wimmera region as:

a landscape of *things* – animals, plants, rocks, streams – *unseparated* in the spiritual and physical presences. That is to say, the knowledge of their spiritual nature cannot be separated from the knowledge of them as practical, material things – in many cases, what modern Western society would understand as commodities. It was an alive landscape with which the human, as part of it, needed to negotiate. (Kenny 2007: 155–6)

Bell (2010), who lived in the Kimberley for 35 years²⁰³ and who collaborated with the Ngarinyin man, David Mowaljarlai, on *Two Way Thinking* and the Ngarinyin Education Initiative comments:

Through Western eyes and the vehicle windows, I see geological formations, gorges, watercourses, vegetation patterns and the like, classifying each element by name and schoolgirl science as we travel from fuel stop to fuel stop between camping grounds. As we walk around we talk, often about things far removed from the present – kids, politics, the economy, pausing every so often to focus on something that catches the eyes. For the most part, the environment passes us by invisibly because our minds are elsewhere – in the past, the future, or on discussing an issue or project.

When I'm in country with Ngarinyin family and friends, it's more like, 'this where crocodile lay eggs', 'trees dancing hip to hip there', 'that little boy, his snot all along that ridge til he stop at the end there', 'this that place where Wodoi and Djingun made that agreement – everything in wunan now'. It's a tapestry of story-threads, their shapes and placements woven into an all-embracing coherent epistemology. In this experience, time warps, colour brightens, the mind's focus is, not on beauty or aesthetic appreciation, but on patterns, relationships, energies, and food. We move slowly, alert for sounds, cloud movement, sun position, smells, wind shifts, evidence of animal, insect and bird activity, the taste and texture of water, all the while observing the human relationship system's obligations in physical position, gender, age, authority and forms of address. We are fully present in the present, and absorb knowledge as experience.

These are completely different cultural experiences of country. In the Western experience we move through the world largely in our heads – observing and analysing, synthesising stuff as we go. In the Ngarinyin experience we inhabit the world as participants in its action. In the Ngarinyin Kimberley, art, song and dance are texts that are integrated in the tapestry of a living context, woven and inhabited by humans and non-humans alike.

(Bell 2010: 6–7).

The Ancestral landscape, although not always fully revealed, is intertwined with the unfolding of the 'historic' processes of human agency. Rumsey (1994), for example, provides a description of a discussion he had with the Ngarinyin man, Dangal Dan Bidd, during his fieldwork in Mowanjum in 1975, at which time Bidd related the story of Pigeon's revolt. Pigeon's subsequent death at Winjana Gorge, caused by Aboriginal

²⁰³ Hannah Rachel Bell was an advisor to government on equality issues and met David Mowaljarlai at a Kalgoorlie mining conference in 1974. They enjoyed a lifelong friendship and working relationship, and Bell was the executor of Mowaljarlai's estate (Laurie 2016).

'magician' Minko Mick from Roebourne, who had been brought by the police to defeat Pigeon, was retold in the following way:

DB: This blackfella/ He been start on this/ this Aborigine been start on this/ 'nother place here/ in, oh/ well sometime, I got my car/ and you and I if you like/ you know/ Thursday or Mon or Friday or Saturday we can go up there and camp with/ you, camp up there and I'll show you that cave .../ I forgot his name this place, Winjana Gorge.

AR: Winjana Gorge

DB: and they got this picture/ sometime he'll come back/ that black boy/ he was acting something like Roy Rogers and them thing you know/ but this is fuckin' true/ Really one this one. (Rumsey 1994: 125)

Rumsey (1994) explains that this truth, unlike the illusoriness of a cowboy film, has been 'memorialised at Winjana Gorge in just the same way as those of the primordial creator figures at many other places in the landscape' (Rumsey 1994: 126), that 'country' is not a static entity.

In *Nourishing Terrains*, Rose (1996) examines the meaning of Aboriginal people's use of 'country'. She observes that:

People say country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy.

Country is not a generalised or undifferentiated type of place, such as one might indicate with terms like 'spending a day in the country' or 'going up the country'.

(D. Rose 1996: 7²⁰⁴)

Further, country is the Dreaming, the dead and others, and it is holistic (D. Rose 1996: 8).²⁰⁵ It is:

a living entity with a yesterday today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will towards life. Because of this richness, country is home, and peace; nourishment for body, mind, and spirit; heart's ease. (D. Rose 1996: 7)

This case is strengthened by Wenten Rubuntja, a prominent Arrernte landscape artist and activist from central Australia (Figs 4.9a & 4.9b), who makes the centrality of the living nature of Country very clear:

This landscape painting is really important for Aboriginal culture. This one came out from the whitefellas hand, from the first white artists. Aboriginal

²⁰⁴ More recently, Nicolas Peterson (2011) debates D. Rose's meaning, writing 'Consequently one may ask whether this implies an Indigenous animist view or is it simply an impressionistic and metaphorically rich account seeking to create a certain aura' (Peterson 2011: 168).

²⁰⁵ The Kimberley artist, Butcher Joe Nangan, stated 'an emu, a frilled lizard, a gecko, might have man-spirit, easy to offend, dangerous in anger ... the *Rais* (spirit men) moved through his life easily and naturally' (Nangan & Edwards 1976: 11).

artists started off with the whitefella law because they didn't paint that way first. They taught us and now we are continuing to paint in our own way ...

The landscape painting is the country itself, with *tyerrenge* [sacred objects] himself. *Tywerrenge* and songs come out of the body of the country. Dot painting is law, but landscape is the *tywerrenge* life with song. Landscape has the cave. Dot is on the painted wall. We're not like whitefellas who can take a photograph and say what pretty country it is; we've got the song to sing for that country. The country has got sacred sites. That stone, that mountain has got Dreaming. We sing that one, we've got the song.

Country where we live we've got to show, and country with the song. We've got to follow the line from a long way. All we're doing now is still Dreaming, it's still there. Doesn't matter what sort of painting we do in this country, it still belongs to the people, all the people, and we've got to keep it going.

(Rubuntja in J. Green 1992: 288–9)

Rubuntja further explains that:

Our country whitefella mob always go there now, everybody's footwalking, footprints now everywhere on the rocks too, rock paintings, they've got their fingerprints on those. And some of them they carry them out and bring them back. I don't know what for. Make little fence. Look at this dog dreaming, those little rocks, round rocks from *Akngwelyarre*, they're somewhere in the foothpath [sic] in the street now. See, that shouldn't be, they've walked all over. Country was pretty and country was *tywerrenge*.

(Rubuntja in J. Green 1988: 13)

Another Arrernte artist, Jillian Namatjira, explains the relationship between different styles of paintings and Country:

We have two ways of painting; sand painting and landscapes. For all of us they both have the same dreaming story. This landscape painting we do, it shows the country. We don't just paint anything, that's not our way. We are inspired by the country and the dreaming as we paint. ... Some white people think 'Oh! Dot dot painting really has meaning. Landscape is only pretty coloured rocks and trees. We only want dot paintings'. But these hills have meaning and we have stories too, the landscape artists. We can also talk about where the different dreaming come from, and where they meet up and so on.

Often they tell these stories for the sand paintings. White people, they shouldn't just say 'That's only landscape, dot dot painting over there is sacred'. *No, both ways of painting are equally important work.*

(J. Namatjira in J. Green 1988: 6, my emphasis)

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Fig. 4.9a: Example of Wenten Rubuntja's painting styles
Ingkwepeye-Tyingye, Honey ant Dreaming meets Fish Dreaming
Wenten Rubuntja
Alice Springs 1985
54cm x 73cm
watercolour on paper
Collection number NAM-0123
MAGNT National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award Collection
Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory

Fig. 4.9b: Example of Wenten Rubuntja's painting styles
Altyerre Ntyarlke – Caterpillar Dreaming
Wenten Rubuntja
Alice Springs 1985
56cm x 76cm
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Collection number WAL-0280
MAGNT National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award Collection
Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory

Likewise, artist and writer Eli Rubuntja describes the importance of this Hermannsburg landscape style's meaning and didactic function for the Arrernte community:

Landscape painting is really important. Through landscape painting we get a lot of recognition and respect. That's how we are, telling stories through painting. It used to be like that, people telling stories from the dreaming. Our ancestors were like that, and we still carry it on today. Everybody tells the stories. But we also paint them as well, so that all the children can recognise and understand. This is how we are teaching the children of today. This landscape painting has been handed down to us from our ancestors, and we want to pass it on to the next generation of children.

(Rubuntja in J. Green 1988: 2)

This didactic use and the recording of contemporaneous events have been expressed by Aboriginal people living in diverse stretches of Australia. For example, in the south-east of Australia, Sayer and Cooper (1994) argue for the long-term existence of a 'figurative, naturalistic Aboriginal art form' observable at the time of the earliest settlers in south-

eastern Australia and they report an early nineteenth-century example of figurative Aboriginal drawings observed on the walls of a bark hut:

a rough drawing of the whole scene [of the intrusion onto Aboriginal lands]. The wheels of the carts, the bullocks drawing them and the drivers with their whips over their shoulders, were all distinctly depicted in their rude but interesting manner.

(Sayer & Cooper 1994:105; see also Coleman 2009: 8)²⁰⁶

Further, Sayer and Cooper (1994) comments that this narrative style is:

concerned with recording historical events, lies outside the two primary expressions of and functions of traditional art: maintenance of social identity and continuity of tribal customs and laws. (Sayer & Cooper 1994: 107)²⁰⁷

Importantly, Sayer argues that these art forms exist within the continuities of Aboriginal milieu: 'The bark drawings probably have their closest referents in the secular music and dances that were also a part of traditional culture' (Sayers & Cooper 1994: 107).²⁰⁸ Sayer concludes that the records of early bark painting examples, in contrast to drawings on paper, provide evidence that there was *internal Aboriginal accommodation* to current events, and that:

As for the seeming discontinuity between abstract and naturalistic or figurative art, it would appear that this distinction was not as real or problematic for south-eastern Aborigines as it was for commentators upon their art. (Sayer & Cooper 1994: 109)

Rose (1996), however, argues that 'country' must be seen as different from 'landscape', as the Western view of landscape involves an observer outside the environment as the arbiter of judgement on the landscape and its values. She contrasts this with the view that for Aboriginal people the 'country' is 'synonymous with life' (D. Rose 1996: 10) and is not human-centric. This is not to say that innovation is incompatible with this view: the more recent artworks over the last 100 years attest to the increasing use of 'landscape' within the vision of Country. The use of the dominant society's technologies such as domesticated farm animals, sailing ships, houses, and caravans within landscape designs still sit within Country, and 'virtually everything can be accommodated, from tin cans to Toyotas, but everything must be accommodated according to the *logic* of country' (D. Rose 1996: 41, my emphasis). Taylor (2008a), when discussing Kuninjku social processes in the

²⁰⁶ Sayers and Cooper (1994) takes this example from Tasmania in 1833 from an observation by a Van Diemen's Land Company employee.

²⁰⁷ Morphy (1999) has argued that 'figurative art in many ways presents a false picture. From an Aboriginal perspective the surface conceals complexity, yet figurative art presents it as if it is all there is' (Morphy 1999: 20); this claim can also be applied to the Western-style landscape genre.

²⁰⁸ Sayers and Cooper (1994) also considers that 'The art of bark drawing, [was] used like popular songs to record or comment on specific events' (Sayers & Cooper 1994: 109).

production of contemporary paintings, notes that the outstations on their own Country were:

near important sites and stylistic features of paintings are shared closely within families. Kuninjku now recognise styles of paintings associated with particular out-stations. Thus consideration of contemporary artistic creativity, combined with an appreciation of the dynamics of new settlement arrangements, allow [sic] an understanding of the contemporary way that painted form becomes linked with geographic location.

(L. Taylor 2008a: 57–8)

It is important to observe that many Aboriginal artists all over Australia make use of different styles within their own bodies of work.

For example, in the Kimberley, Mowanjum artist Gordon Barunga works in different mediums and styles, as illustrated below (Figs 4.10a & 4.10b; 4.10c & 4.10d). A detailed examination of art production in the Mowanjum community in the 1960s–1970s is undertaken in Chapter 6.

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Fig. 4.10a: *Landscape* 2011
Gordon Barunga²⁰⁹
53cm x 35cm
acrylic on canvas
Art Gallery of Western Australia
<http://desertriversea.com.au/art/380>

Fig. 4.10b: *Pantijan Country*, unknown date
Gordon Barunga²¹⁰
61cm x 50.5cm
acrylic on canvas board
Aboriginal Arts Company, UK
http://www.aboriginalarts.co.uk/other_art/gordon_barunga/godon.htm

²⁰⁹ Web caption for this painting: Gordon Barunga was born in Derby in 1961. He grew up at Mowanjum Community. His father was the well-known Kimberley leader, Albert Barunga, and his mother, Pudja Barunga, was a painter. When Gordon was quite young his father passed away and his mother, who was from the Wunumbul people, raised him. Being the youngest child, Gordon was very close to his mother. Gordon remembers the old people painting on boards and bark, telling the children the Wandjina stories. This was very important as the Wororra [sic] had been moved off their traditional lands to Mowanjum in the 1950s. Before he began painting, Gordon worked at a number of Kimberley stations, including Pantijan and Christmas Creek, and he worked at One Arm Point. His strong connection to his parents' countries is reflected in his painting. He loves to paint Pantijan country, having lived there for some time and because it was special to his mother. Gordon Barunga paints in natural ochres and his work is typified by fine brushstrokes, indicating the rain falling as a result of the power of the Wandjinas. His work is both sensitive and strong, reflecting the beliefs inherited from his family (AGWA).

²¹⁰ Web caption for this painting: Many consider Gordon Barunga to be the most gifted artisan working in the Kimberley indigenous art world. Gordon specialises in many areas of art including traditional Wandjina painting, boab nut carving and realistic Kimberley landscape painting in the Albert Namatjira Hermansberg [sic] style. Some consider Gordon Barunga to be an undiscovered artistic genius, although the National Gallery of Victoria have purchased some of his work in 1999 (Aboriginal Arts Co.).

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Fig. 4.10c: *Dreaming*
Gordon Barunga
Mowanjum Community 2009
Kimberley Art Prize Winner 2009
Sponsored by Old Broome Lock-up Gallery
Shire of Derby - West Kimberley

Fig. 4.10d: *Wandjina & Unngud* 2014
Gordon Barunga
970mm x 1500 mm
acrylic on canvas
Copyright Mowanjum Art & Culture Centre
Art Gallery of Western Australia
<http://desertriversea.com.au/art/379>

Akerman (1991) observes that Kimberley artist Butcher Joe Nangan's explanations of the Dreaming narratives associated with his realistic human figures were depicted as:

devices [that] were invariably associated with pictures that depicted human images only, and were themselves sketches of various birds, reptiles, marsupials, flowers or insects. They represented the alternative manifestations of the human mythic figures portrayed in the major image. For example, a bowerbird image or a skink in the lower corner would indicate that pictures of the man spearing another man, or of a boy wandering alone in the sandhills in fact represented respectively a scene from the evil bower bird/man saga and the disobedient Ngalyak skink/boy myth. (Akerman 1991: 91)

Again in central Australia, Wenten Rubuntja remembers that:

When we were kids we used to see cowboy pictures, Tex Morton, Pat Jones, Flash Gordon all those, and I used to draw that mob with a pencil. Draw the cowboy with horses. All the young fellas used to draw them. So that's how I started. I used to get chalk from school and take it back and smash it up and make it fine and put it in a tin. Then I saw comics. Well I made all those comics, coloured ones. I had my own ideas.

(Rubuntja in J. Green 1988: 12)²¹¹

Likewise, the best-known boab nut artist in the twentieth century, Jack Wherra, whose 1950–1960s' narratives were recorded by John McCaffrey, an American anthropologist,

²¹¹ The importance of the cowboy archetype for Aboriginal men in the Kimberley is discussed in Chapter 5.

was inspired by the comic books he had read in prison.²¹² The Powerhouse Museum catalogue records that:

Not all of Jack's narratives flowed sequentially through the run of cameos that he had delineated on a nut. Depending on what he 'saw' and subsequently carved, the space could contain images of people and events or views of the Kimberley landscape – the 'environment' in which the action of the narrative occurs. (Powerhouse Museum 2004)²¹³

Wherra exchanged his decorated boab nuts for 'luxury items', including Phantom comics, while in Broome Prison and, as Jebb (2006) notes Wherra's:

style was influenced by the comic books he read in prison; both the style of action figures and the framed layout of the story friezes were to become trademarks of Wherra's art'.

(Jebb 2006: 701²¹⁴)

Wherra also received comic books from the son of a warder, Brian Naughton, in the early 1940s and he and Brian would sit together reading them (Jebb 2006: 709).

In central Australia, at Hermannsburg, water colour painting co-existed with a smaller craft production, and at Ernabella²¹⁵ the Pitjantjatjara women were producing paintings, as well as crafts, to generate income (Newstead 2014: 107). Based on discussion with the artists, Green (1988) concludes that the Arrente watercolours transcend the often claimed inauthenticity of European watercolour paint and realist representation, in that they are 'beyond the view which regards country as scenery and takes its "memory out of a photograph"' (J. Green 1988: 4). These landscape paintings are part of an ongoing art practice and 'should be recognised for what the artists see them as: part of a living title to land they belong to' (J. Green 1988: 4).

The increase in the use of 'landscape' in the Western style sense on decorated boab nuts is one result of the pressure placed on Aboriginal people to speak for their country, for their ownership of country, and demands that they 'must talk about their land, mostly to strangers, in a strange setting, in a strange language' (Walsh in Bonyhady & Griffiths 2002: 3). The early twentieth-century expectation of the assimilation of Aboriginal people into the dominant culture meant there were attempts to memorialise aspects of Aboriginal culture, while in the later twentieth century there were attempts to use Aboriginal artefacts

²¹² This is further discussed in Chapter 6.

²¹³ See also Sotheby's catalogue (Akerman 2003: 70–1).

²¹⁴ Nicholls speculates on this partitioned style being over-determined in that there was a distinct possibility that Wherra encountered in prison Northeast Arnhem Landers who paint in a similar style (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 30 April 2016).

²¹⁵ Winifred Hilliard was the art advisor (1954–86) at the Presbyterian mission at Ernabella, establishing this art and craft industry (Newstead 2014: 107), and she donated three boab nuts to the NMA after 2002 – Winifred Hilliard No. 4 collection (IR3437.0009, IR3437.0010, IR3437.0011).

and artwork to help to construct a national identity (Jackson 1999: 102).²¹⁶ Notable examples include David Malangi's bark painting being reproduced in 1966 on the \$1 note²¹⁷, Qantas Boeing aeroplanes painted with *Wunala* and *Yananyi Dreamings*, Donny Woolagoodja's Wandjina design at the Opening of the 2000 Sydney Olympics, and most importantly both the Aboriginal Flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag being recognised by federal legislation in 1995.

At the same time Aboriginal groups were actively trying to regain their land and preserve their group identities and cultural histories, histories that are supported by objects held in museums and other collections. As Philp (2007) notes:

The concept of Indigeneity has, over time, become an important marker of Australian cultural identity, distinguishing specifically Australian characteristics and traditions from those of other nations. It has enabled some museums, particularly the National Museum, to open up debate on the moral and ethical issues arising from Indigenous histories and cultures. (Philp 2007: 48)

Phillips (2004) makes a similar point in regards to cultural identity through Canadian Aboriginal representations in Canada as part of a more generalised response to colonialism, and notes that for the Aboriginal Canadians this expressed itself in the fabrics of the clothing they wore and in the artefacts produced as gifts and for sale (Phillips 2004). In the later Australian context of the mid-twentieth century, one of the means to express the relationships between Aboriginal people and the dominant society was through the increasing use of realistic landscape in tourist art, specifically in this case, decorated boab nuts. The use of 'landscape' is a way to circumvent the demands from non-Indigenous society to 'make public the ineffable and the unspoken' (Walsh in Bonyhady & Griffiths 2002: 3). At this time, increasing cultural sensitivities and understanding had contributed to the decline of the geometric motif and, like the Central Australian dot painting, possibly led to the desire to 'hide' meaning in Western-style landscape as well as promote increased

²¹⁶ At the same time Aboriginal images were so frequently used on domestic items in the 1950–1960s that the National Gallery of Victoria director Eric Westbrook believed that for visitors to Canberra there was a need for a national gallery of Aboriginal art 'if only to be able to correct the impressions they could form of Aboriginal art from the ash trays and other "typical Australian souvenirs"' (Philp 2007: 51).

²¹⁷ The appropriation of this art work caused a huge furore with the Governor of the Reserve Bank explaining 'that the government had assumed the painting was the work of an "anonymouse and probably long dead" Aboriginal artist' (Van den Bosch & Rentschler 2009: 123). There is a large body of literature on the issue of Aboriginal authorship and intellectual property, see for example Coleman (2005a).

legibility to appeal to the tourist need. It is also a means to make non-Indigenous society aware of the often unacknowledged²¹⁸ history of Aboriginal–settler interactions.

Jebb (2008),²¹⁹ a consulting historian, in a seminar organised by the Kimberley Society discussed her research on how decorated boab nuts ‘operate as “objects” or texts that not only represent historical events but also influence ideas, change values, and build relationships across cultures’ (Jebb 2008: n.p.). Jebb observed that the Ngarinyin artist Jack Wherra (Fig. 4.11):²²⁰

was an active participant in crosscultural exchange, sending out these objects [carved boab nuts] to be interpreted – in ways that he could not completely control, but with ‘hopes’ of communicating something to the recipients. Beside this being a means to relive/reconnect/engage with and reproduce his own culture; earn some money, tell a story, have some fun, be creative, they also carry a political message of justice.

To use a term, recorded by McCaffrey [an American anthropologist] in September 1964, as a direct quote by one of Wherra’s contemporaries, Wunambal artist and boab nut carver, Lockie Nollier, it is a ‘remembrance’. Nollier explained to McCaffrey, that if someone went to Kalumburu where many of his relations were, he would send something to them, like a carved shell. They are ‘rememberances’ [sic].²²¹

The carvings are also Wherra’s personal struggle to explain how his past actions fitted in the context of major cultural shifts that he was able to see and express as an Aboriginal historian using boab nuts to tell Kimberley history.

(Jebb 2008: n.p.)

²¹⁸ See Gill, Paterson and Kennedy (2001) regarding hidden histories and landscapes in the Northern Territory; also see Fyfe and Law (1988) on the principles of inclusion and exclusion of motifs within landscape designs to make comment on events, both historical and contemporary.

²¹⁹ As cited earlier, Dr. Mary Ann Jebb received a grant from the AIATSIS in collaboration with Mowanjumb Aboriginal Community, Derby, to research the Jack Wherra boab nuts from the John McCaffrey Collection, which was sold by Sothebys in 2003.

²²⁰ Jack Wherra (c.1920–1983) is perhaps the best-known of decorated boab nut artists and is accredited with creating the ‘cartoon’ style of realistic decoration in the mid-twentieth century. His work is represented in the Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1 (1982.0092.0002), Enid Bowden Collection (1987.0050.0315), and the Jack Wherra Collection (IR3205.0001 through IR3502.0021).

²²¹ ‘Remembrances’ and ‘rememberances’ have nuanced differences of which Nollier was aware. The remembrance is the physical object itself as a gift to connect the giver to the recipient and is different to an object that recalls memories, remembrances, personal or cultural.

Wherra's artwork is discussed further in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, and a number of his decorated boab nuts are reproduced throughout the thesis (for example Figs 5.15, 5.26 & 5.27a).

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Fig. 4.11: Incised boab nuts by Jack Wherra (Ngarinyin, c. 1920–1983)
various lengths 14cm to 24cm

Sothebys Auction House, John McCaffrey Collection of Kimberley Art, Sydney, 28 July 2003

Sotheby's description: This collection of finely incised boab nuts depict, according to McCaffrey [American anthropologist], a visual history of the relationship between Aborigines and Caucasians in Australia as perceived by Ngarinyin artist Jack Wherra. Three stages of acculturation are depicted: first, early contact and warfare during which the Aborigines are defeated; secondly, a stage of Aboriginal settlement on cattle stations under Caucasian authority where continuing hostility centres on jealousy and competition for women; thirdly, Aboriginal settlement in towns, suffering legal and social disability due to violence, gambling and alcohol (Sothebys 2003: 74).

Concluding comments

This chapter has assembled a number of arguments supporting the idea of the authenticity of contemporary incised and decorated boab nuts, and the validity of the imagery used by the artists as a means of historical documentation and remembrance. Further to this, it has been argued that deeply embedded in the imagery of these 'Western-style' landscapes are inherent long-term Aboriginal concepts of 'Country'. Equally, this chapter has aimed to demonstrate that the development of the Western-style landscapes on decorated boab nuts in the mid-twentieth century was both a reaction to post-settlement changes and an innovative internal response to change in the contemporary Aboriginal lifestyle and

environment. This response was underpinned by long and ongoing practices of cultural exchange and inclusion, thus validating the use of decorated boab nuts as historical visual ‘text’.

The linking of the theories of authenticity and tourist art, landscape and Western realism allows the proposition – that a new style of decorated boab nuts has developed within the changing milieu of the post-settlement Kimberley region – to be explored and, in addition, that this is demonstrated through the National Museum of Australia collection and further illustrated with images from other major collections. The following chapters discusses Kimberley history and art practices, the decorated boab nuts of the Mowanjum community near Derby, and the Western-style landscape boab nuts of the National Museum of Australia collection, placing both collectors and institution within the historical Australian narrative.

CHAPTER 5: KIMBERLEY HISTORY AND ARTS PRACTICE

This chapter will reveal how contact history provides the context for the examination of factors that have helped shape a new decorated boab nut genre in the mid-twentieth century. The introduction of Western ‘realism’ in conjunction with the transformative nature of public ceremony and other Aboriginal exchange processes incorporates new experiences within the traditional framework of art practices. This discussion of cross-cultural influences in the Kimberley region over time expands on the concepts considered in Chapter 4. After a discussion of the major cross-cultural influences in the Kimberley, the production of Western-style landscape boab nuts at Mowanjum which developed in the late 1950s–1970s will be examined in Chapter 6.

The history of the Kimberley cannot be contained in a single point of view, a body of literature, or an oral tradition. The complex activities of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals, groups and institutions and the vast area and timeframe of such activities allow for any ‘history of the Kimberley’ to be contested. What is important to the understanding of the historical process and where such processes lead are part of the dynamism of ‘expressions of accommodation and resistance, of continuity and discontinuity ... at the local, regional, and national levels’ (Poirier 2005: 16). These processes of change and innovation from within and as a consequence of outside contact will be examined in this chapter.

Internal and external influences on innovation in Aboriginal art practice

Changes that emerge as a consequence of internal innovation in the Kimberley Aboriginal community will be discussed in the context of the various art practices including the non-visual art forms. The historic and current linguistic diversity of the Kimberley has been well described (Vaszolyi 1979; Kofod 1993; Horton 1994: 548), with five language families encompassing 27 languages (Map 5.1). Although several languages have very small numbers of speakers, people’s cultural identities remain strong, and ‘most of the older artists painting today do speak their language’ (Kofod 1993: 6). The phenomenon of languages crossing cultures has also been examined elsewhere; for example, Kriol and Aboriginal English in Australia (Kofod 1993; Bonyhady & Griffiths 2002) and the

relationship between these types of languages and tourist arts have been researched (Ben-Amos 1977; Wollen 1990).



Map 5.1: Traditional location of Aboriginal languages in the Kimberley, Western Australia (Ryan & Akerman, 1993: n.p.)

Kimberley art comprises rock paintings and engravings (Fig. 5.1), ground and body painting (Fig. 3.21), sculpture – predominantly wood carving (Figs 3.20a & 3.20b) – and a wide variety of practical and ritual objects, such as baskets (Plate 1.4), pearl shell phallics and pendants (Figs 3.19 & 5.2), and bullroarers and boards (Fig. 5.3) (Davidson 1937; Mountford 1937; Mountford & Harvey 1938; Akerman 1993; Akerman & Stanton 1994), as well as the types of weapons collected by Lieutenant King and others since the early nineteenth century, including spears, (Fig. 5.4), spear throwers and shields (Plate 1.1). Decorated with geometric and/or figurative designs, all these forms could be invoked in ceremonial contexts and thus connect Aboriginal people to their Country and hence their creation narratives, often designated as ‘the Dreaming’²²² (Stanner 1979: 23–40; Stanton 1986a: 21; Utemorrhah et al. 1980). They refer to the ‘mythological events in the “country”, or landscape, of the artist’ (Stanton 1989: 6). These forms are not produced in isolation but as part

²²² Stanner (1979) describes the Dreaming as ‘many things in one’ and a cosmogony that explains ‘how the universe became a moral system’ (Stanner 1979: 23–9).

of narratives, songs and dances, and are part of the internal exchange patterns and innovation that underpin the inclusion of the ongoing lived experiences through processes, such as the *balga* performances and other ritual, into the twenty-first century. Butler (2008) makes an important point about different views of ritual in that while:

the concept of ritual is the vehicle for change in contemporary Aboriginal art. We conventionally look at the term ‘ritual’ and don’t actually use it much in contemporary art history because it has a connotation of a static repetition of something from the past. But when you look at the way ritual is brought to bear on contemporary Aboriginal art, you can see that it is a dynamic vehicle for change. It is how they move through and engage the modern world in the twentieth century. (Butler 2008: n.p.)

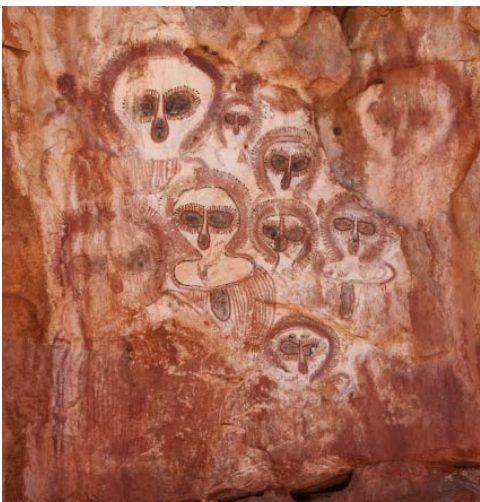


Fig. 5.1: Aboriginal Wandjina Rock art in the Wunnamurra Gorge, Barnett River, Mount Elizabeth Station, Kimberley, Western Australia 2013
Courtesy of Graeme Churchard
Bristol, UK

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Fig. 5.2: Pearl shell pendant
Kimberley, unknown
L 110mm x W 80mm
shell and ochre
Kimberley Pearl Shell collection
NMA 2004.0081.0006
<http://collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/object/73897>

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Fig. 5.3: Ceremonial board depicting Wandjina
Kalumburu, 1964–65
L 731mm x W 104mm x H 10mm
wood
Bruce Wright Collection
NMA 2003.0085.0002
<http://collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/object/70918>

Fig. 5.4 Spear
North Western Australia, [c. 1916]
L 3596mm x W 35mm x H 30mm
wood, pigment, adhesive, sinew, glass, bamboo
Dr. Herbert Basedow Collection
NMA 1985.0060.0465

In 1938, Lommel (1950) observed the appearance of a new secret cult among the Worora and Ngarinyin men, which was spreading into Wunambul territory (Lommel 1950: 70).²²³

He believed that this cult revived old traditions and assimilated new experiences as:

it was a synthesis of the aborigines' old mythic conception of the universal with new elements brought in, that it was an attempt to assimilate modern culture in a genuine way, and in this attempt the men of different stages of contact were united (Lommel 1950: 70).

Lommel (1950) links the intensification of secret cults with the psychological trauma of 'modern culture' (Lommel 1950: 70), believing this adjustive process was a psychological reaction to falling birth rates due to the conception 'dream' of a spirit child, related to totemic fauna, flora and Ancestral Beings, becoming less frequent (Lommel 1950: 71). He argues that migrating cults²²⁴ and associated dances and songs connect groups of men and 'conveyed new elements', 'absorb and revitalise' traditions and this phenomenon 'seems to be a synthesis of the old and the new way of life, a synthesis in genuine aboriginal style' (Lommel 1950: 75).²²⁵ The cults discussed are groupings of men using secret-sacred ceremony to both revive old traditions and assimilate new experiences into ceremony and is one of the foundations of internal change in response to the settler colonial society. This path for internal change is not public 'business' and will not be discussed further here.

²²³ Lommel (1950) writes these names as Ungarinyin, Worora and Unambal (Lommel 1950: 70). These are the language groups comprising the Mowanjam community.

²²⁴ Lommel (1950) mentions that there had been preceding 'waves' of cults and the 'more modern cult is connected with the older one by its myth' (Lommel 1950: 77).

²²⁵ A general discussion on these psychological aspects of innovation is contained in Chapter 3.

Public ceremonies were observed in the 1950s by Mountford, who noted a ‘wide distribution of art that is non-magical, and apparently decorative in function’ (Mountford 1961: 17). This is public art and performance, which may be viewed by anyone but nevertheless contains restricted knowledge for those with the appropriate status. Morven (2014) believes that one of the most significant contributions of the anthropologists, Petri and Lommel, was their description of ‘traveling ceremonies’, which show the integration of features of colonial contact into these narratives (Morven 2014: paragraph 7). For the East Kimberley, Morven (2014) describes the emergence of new art forms in the late 1970s, which he calls a ‘counter narrative, an indigenous reading of the past, combining art, performance and history’ (Morven 2014: paragraph 11), and a clearly vital decade for Aboriginal art throughout the Kimberley.

The importance of these ‘traveling ceremonies’ is highlighted by Shaw (1986) who recounts that Mandi Muniim²²⁶, recalling the early 1970s, explains how the *balga* connects with exchange and innovation processes:

Balga is in the Wunambal language but I can’t understand that. We can only tell by the dancing. But I can listen to that Wuladjau, Wula the same people. The Wyndham boys talk Wula. They’re Wuladjau, not Miriwong, though some of them are Miriwong who belonged to Lissadell Station. They have two languages, Wuladjau and Wunambal ... Half of them down here at Fork Creek are all mixed. A couple are there and a couple have passed away. Wunambal, that’s the language in which the songs are sung.

The Gulawada was Wunambal. That material was only the show. What the show was for was to sell it to someone, *winan*. See, they brought it out here. This is the story now. They give it to us, *winan*, and when they show it to us well we learn from that story and give it to that mob there at Auvergne and Newry. We call it *wurrangu*, long posts with wool, the *Balga* ... We exchanged, swapped them. When we got there we learnt from them and they had to learn ours. (Muniim in Shaw 1986: 141–2)

Donny Woolagoodja who owns a number of his father’s *joonba* (*balga*), also explains these exchange connections:

Because his father composed the Burrinja *joonba*, he was considered its owner. As its owner, Sam [Woolagoodja] was allowed to sell the *joonba*, for money or for material

²²⁶ East Kimberley man, Mandi Muniim, was born in 1904 and was ‘a handyman who built rough but highly practical sheds and bough shelters for his family and community. He made artefacts for the small tourist trade: didgeridus, boomerangs, spears, carved boab nuts’ (Shaw 1986: 14).

goods, but only to another person who share the Wanjina culture. ‘He can sell it to someone in another tribe ... but not a desert bloke’. (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 108)

Towards the end of the twentieth century, Vinnicrombe (1998), investigating Kimberley dance totems, observed:

In Kunmunya, there was a dance telling of the coming of the white man, while the late Wattie Nerdu,²²⁷ a Wororra man from Mowanjum (Derby), dreamed a dance which originated from the Wanalirri²²⁸ painted rock shelter. This dance, with its associated painted totems embellished with a surround of twinned coloured wool, is now proudly performed by the pupils of the Wanalirri School at Gibb River. The visual images used in the dances all originate in dreams, as does the accompanying music and the dance.

(Vinnicrombe 1998: n.p.)

The Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre (KALACC) (1996) reports the organisation of both the Karanypany Joonba in 1993 at Doon Doon, south of Kununurra, and then in 1994 the Yirra Festival at the Mount Anderson pastoral station on the Fitzroy River. These performances are reflected in other art forms as well going into the twenty-first century (Figs 5.5 & 5.6). The Yirra Festival represents:

one of these opportunities [to come together for celebration and cultural exchange],²²⁹ and preparation for the gathering began many months in advance. Dances must be ‘*straightened*’, that is censored and rehearsed, so that they are suitable for public viewing and the elders are happy with the performance.

(KALACC 1996: 1)

²²⁷ Nerdu elsewhere spelled as Ngerdu (O’Connor, Barham & Woolagoodja 2008: 22) and Nyerdu (Mowaljarlai & Malnic 1993: 115).

²²⁸ A description at this important cave site, Wanalirri of the Wandjina Wodjin, has been provided by Crawford (1968: 40–2).

²²⁹ Twelve hundred people representing 18 Kimberley language groups attended the five-day festival (KALACC 1996: 2).

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Fig. 5.5: *Bali Bali Balga*²³⁰ 2008
Alan Griffiths
1400mm x 1000mm
natural ochre and pigment on canvas
Art AM9234/12
Art Mob Aboriginal Fine Art

Fig. 5.6: *Djunba Dancers*²³¹ 2006
Jack Dale
1040mm x 1240mm
ochres on linen
AM9681/13
Art Mob Aboriginal Fine Art

Taylor (2008) provides some insight into internal change by recounting an explanation for changes in art technique and style in Arnhem Land by senior Kuninjku artist Mawurndjul who states:

I'm doing things differently. I'm thinking about what my father told me. I know everything today from my dreams. I have ideas in my mind that can change. I paint cross-hatching but over a plain colour, the light colour [white]. The old people painted with red colours. They didn't know [about using cross-hatching], they only used solid patterns of colour. Red, white, black, but we, however, have changed that. The way I paint is my own idea from my own way of thinking. I changed the law myself. We are new people. We new people have changed things.
(Mawurndjul in L. Taylor 2008: 878)

²³⁰ Web caption for this painting: During times of Law, East Kimberley Aboriginal groups come together for celebration and ceremony. This painting shows the artist's own corroboree the Bali Bali Balga. This was given to him by his grandfather when he was a young man. Later in 1974 Alan began to have his own dreams which he has added to the ceremony that he was gifted. Throughout the work are senior men displaying large woven dance boards called Balmoora. Traditionally these were woven from human hair but more recently woven with wool. Each Balmoora represents a Dreaming story. In turn each dancer steps forward as the verse that accompanies the Balmoora is sung. This ceremony is a great celebration and the whole community participates. Senior women carry small Balmoora to support the leading men, while people of all ages dance to the music made by clapsticks and didgeridoo (Art Mob Aboriginal Fine Art).

²³¹ Web caption for this painting: A Djunba is a form of commemorative dance that is traditional to Ngarinyin and other Wandjina people. The preparations include the construction of a screen made from tree branches and sheets of bark [the dance board]. The dancers paint and ornament their bodies with ochre, tassles and headdresses behind the screen in advance of a ritualised emergence before an eager and appreciative audience. The Djunba is then performed to the accompaniment of an orchestra sitting in front of the audience. Djunba dance and song continue to play an important role in the lives of the senior people who were also the backbone of the Kimberley cattle industry in its day (Art Mob Aboriginal Fine Art).

Glaskin (2005) discussing *Bardi* perception of dreams, comments that:

through the medium of dreams, spirits of the deceased, spirit beings, and ancestral figures are said to communicate with the dreamer and ‘reveal’ to him or her certain things. Some things that are revealed, such as those pertaining to ritual and ceremonial life – new songs, designs, dances, and so on – are said to have always, ‘from the beginning’, and are not considered to be ‘new’.

(Glaskin 2005: 299)

Glaskin (2005) uses as an example the revelation of new *ilma* (performances), which are understood not to be ‘new’, just not previously revealed and:

As with other ceremonial revelations, the processes by which the newly revealed *ilma* come to be accepted within the wider community involves [sic] some negotiation and agreement among senior ritual figures.

(Glaskin 2005: 306)

Glaskin demonstrates how innovations emerge culturally and how ‘cultural repertoire shapes and validates the kinds of innovations that occur’ (Glaskin 2005: 306). She also notes that a number of anthropologists have investigated dreams in different regions of Australia and the ‘role of dreams in cultural innovation and maintenance’ and ‘the changing social and structural situations arising from the effects of European settlement, namely displacement from country’ (Glaskin 2005: 299).²³² It is this ‘innovation’ that allows for change in art practices, including both realistic and Western-style landscape genre decorated boab nuts.

Colonialist and assimilatory influences compelled change upon the art practices of the Kimberley as the similar but different Aboriginal communities were undergoing post contact transformations. As technological and material ‘opportunities’ in the form of new materials, for example, steel tools, brushes and pigments (Micha 1970: 285; Graburn 1976: 11; Akerman 1979a: 243) became available they were used innovatively by Aboriginal people. In general, this frequently leads to functional changes or, indeed, ‘the whole context of ideas may be changed’ (Ben-Amos 1977: 128; see also Micha 1970: 286). This change, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, occurs within the continuous and ongoing art practices and involved relationships with other Aboriginal groups, non-Aboriginal peoples and eventually sustained contact interactions between the Kimberley settlers and workers in the missions, towns and industries that were established.

²³² Glaskin (2005) examines in detail the role of dreams in the Bardi and Jawi people living at the Lombadina mission established in 1910 by the Pallottines as an outstation of the Beagle Bay mission and identified a number of different types of Dreaming.

The displacement of people from their country and their subsequent congregation in and around missions, settlements and towns, often far outside their country interfered with the custodial obligations attached to specific locations and the retouching of rock art (Ryan & Akerman 1993: 11; Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005)²³³ and painted trees (Utemorraah & Vinnicrombe 1992: 25), a process that renewed and regenerated the land and all within it, the importance of which is discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. Utemorraah (1992) recounts:

where Wandjina made snakes or yams or honey or when we wanted to have plenty yams or crocodile we would go back to that place and paint them again. We used to keep the things Wandjina painted looking nice and fresh. We looked after them for a long time now. We go [sic] shifted out of country and this makes us very sad.

(Utemorraah & Vinnicrombe 1992: 25)

In 1930, recognising the importance of retouching the rock art, Reverend J.R.B. Love from Kunmunya Mission wrote:

It will be seen that a picture cave occurs every five miles or so ... the whole purpose of these picture caves can be summed up in one sentence: they are to ensure the food supply of the present generation.

(Love in Rainsbury 2009: 30)

Changes to legislation and governance of Aboriginal people over the mid-twentieth century permitted increasing access to Country, allowing these regenerative practices to become strong again. Crawford (1968) demonstrates this with his observation in the early 1960s that:

When visiting trees with snakes or long lines carved on them, my guides often picked up a lump of rock and re-scoured the lines in order to make them more obvious.

(Crawford 1968: 128)

Blundell described this land regeneration in 1974:

When large numbers of men met to burn the grass and to undertake communal hunting, the sacred Wandjinas were retouched to ensure the coming of the monsoon and the regeneration of all life (Blundell in O'Connor et al 2013: 539).

The importance of these custodial actions is argued by Sale (1993), who focusses on the ethnographic evidence for re-marking as an expression of the relationship between the people, the landscape and the Dreaming, with 'implications for the notion that re-marking may provide a medium for expressing socio-cultural change' (Sale 1993: 65). Crawford (2001), documenting Aboriginal cave paintings in the Kimberley, recounts Albert

²³³ Wandjina art is painted in white pipe clay, which is unstable, so regular repainting is necessary to prevent deterioration (Rainsbury 2009: 7).

Barunga's²³⁴ statement that the Wandjina had said: 'I give you this land, and you must keep your tribal land. You can't touch somebody's land because it is your body, and your body is right here' (Crawford 2001: 277). Bell (2010) argues that these images and their relationship to the landscape around them are 'all the one knowledge system' and that 'theirs is not an extinct Law and culture; it is essentially modern, continually evolving to reflect and anticipate current conditions' (Bell 2010: 8).

Akerman (1991), an anthropologist with long involvement with Kimberley people and artists and with publications on a number of Kimberley art forms, including decorated boab nuts, argues there are three major influences on the more recent iconography of the regional art forms. He makes clear that the displacement in the early twentieth century of people from their Country in the central and north-western areas to missions and government stations, and for some a further relocation, with some eventual returns to Country through the outstation movement in the 1980s and 1990s, was a major factor. He comments that:

Naturally one effect of these moves was to reduce the range of intimate country impressions and related mythology, leaving only broader aspects of traditional knowledge available for many, particularly younger, artists to draw upon. (Akerman 1991: 91)

Kevin Kelly, art advisor at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts in 1997, also made a similar observation that, for the parent generation often no longer living in their Country, there was a shrinking of traditional knowledge but now the grandparent generation are teaching grandchildren in the communities and outstations (Kevin Kelly, pers. comm., 22 August 1997).

The second influence identified by Akerman (1991) was the effect of institutionalisation in prisons and hospitals²³⁵ in promoting diversity of art practices within Aboriginal groups and others, also noting the impact of the art practices imposed on inmates by such institutional practices, for example, the well-known boab nut artist, Jack Wherra, imprisoned for 18 years, whose access to comic books in prison allowed him to develop a completely new style of compartmentalised incised boab nuts, one that contained a Western-style realistic narrative (Akerman 2003: 70–1; Jebb 2006, 2008).²³⁶ Chapters 6 and 7 contain further discussion of Wherra's decorated boab nuts. At the Derby

²³⁴ In 1963, Albert Barunga from Mowanjum near Derby was guiding Ian Crawford through the *Worrorra* territory in the remote northern and western coasts (Crawford 2001: 277).

²³⁵ See Lang (1999) for a general discussion of institutional influence.

²³⁶ In prison Aboriginal people from many different language groups were incarcerated together and storyboard-like partitioning is also a characteristic of North-East Arnhem Land traditional works.

Leprosarium the use of art therapy, including the incising of boab nuts, is mentioned in *Healing Hangs, Memories and Milestones of the Derby Leprosarium Where Sisters of St. John of God Provided Nursing Care* (Daly 1980) and the artists were encouraged towards a realistic style (Lang 1999).

Finally, the third influence that Akerman (1991) discusses for the North-western Kimberley is the move away from interest in the ‘traditional’ Wandjina art practices²³⁷ through the commercialisation of certain art forms for economic reasons. Akerman (1991) states that the:

general aesthetic/economic thrust ... directed at producing durable art forms based on the engraving of boab nuts. Engraved boab nuts could be produced rapidly and had a rapid turnover, ensuring a low but reliable income for those who wished to produce them. With the recent recognition [1980s] of individual artists such as John Dodo, David Downs, Rover Thomas, Paddy Jaminji Wirminji, Alec Minjelmarnaganu and Manila Kutwit, among others, more and more people are producing works in the expectation that these too will command high prices. These expectations may or may not be fostered by art advisors or dealers, who are often themselves economically controlled by a very fickle, usually untutored market. Consequently a plethora of ‘artists’ not realising their economic ambitions tend to, after an initial fling at ‘great works’, fall back on the more dependable income derived from engraved slates, boab nuts or less ambitious paintings that are within the price range of a wider section of the buying public. (Akerman 1991: 91–2)

The relationship between incised and painted boab nuts and internal and external influences is discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 6. A further important point is made by Mulvaney (2003), about custodial actions in Country and how the inability to access Country meant the retouching of rock art was transferred to depicting these images on portable art works, as he explains:

The imposition of white pastoral control undoubtedly curtailed people’s production of rock-art and the retouching of important images. To a degree, the requirement for ritual renewal has been transferred into the creation of the commercial artworks. This is certainly how the three Waringarri artists [Paddy Janama Carlton, Joe Jurlama Lewis, Alan Jangari Griffiths] see their works. Their creation of paintings is not random, but reflects their ties to country and the individual artist’s re-acquaintance with particular sites and Dreamings. The artworks express their need to replicate the Dreaming narratives as a process of ritually prescribed behaviour. It is the knowledge of place-based narratives that the artist draws on for inspiration in their works. The canvas forms the space for a creation about Ancestral

²³⁷ See Chapter 3 regarding the instability of natural pigments.

domains; the totemic landscape is reproduced in a two-dimensional form...For although the artworks are produced for commercial sale, the underlying structure in their creation is the cultural traditions and ritual positioning of the artists. (Mulvaney 2003: 307)

Kimberley history and art practice until the mid-twentieth century

Exchange between Aboriginal groups has been well recognised by anthropologists as ‘an interchange, on the broadest scale, of both material and intellectual cultural items’ (Micha 1970: 285), including body painting patterns. For example, in the south of the Kimberley there is significant movement from the Western Desert regions (Stanton 1986: 23), where the circumcision and subincision of the Wandjina cult has been replaced by desert cult initiation laws and are part of a number of changes over a long period of time.

Glowczewski (2001) argues that the chain of alliances transfers the objects and ceremony of initiation cults over a vast terrain, and that after years of circulation, the ceremonies develops new ‘forms of expression’ (Glowczewski 2001: 271). Glowczewski (2001) illuminates the association between circulation and change:

As the secret name of the cult must not be pronounced, it is designated by one of the public dances that is part of the cult [Balgo Business] ... It took the cult over fifty years to cover the 1,000 kilometres separating the coast [Broome] from the Central Desert. In 1976, the Balgo elders, who speak Kukatja, Walmajarri and Warlpiri, became the ‘custodians’ of the objects, songs and rites that circulate with the cult and in turn passed them on to the east. However, according to these desert groups, the objects remain the spiritual property of those who, at various times, introduced them into the cult, in particular the Yawuru from Broome. (Glowczewski 2001: 272)

These were transactional in the economic, social and political arenas, in that ‘rights in them could be traded, bequeathed, and at times, even stolen for their high value’ (Sutton & Anderson 1988: 4). In the 1950s Helmut Petri recorded that ‘the Aborigines could recollect an even earlier cult’ (Petri in Crawford 1968: 35–6). The consequences of this circulation can be perceived recently; for example, in the desert influences apparent in some of the East Kimberley paintings (Stanton 2009: para 16).²³⁸ The enduring geometric and figurative genres have been modified over time, as with any art form, to be inclusive of the current environment (Lewis 1996: 47–50; Russell 2004; Akerman 2015).

²³⁸ See Chapter 4 for examples and discussion.

Bassett-Smith, a surgeon on HMS *Penguin* in 1891, for example, had earlier reported seeing a cave on an Admiralty Gulf island in which figures ‘had been worked in red, black, or white pigments various drawings, and among them the representation of a clothed man probably meant for a “pearler”’ (Bassett-Smith 1894: 330). Nevertheless, continuity is firmly entrenched, with many of the motifs across the genres of rock art, tree carving and wooden-weapon incising, as would be expected in relation to the depiction of profound narratives (Lang 1999).²³⁹ In the pre-settlement era the designs on artefacts were part of economic and religious exchange and an expression of social values.

Aboriginal groups would exchange knowledge, in the form of songs, dance, designs and objects for example, ochre, through the *wunan*²⁴⁰ trading system (Map 5.2). Blundell (1980) details the *wunan* or *wurnan*, in its broadest sense of a cognitive model which is also geographically expressed, and exchange processes are part of this (Blundell 1980: 109–15; see also Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 31–5). It ‘decrees that nothing is withheld, that men and women know how to relate to one another, who they will marry and who their children will marry’ (Jebb 2008: 8). There was ‘always some kind of transaction involved in artistic production – it was never above economics however, of a non-capitalistic nature’ (Nicholls in Lang 1999: 22).

Pearl shells, ochre and natural pigments, ceremonial objects, wood, functional items and cultural practices were exchanged along the *wunan* trade routes, which connected the Kimberley region with the north and south (Blundell 1980: 111–14; Lofgren 1975: 51; Kolig 1984) and different Aboriginal groups influenced each other through these exchanges. After settlement, the stations and missions became trading points for both traditional objects and new items such as metal, glass and ‘ration’ tobacco²⁴¹ (Blundell 1980: 105; Stanton 1986: 5; N. Green 1997: 22; P. Jones 2007: 116). Green (1997) notes that in 1873 the explorer, P.E. Warburton, found metal objects in use near Balgo Hills, an area beyond the penetration of the region by Europeans at the time (N. Green 1997: 31). The reworking of horseshoes, shovels and windmill blades into ‘heavy elongated spearheads proved to be highly efficient for piercing the tough hides of station cattle (N.

²³⁹ See Chapter 4 for a discussion on the relationship of the Dreaming narratives and the art produced.

²⁴⁰ The most common spelling is *wunan* (for example, Kaberry [1939] 2004, Blundell 1980: 111–14, Akerman, Fullagar & Van Gijn 2002; Glaskin 2005: 299); however, the terms *winan* (Shaw 1986: 141–2) and *wurnan* (Redmond 2010) are also used.

²⁴¹ By the 1920s this was a specially made ‘Black Stick Tobacco’, produced for the Aborigines Department, which was ‘a sweet mixture of tobacco mixed with honey, sugar, glycerine, glucose, liquorice, caramel, rum, coconut, coumarin crystals, walnut essence, almond oil, maple leaf and gum arabic cut into sticks about the length of a finger’ (Jebb & MAC 2008: 64–5).

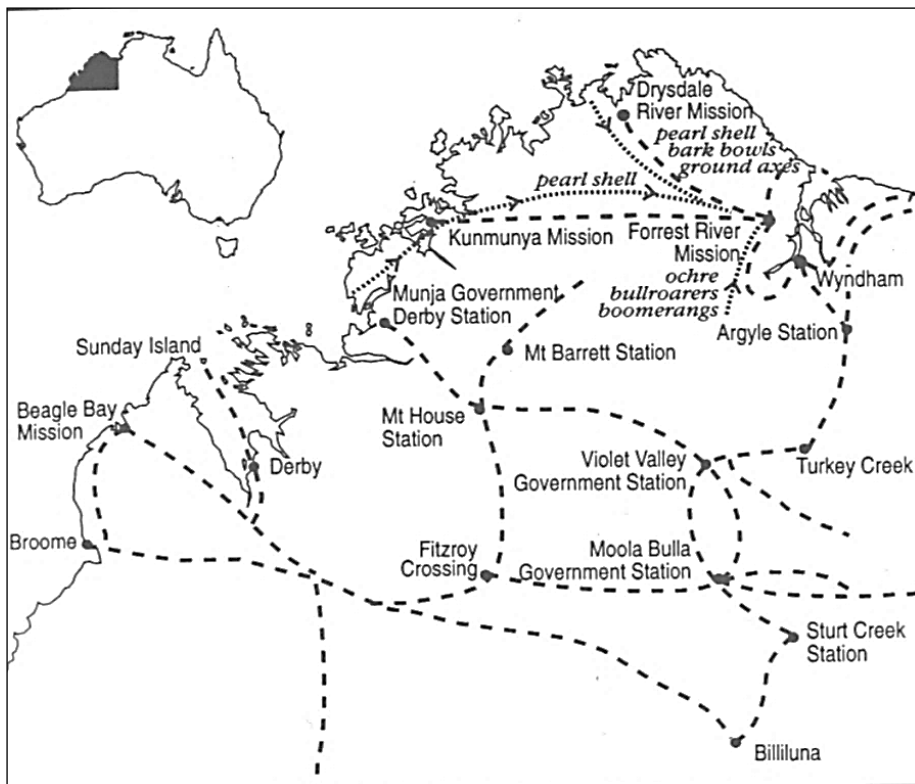
Green 1997: 31). Women's digging sticks were being replaced by iron rods known as 'wire' and metal buckets were used for water for tea during ceremonies (Love 1936: 214, Akerman 1979a: 243; Crawford 1982: 4).

Redmond (2010) provides an example of this type of exchange, quoting senior Ngarinyin man Paddy Neowarra, who explained that:

after we go to other communities for ceremonies, we will come back later to receive presents from them during a 'smoke', after all the business is finished. Everybody can relax then. People give us clothes and food and blankets for bring our ceremony to them. Maybe to Looma or Fitzroy Crossing or Kununurra. Ceremony and everyday things are mixed up together.

This is how we trade one thing or another right across the Kimberley and down into the desert. All sorts of things, not just secret thing, but meat and sugar-bag, clothes and motorcars and money too. Or I might need a special type of wood for something I'm making or bamboo. All these sorts of things I can get through the *wurnan*.

(Neowarra in Redmond 2010: 63)



Map 5.2: *Wurnan* trading routes throughout the Kimberley (N. Green 1997: 23)

The history and recording of non-Aboriginal contact in the Kimberley

There was a long history of encounters between Aboriginal people and other peoples from the region as the north and north-west coast was a region used by the Indonesians for collecting trepang (sea slug or sea cucumber) and trochus, which would be dried onshore and sold onto China (Crawford 1968: 17). ‘Makassan’ is the general term used for the Indonesian fishermen and marine harvesters who came to the Australian coast from the Indonesian Archipelago, including the Sulawesi and Timor. Some northern rock art demonstrates Makassan²⁴² contact, depicting *prau* masts and trepang smokehouses (Russell 2004: 6–7) and other motifs, including introduced objects such as tall ships, destroyers from the Second World War, a bi-plane²⁴³ and a car, portrayed in rock paintings in Arnhem Land (Layton 1992; O’Connor & Arrow 2008; May et al. 2010; Newstead 2014: 68). The introduction to northern Australia of the Makassan pipe has been depicted in rock art and on boab nuts. Another import to the landscape was the tamarind tree (Lofgren 1975: 59; Akerman & Stanton 1994: 41; Russell 2004: 4; Ganter 2006: 28), and while on field trips Stanton reported finding bamboo joints for carrying seafaring water; the *Areca* palm, which produces betel-nut; and coconut palms planted at trepang-processing sites (Stanton in P. Clarke 2007: 129). In the 1960s Crawford was involved in identifying some of the coastal sites and reported that: ‘the number and size of these sites suggest that there were very extensive contacts [with Aboriginal people] over the past several hundred years’ (Crawford in Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 47). In the Kimberley, Clarke (2007) notes that the Bardi of the Dampier Peninsula ‘sometimes encountered Timorese fishermen working the reefs around Sunday Island’ (P. Clarke 2007: 129).

Although Elkin suggests that a pearl shell engraved with a pipe-smoking kangaroo could be attributed to ‘mission influences’ (Elkin in Akerman & Stanton 1994: 41), it may be that pipe imagery was introduced with the Makassan long pipe (Peggs 1903: 326, Thomas 1906: 128; Akerman & Stanton 1994: 41) (Figs 5.7 & 5.8). Also introduced were dugout canoes, glass and metal (Crawford 2001); and cloth, tobacco, rice and opium (Langton & Sloggett 2014: 8). It was ‘a two-way exchange of ideas and technology’ (Clarke 2007: 129). Langton and Sloggett (2014) argue that for the Yolngu in Arnhem Land ‘if the trade in commodity was substantial, the associated social and cultural exchanges were no less

²⁴² Makassan, Macassan and Makasans are used by different authors (Akerman & Stanton 1994; Crawford 2001; Russell 2004; Langton & Sloggett 2014). Indonesian pottery shards have been excavated near the coast at Napier Broome Bay (Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley 2007: 7) and throughout the northern coast.

²⁴³ Introduced objects are recorded on other media, for example, biplanes are also incised on a pearl shell (Berndt, Berndt & Stanton 1982: 43 Plate 152; Akerman & Stanton 1994: 43 Plates 36b & 37).

significant’ (Langton & Sloggett 2014: 8). They list several areas in which observable cultural importations or exchanges were incorporated into Yolngu life – dances, designs, songs, stories, and language (Langton & Sloggett 2014: 8).



Fig. 5.7: The legends say that these children on Bigge Island are eating lily roots [detail only] (Crawford 1968: 79 Fig. 54) These Wandjina-like figures are possibly Kaiara figures, responsible for coastal weather patterns and cyclones. (Akerman 2015: 35 Fig. 24).



Fig. 5.8: Boab nut depicting ‘smoking’ kangaroos [North Western Australia], pre-1955
L 130mm x W 107mm
C.S. Ashley Collection
SAM 48493
South Australian Museum (Lang 1999)

Although this contact was not without conflict, not all interaction was hostile, and women were sent to ‘the Macassans in exchange for goods such as metal and food’ (O’Connor & Arrow 2008: 400), resulting in these exchanges become merged in the art, song and dances of both groups (Crawford 2001; Russell 2004: 10). Rock art depictions record Makassan interaction (Figs 5.9a & 5.9b). McDonald and Finnane (1996) report that marriages were arranged between Makassans and Aboriginal women in Cambridge Gulf:

The Gulf and its rivers divided the region in such a way that the local tribes were small in size and only met together for special tribal celebrations. At these celebrations marriages were arranged [between Makassans and Aboriginal women], new corroborees were taught and stories told. Munon-gu, the Forrest River, was often a meeting place for these gatherings.

(McDonald & Finnane 1996: 256)

On this contact and exchange, Russell (2004) also reports ‘that there is evidence to suggest that Makassans negotiated with Aborigines for the right to fish’ (Russell 2004: 8), predominantly an economic exchange while cultural forms were also exchanged, for

example, in ceremony and language.²⁴⁴ May, McKinnon and Raupp (2009) conclude that depictions of *praus* for Groote Eylandters:

have embedded cultural meaning which relates to Groote Eylandt Aboriginal belief systems. *Praus* are not merely depictions of boats for the purpose of illustration, and they are certainly not mere representations of the ‘other’ as many would assume for paintings showing imagery from other cultures. In this case, the *prau* is linked to stores of creation, land and ancestors for Australian Aboriginal people in a way that can only happen as a result of long periods of interaction with maritime visitors.

(May, McKinnon & Raupp 2009: 383)

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Fig. 5.9a: Rock painting of a watercraft in Bigge Island (Photo: R. Baker, WA Maritime Museum, WINC 1978) (Bigourdan 2006: 9)

Fig. 5.9b: Rock painting of a canoe from the Kimberley (Photo: M Del Grande, from Leech 1998: 19) (Bigourdan 2006: 14)

<http://museum.wa.gov.au/maritime-archaeology-db/maritime-reports/aboriginal-watercraft-depictions-western-australia>

In relation to painting of Kaiara on Bigge Island (Fig. 5.7), located in Wunambal territory, Crawford suggests ‘that what have happened here is that white people arrived, and because their clothing resembles the body decoration of the Kaiara, and sound and flash of light from their weapons resembles thunder and lightning, they were incorporated in the Kaiara mythology’ (Crawford in Bigourdan 2006: 9). Kaiara are similar to Wandjina but ‘came out of the seas from the north and west bringing, or carried by, the cyclones’ (Crawford 1968: 69).

Boat images have also been found carved on to boab trees; for example, Lewis (1996) photographed what he believes to be a boat at Bradshaw Station, Victoria River (Fig. 5.10).

²⁴⁴ Nicholls observes that the Groote Eylandt Yolngu man, Minimini Numalkiyiya Mamarika, has a Makassan name (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 24 November 2015).

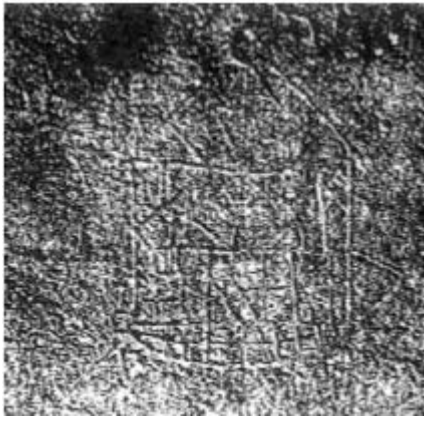


Fig. 5.10a: Detail of Site 8: 'Mystery Ship' Boab, Bradshaw Station. This ship is 64 cm high (Lewis 1996: 47, 50). For a comparison see Figure 4 Rock-painting of Makassan perahu (carrying three canoes) in Bickerton Island (Turner in Russell 2004: 7).



Fig. 5.10b: Aboriginal canoes in communication with Monarch and the Tom Tough, 28 August 1855, by John Thomas Baines © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London. The artist participated in A.C. Gregory's expedition to northern Australia. The schooner on the right hand side is the Tom Tough (Indigenous Watercraft of Australia n.d.).

Lewis (1996), an expert on boab trees as historic sites, comments that:

It is impossible to identify with certainty just what this design represents, or whether made by an Aboriginal artist or a European. My own opinion is that it has been carved by an Aboriginal artist and represents an early sailing ship. My reasons for this opinion are as follows:

First, the top of the design is less than one metre from the ground, and appropriate height if it was carved by an Aboriginal sitting cross-legged. Second, the design bears a remarkable resemblance to a rock painting from Groote Eylandt which undoubtedly represents a ship ... Third, it is difficult to fathom why a European would create such an enigmatic and (for a whiteman) apparently pointless design. (Lewis 1996: 47–8)

Lewis further notes that the tree is large, mature and could be of substantial age; therefore, it could potentially 'depict Gregory's schooner, the Tom Tough, which was in the Victoria River nearby for eight months in 1855–56' (Lewis 1996: 48) (Fig. 5.10b).

The north-west coast of Australia has been visited by Europeans since the seventeenth century; for example, Dampier in 1688 and Baudin in 1801 and 1803, while King mapped the coast in 1821. This was the beginning of a number of coastal explorations; for example, Grey and Stokes in the 1830s, and unsuccessful attempts to establish a settlement at Camden Harbour in 1863 and then again in 1864–65. Crawford (2001) believes these initial early contacts:

caused no disruption to the Aboriginal lifestyle ... The appearance and actions of the whites – apparently emerging from sea or sky, their use of firearms, and their clothes – more or less conformed with those expected of spirit beings, and narratives of early visits were simple added to the body of mythological accounts. In this way, the visits reinforced traditional beliefs rather than challenged them. (Crawford 2001: 118) (Fig. 5.11)

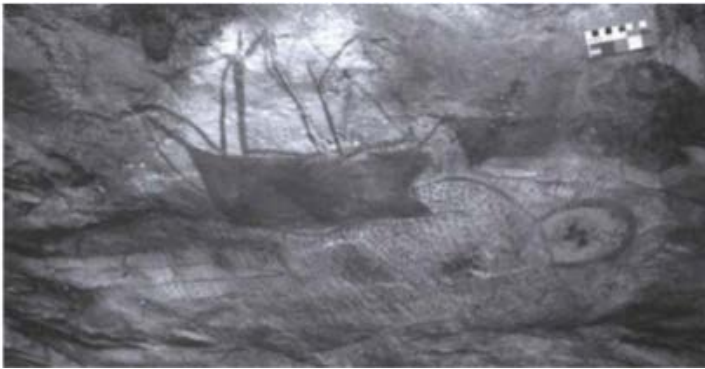


Fig. 5.11: Double-masted boat nestles into side of a Wandjina (O'Connor, Barham & Woolagoodja 2008: 27 Fig. 4)

Towards the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century a number of exploratory groups surveyed the Kimberley region, and included, apart from the non-Aboriginal explorers and specialists such as geologists, botanists and surveyors, their Aboriginal assistants. For example, Jebb (2002) notes that the Crossland, Browne and Fitzgerald trigonometrical survey expedition of 1905 included 'a group of eight white assistants and at least four Aboriginal assistants plus two Aboriginal women not officially recognised as members of the group' (Jebb 2002: 51) but who tended the horses. Brockman observes that he was surprised at the low numbers of Aboriginal people encountered in his 1901 travels, and noted that 'every party ... even the most remote localities, had axes and chisels made of iron (principally cart tyre iron and shovel blades)' (Brockman in Donaldson 2003: n.p.). Rubbish dumps at the missions and stations were scavenged for metal and tools left lying around, which were pilfered and reshaped (N. Green 1997: 5).

Beyond this exploration, temporary visitors were becoming part of this superficial contact with Aboriginal people in and around the missions and settlements, as Green (1988) succinctly observes:

A steady parade of Europeans to Aboriginal settlements have clicked their cameras and then moved on. These photographs now exist in the albums of aging missionaries and teachers, sometimes just as esoteric memories. Occasionally, the significance of such photos is recognised by those clearing out the estate of a deceased family member and a few photos find their way into archives across Australia. (N. Green 1988: 9)

Others recorded observations in letters²⁴⁵, field notes, in genealogies, on maps and later audiotapes. Missions were initially visited in the earlier twentieth century by ‘a long succession of naturalists, anthropologists, and scientists from other States of the Commonwealth and from overseas’ (Perez 1977: 15). In general in the Kimberley, these were male anthropologists who published their research including Elkin (1932), Davidson (1937), Lommel (1949), Petri (1954) and, later, Crawford (1968) and Akerman (1979)²⁴⁶. In this gendered society there was a significant bias in the research of male anthropologists towards men’s roles in society, their artefacts, and their traditional religious importance. The exception to this was Kaberry (1935), whose extensive field work at Forrest River eventually provided a foundation for further research on women’s roles by women anthropologists, including Blundell (1975). Working on the missions there were amateur ethnographers, such as Reverend Love at Kunmunya, and visiting professional anthropologists such as A.P. Elkin in the late 1920s, who was followed by his student Phyllis Kaberry at Forrest River Mission in 1934. About the same time, in 1938, Andreas Lommel, visited as part of the Frobenius Expedition, and Arthur Capell, a linguist surveyed the Kimberley languages. Later, among others, Ian Crawford researched for his doctoral thesis in the 1960s and the Canadian anthropologist Valda Blundell worked in the Old Mowanjum mission in the 1970s; and Kim Akerman has undertaken ongoing research since the 1970s.

²⁴⁵ For example, in 1910–11 the zoologist Eric Mjoberg and in 1926 the mineralogist William J. Maiden were investigating potential mineral rights for an English syndicate (Jebb & MAC 2008: 32).

²⁴⁶ The dates given are the dates of the first publication of their fieldwork.

An overview of legislation and governance of Aboriginal people in the Kimberley

Jones (1996) argues that the unequal power relations attached to colonial contact histories are not sufficient to explain how, with:

daily encounters between Aborigines and Europeans, those encounters were also formed through pragmatism, opportunism and the gamut of understandings and misunderstandings accompanying a rich diversity of contact. (P. Jones 1996: 1–2)

Thomas (1991) calls this the ‘dynamics of accommodation’ and argues that colonialism is never complete domination (Thomas 1991: 310). Thus, while attempts were made by the Western Australian and federal governments to control the Aboriginal and Asian peoples of the Kimberley through legislation, these strategies were in many cases disrupted due to geographical remoteness and the lack of resources needed to administer and police such requirements.

The Aborigines Act 1905, which formalised administratively a stricter control of Aboriginal lives than had been the case in the nineteenth century, was a result of the Moseley Royal Commission. This Act was used and then amended in an attempt to halt sexual relationships between Aboriginal and other peoples, especially in the Kimberley with Asian men (Choo 1995, 1997), and led to the *Native Administrative Act 1936*²⁴⁷, which gave even greater legal control over children.²⁴⁸ Changes to the definition of ‘native’ to include mixed-heritage people, led to stricter control over mixed marriages, which now needed permission from the Chief Protector of Aborigines (Choo 1999: 51). Under the 1905 Act there were curfews, and restrictions on movement and ‘everything from where they could swim to what bedding and clothing they were allowed to buy’ (Newstead 2014: 146).

After the Second World War, the gradual introduction of the federal government’s reforms in the removal of discriminatory exclusions to welfare provisions and benefits for the aged and unemployed began to address the lack of support for Aboriginal families provided by the state government (Haebich 2008: 216; Murphy 2013). The first reform in the 1940s, providing child endowment for all non-nomadic Aboriginal children, did at the same time allow for state authorities to reduce ration expenditure (Haebich 2008: 216).

²⁴⁷ Also known as *The Aborigines Act Amendment Act (1936)* (Choo 1999: 51).

²⁴⁸ Before this Act children were forcibly removed; see Wattie Gama’s childhood recollection of children and parents placed in chains and moved like cattle to be relocated and the children taken to a mission, as told by Daisy Utemorrhah (1980: 66–7).

Beginning in 1952 and concluding in 1963, the movement and employment restrictions of the *Native Administration Act* were progressively removed.²⁴⁹ Aboriginal people moved, willingly or not, from pastoral leases to towns. There may have been some access to these lands but it was dependent on the station owner/manager. Farming, mining and the Ord River Scheme had expanded the size of inaccessible land. The introduction of equal wages for pastoral station workers in 1968–9 caused an inundation of people from the leases into overcrowded and unserviced fringe camps (Jebb 2002: 3). It was not until 1970 that unemployed Aboriginal people were ‘entitled to full unemployment benefits, pensions or social security payments’ (P. Smith 2000: 88).

The ‘self-determination’ policy introduced in 1972 by the new elected Whitlam Labor Government encouraged Aboriginal people to return to their traditional lands, a ‘move made possible by welfare support’ (Fisher 2012: 253). The Lands Rights Commission, the outstation movement²⁵⁰, and the formation of representative organisations and corporations such as the Kimberley Land Council, as well as the creation of the Aboriginal Arts Board in 1973, played a role in the beginning of a ‘cultural renaissance’, led by the visual arts (Altman 2005: 4; Fisher 2012: 253; Lane 2003: 92). The Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection (1974) of 9 boab nuts, and the Enid Bowden Collection of ten boab nuts collected while she was running an early outlet for Aboriginal art and craft in Melbourne, particularly highlight this renaissance in artistic production and Australia-wide distribution in this new political environment.

The *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* was inspiring to Aboriginal people no longer on their country and the Kimberley Land Council was established in 1978 to represent rights to land. A council of Elders, Kamali Land Council, was founded by leaders²⁵¹ throughout the Kimberley in 1983 (Jebb 2008: vi). In Western Australia the recognition of native title came much later, in 1992, when the Ngarinyin people’s land claim was successful in court. The use of contemporary and historical paintings²⁵² as evidence in native title hearings is based on the relationship between art and art production

²⁴⁹ The Department of Native Welfare was terminated in 1972 (Lane 2003: 84).

²⁵⁰ Outstations were frequently located at sites of old ration camps, stock camps or wet season camps (Lane 2003: 94).

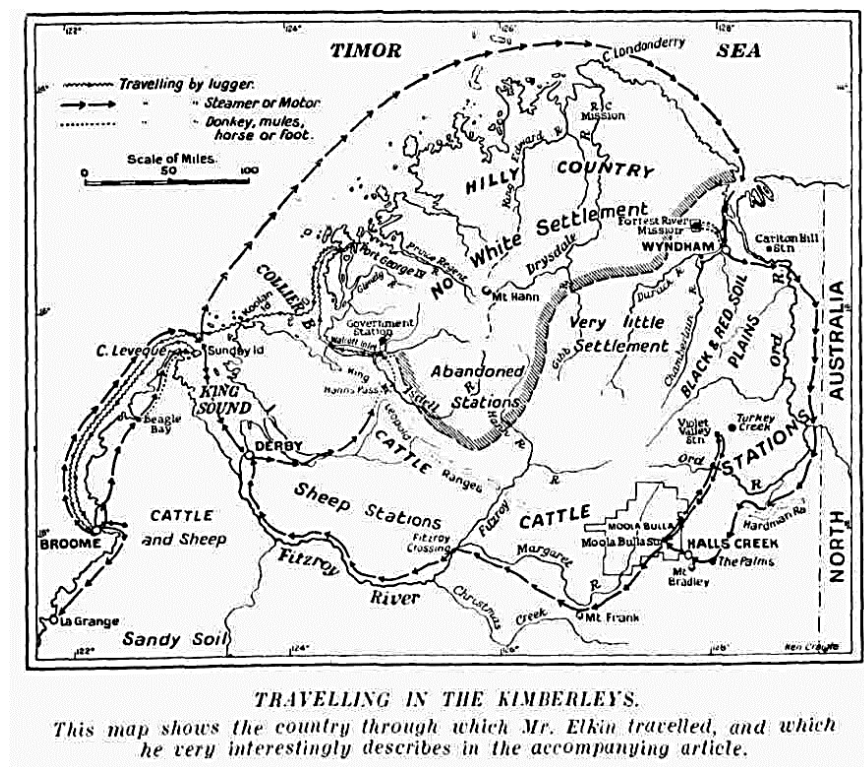
²⁵¹ The Kamali Land Council included Paddy Warma, David Mowaljarlai, Spider Burgu, and Laurie Utemorrah amongst others (Jebb 2008: vi).

²⁵² As discussed in Chapter 4, besides paintings, an incised boab nut was produced as evidence for Miriwoong and Kadjerong peoples’ native title application before the Federal Court in 1998 (Lane & Waitt 2001: 386).

and the link people have with specific places, and ‘establishing affiliation to particular country’ (Mulvaney 2003: 307; see also Lane 2003: 107). Even in instances of contemporary paintings for sale, Mulvaney (2003) notes that ‘the underlying structure in their creation is the cultural traditions and ritual positioning of the artists’ (Mulvaney 2003: 307) which locates them geographically.

Kimberley industries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

Early pastoral contact and its impact



Map 5.3: A.P. Elkin’s ‘Travelling in the Kimberley’ published in *The Sunday Mail*, Wednesday 13 February 1929: 8–10 (Elkin 1929: 8).

Early contact with Europeans, which often involved confrontation with local Aboriginal groups, was generally through exploration into the Kimberley interior (King 1827, Gregory & Gregory 1884), and later the harvesting of oyster beds on the coast (Bain 1982: 14–5), with a small number of squatters and lessees established in the Kimberley, who used unpaid Aboriginal stockmen (Skyring 2012: 155–6). This frontier is defined by Litster and Wallis (2011) as ‘any areas where colonial settlers were using the land for agricultural, mining and/or livestock (Map 5.3), whilst Aboriginal people were still maintaining their traditional life-ways in the area’ (Litster & Wallis 2011: 105–6); the Kimberley region also included marine industries. In Western Australia, the white population in 1874 was only

26,209 (Forrest 1875 [1969]: 354), and Green (1997) estimates that the Aboriginal population in the Kimberley at contact:

may have been approximately 10,000 but within 50 years dwindled to less than 5,000 ... the decline was the consequence of abduction of men and women to work in pearling fleets, confinement of men in prison, effects of punitive expeditions, impact of measles, influenza, small pox, leprosy and venereal disease. (N. Green 1997: 20)

The 1879 the Alexander Forrest survey of the Kimberley led to the opening-up of the far north to pastoral settlement, especially as the land was considered vacant (Colebatch 1929: 87). In 1883 cattle were finally introduced successfully by the Durack family from Queensland (Owen 2003: 106), and the Northern Territory, and, by the end of 1880, five-and-a-half million acres had been allocated (Colebatch 1929: 402). In the East Kimberley, Fossil Downs Station was established by the McDonalds and in 1888 Brooking Springs Station, near what was to become Fitzroy Crossing,²⁵³ was set up (Hawke 2013: 7).

As early as 1886, 2000 sheep were delivered to the Victorian Pastoral Company on Cambridge Gulf, only to be scattered, with some speared by Aboriginal men, and the stock horses driven 'into the mud flats where they got bogged and they [Aboriginal people] cut off the manes and tails for hair belts' (N. Green 1988: 12). The remaining sheep were eventually sold off to the Halls Creek miners.

Clements (1998) discusses allocation of land in the Kimberley and argues that the 'key to understanding the early acquisition of land is to split the focus equally between acquisition of land and control over access to water' (Clements 1998: n.p.). She details changes over time to the regulations for the often-corrupt allocation of land and stock rights, tenure and development of pastoral stations. There were also bids for the 'establishment of a mission station where they could have the natives congregated together at some spot, instead of rambling about the country, endangering the lives and property of pioneers, and making raids upon their flocks' (Clements 1998: n.p.).

Pastoral expansion into the Napier and Oscar Ranges in the late nineteenth century was met with violent confrontation by Aboriginal groups, who were able to 'harry the stations and their flocks, and then retreat to the rugged limestone ranges where pursuit or tracking

²⁵³ 'A townsite is established at Fitzroy Crossing named Wallaberi and blocks are selling' (Boab Festival 1968: 13) extracted from the 1902–04 *West Australian Year Book* and published in the Boab Festival program.

was near impossible' (Hawke 2013: 35). This resistance was led by a Bunuba man, Jandamarra, also known to the pastoralists as Pigeon during the 1890s.²⁵⁴

Each station manager dealt with Aboriginal workers (Fig. 5.12) differently and for many stations the downtime during the wet season allowed Aboriginal people to gather for Law time. In the East Kimberley people moved between stations, from Christmas Creek to Noonkanbah to Jubilee to Cherrabun for ceremony (Hawke 2013: 62). Gordon Broughton, a station worker in the 1920s, commented:

The basic philosophy of the stockmen living in the Kimberley 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 a simple and as brutal as that. (Broughton in Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 53–4)

The Aborigines Act 1905 had bound Aboriginal people to stations under a permit system and they were unable to move freely. Hawke (2013) provides an example from Leopold Downs Station in 1936, where there had been an altercation between Aboriginal workers and a new station manager. This manager returned to the stockyard with a rifle, as he explained, to shoot a bullock, and he reported the next morning that 'all the natives had left during the night, and as he could not work the cattle without the natives he decided to abandon the muster' (Hawke 2013: 42). On reporting this 'walk off' to the Fitzroy police, police trackers were sent to find the 'runaways' and some were 'persuaded to return' (Hawke 2013: 43). The police report to the Chief Protector of Aborigines noted:

Whatever faults of [the manager], which may have contributed towards making the natives run away will I am sure be rectified in the future as he quite realises that if he cannot get the natives to work for him, his own services will soon be dispensed with by the station owners as they can run the station without him but not without the natives.

(Chief Protector in Hawke 2013: 43)

²⁵⁴ For a detailed history of this resistance, see *Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance* (Pedersen & Worrundmurra 1995).



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Fig. 5.12: Aboriginal children branding a calf at Moola Bulla Station

Photographer: A.O. Neville (1875–1954)

13cm x 18cm

photographic print, black & white

Call number 733B/176

Batty Library, State Library of Western Australia

The pastoral industry was to have a far-reaching influence on Aboriginal people's cultural and artistic practices. On the introduction of new animals, Stanton (2008) makes clear that with:

the resulting art, dance and story telling, non-Indigenous people often fail to listen well enough, or to learn enough, to grasp the meaning of that they are seeing. Men dressed as bullocks, for example, 'become' what they are. (Stanton 2008: n.p.)

Trigger (2008) points to the 1938 photographs by anthropologist Helmut Petri of men decorated for dances that represent cattle mustering and who mimic the behaviour of bullocks (Petri in Trigger 2008: 643). He argues that elsewhere, for example, to the south, the Pilbara dances represent 'horses, donkey, cattle and mouse' (Trigger 2008: 637). In the east, in the Gulf Country, where there has been extensive long-term pastoralism, domesticated horses, cattle and dogs have:

become enmeshed with the culture that Aboriginal people have inherited from their forebears ... considerable articulation of an intimate knowledge about which areas are suited to cattle, the significance of waterholes for stock, necessary fence lines ...

(Trigger 2008: 633)

Importantly, Trigger argues that this construction of 'complex' identity incorporates flexible visions of what 'belongs' and therefore:

selective embracing of introduced species into traditional law and custom could be regarded as an exemplar as to how the reproduction of traditional rights and interests in land accommodates cultural change. (Trigger 2008: 641)

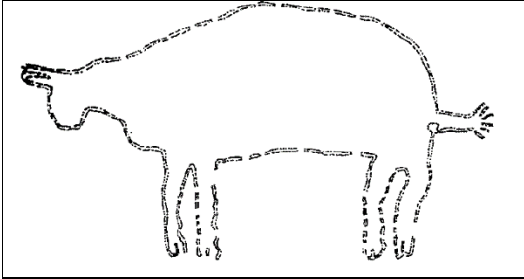


Fig. 5.13a: Rock art: white outline painting at Kaljapi produced by Paddy Carlton's father (figure 340 cm nose to tail) (Mulvaney, 1996: 16).



Fig. 5.13b: Detail of an incised boab nut with image a bullock
Broome, 1916
L 210mm x W 140mm x D 130mm
Dr. Herbert Basedow Collection
NMA 1985.0060.0807
<http://collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/object/11582>

The performances and depiction of these introduced animals allows for placing them within the Law with the appropriate relationship to groups of Aboriginal people, as well as delivering 'instruction' of how to deal with introduced species and in this case the eventual method of killing the bullock. As Mulvaney (1996) relates the background to the Kaljapi rock art figure (Fig. 5.13a):

According to Paddy, his father painted this and recounts the story of how, when these animals first appeared, people had trouble killing them outright. In one case the wounded bullock was following into the gorge associated with Kaljapi, eventually collapsing near the site. The painting of the bullocky image on the ceiling the shelter was done as a means for people to recount this event. (Mulvaney 1996: 15)

Trigger (2008) also notes the *kundu* masks collected by Norman Tindale in 1953 near Port Hedland and held in the South Australian Museum. These masks included representations of 'donkeys, milking cows, mules' (Cubillo in Trigger 2008: 637) and are made of kerosene tins and other materials. The introduction of large mammals, horses, cattle, bullocks, donkeys, sheep, camels²⁵⁵ and goats was enduringly recorded across Kimberley art in rock shelters and on the then-contemporary boab nuts (Fig 5.13b) and the representation of these introduced species in performance had a didactic purpose.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Camels were introduced into the Kimberley by the Afghan cameleers, who spread north supplying stations 'mostly west of the Wyndham-Halls Creek road, and on the north of the Fitzroy River basin' (Elkin 1929: 9).

²⁵⁶ See Layton (1992: 49-51) for a discussion on the didactic purposes of rock art.

It is this narration as both historical and ongoing lived experience and as belonging to 'country' that is observed in both rock art and later incised boab nuts, especially those created by Jack Wherra, with realistic landscape scenes on boab nuts developing from the 1940s. Wherra's boab nuts are inscribed with narratives of contact and conflicts with settlers, intra-Aboriginal conflicts in missions and ration stations, and the introduction of practices such as gambling and Christianity. As Jebb (2012) comments (see Fig. 5.14):

These stories traverse the edge of historical imagination, oral history and memory. Wherra who did not read or write, created his own visual narrative code, or vernacular historical language to communicate significant and sometimes challenging elements of his culture and autobiography and his people's history. (Jebb 2012: n.p.)

Image not
available
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig. 5.14: Boab nut depicting cattle spearing
Jack Wherra
Derby, unknown
L 187mm x W 105mm x D 105mm
X 101237
Museum Victoria
<https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/items/1118328>

As early as 1903 a newspaper report linked art production with cattle spearing and imprisonment. Mr. Sach of Albury, New South Wales, intending to exhibit two boab nuts and a number of Kimberley points in 1903, noted these were produced by 'blackfellows

when detailed in Derby gaol, for cattle spearing' (Albury Banner and Wodonga Express 1903: 38). It was reported that these items were from Cambridge Gulf and included:

Two boab nuts are about four inches long by three and a-half broad; they are of a rich brown colour, but when slightly cut reveal a white second skin. The nuts have been decorated by drawings of alligators, turtles, starfishes, a steamer, and the letters G.H.T., the latter being copied from an old newspaper.

(Sach in Albury Banner and Wodonga Express 1903: 38)

The depletion of the natural food resources due to the introduced cattle and sheep was noted in 1910 by James Isdell, the travelling Inspector of Aborigines, and he argued for the establishment of an Aboriginal reserve as a means to reduce stock killing and the resultant imprisonment of Aboriginal men (N. Green 1997: 72). Two years after the establishment of Moola Bulla, the Kimberley inmates in the Broome gaol were reduced from 47 to eight prisoners and those in the gaol in Wyndham from 97 to no prisoners; however, the police practice of only arresting the actual cattle killers instead of the whole group, including witnesses, also would have contributed to these huge reductions (N. Green 1997: 73–4). The link between imprisonment and art practice is made later in the chapter and in particular with regard to Jack Wherra's boab nut carving (Jebb 2008).

In 1929, the anthropologist A.P. Elkin²⁵⁷ in his article in *The Sydney Mail*, reporting on his 1927–28 fieldwork in the Kimberley, described the kinds of spear that Aboriginal men used to kill cattle and their skill in material innovation:

A long spear pointed with a narrow lance-shaped piece of iron proves very effective against kangaroo, and, incidentally, also cattle. This is termed a shovel-spear. It is almost *impossible* for a black [sic] to pass a piece of bottle, wire, or iron without appropriating it.

The wonderful thing is how the 'bush' black, using only crude stone implements, can cut and fashion galvanised or other iron into the required shape ... [and] when matters concerned with their economic or ceremonial life are concerned, as all will vouch who have seen them sitting for hour after hour making a weapon, a ceremonial or sacred wooden object. Moreover, they are not just content with making the article effective or of the right form; but, in most tribes, add certain grooving or carving, according to the traditional pattern of the tribe.

(Elkin 1929: 9)

²⁵⁷ Elkin collected a number of artefacts, including six incised boab nuts during his Kimberley field trip in 1927–28 (NMA 1985.0073.0042-1985.0073.047).

Elkin (1929) also comments on the meat-slaughtering industry in Wyndham, established in 1919, describing it as depressed²⁵⁸ and that:

some cattlemen say that if the stations did not have the blacks [sic] to do the bulk of the work, but had to employ whites for everything, they could hardly carry on.

(Elkin 1929: 8)

Elkin further noted in his travels from Wyndham south to the government station at Moola Bulla²⁵⁹ between pastoral stations with A.O. Neville,²⁶⁰ the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia, that: 'Each station had a few stock boys etc., but tribal laws etc., are almost a thing of the past. There appear to be no bush blacks, or else very few' (Elkin in Gray 1997: 35).

In contrast to cattle production, agriculture was initially a small industry and included local food production at sites for shipping anchorage and restocking, or attached to missions and settlements. For example, at Kalumburu, the crops included peanuts, beans, sorghum and pawpaw (Crawford 2001: 249). In the 1920s both the Catholic and Presbyterian missionaries explored the idea of commercial crops, for example, cotton and peanuts (Crawford 2001: 195, 209–10). By the early 1930s, however, cattle and sheep had failed in the marginal pastoral lands and these stations began to grow crops of peanuts and sandalwood (Jebb 2002: 75, 132), with the push for irrigated agriculture on the Ord River supported by pastoralists, including the Duracks. With post-war reconstruction underway, the Western Australian Government proposed the Ord River irrigation scheme, which was approved in 1947 (Lane 2003: 44–5).

Skyring (2012) argues that the pastoral industry in the mid-twentieth century was being sustained by a combination of low labour costs, low pastoral lease rents, and the misappropriation of Aboriginal peoples' old-age pension payments (Skyring 2012: 154–5). As early as 1949 this misappropriation was being observed, Derby District Officer Pullen reported that he had been told that 'the stations were supporting hundreds of aged and indigent [Aboriginal] people [but found] only 72 indigents were being fed, scattered over 12 stations, that is six a station' (Pullen in Hawke 2013: 68–9). The missions generally

²⁵⁸ Green (1997) notes in 1926 'about four hundred men and a hundred women made the annual pilgrimage north to the Wyndham meatworks for the killing season. When off shift they livened up the town keeping the police busy (N. Green 1997: 133).

²⁵⁹ Moola Bulla Native Station was run by the Department of Native Welfare and 'used as both a ration station, and an informal prison' (Hawke 2013: 53).

²⁶⁰ A.O. Neville was Chief Protector of Aborigines from 1915 to 1936 and then Commissioner for Native Affairs until 1940. He shaped government policy, in particular in amendments to the 1905 Aborigines Act (Haebich & Reece 1988).

treated their Aboriginal populations better, reporting to their religious organisations as well as to the government. For example, by 1965 the schedule of payments made to the United Aborigines Mission at Fitzroy Crossing was apportioning one-third of the pension funds into a cash payment to the pensioner, with the remainder payable to the mission (Hawke 2013: 115). The introduction of equal wages for pastoral station workers in 1968–69 and the use of mechanised equipment such as helicopters for mustering led to evictions from stations, which ultimately retained only a few stock workers (Skyring 2012: 153; Yu 1994: 19). The employment of Aboriginal women also declined as the employment of domestic workers was no longer economically viable.

The importance of pastoral history and station work in the artworks cannot be overestimated (Figs 5.15 & 5.16). As the historian Dick Kimber, a boab nut collector and donor to the boab nut collections of the National Museum of Australia, comments: ‘From the 1880s to 1970 depictions of cattle station life were also favoured: the rider on a bucking horse, free-running horses, and long-horned cattle were universal favourites’ (Kimber in Jorgensen 2013: 5). As previously discussed, the life and art of the Hermannsburg artist Albert Namatjira, who became celebrated for his Western-style landscapes, were portrayed on film in 1947. This film was shown in a number of Aboriginal communities during the 1950s and 1960s (R. Poignant 1995).²⁶¹ In it he painted and drew ‘scenes and incidents around him ... [including] the cattle yard, the stockmen with their horses, and the hunters after game’ (Jorgensen 2013: 5). In the Kimberley, the Mowanjumb artist Gordon Barunga tells of how:

every time I went mustering and I had nothing to draw with I would sit under a tree, a white gum tree, break a stick and lean in with my horse and start drawing on the bark of the tree. (G. Barunga in Kimberley Aboriginal Artists & ABC Open 2015: 55)

The boab nut artist and painter Alan Griffiths also painted from the history of his station life in 1940s (Fig. 5.17a), and the Walmajarri artist Jimmy Pike has illustrated a number of popular books written with his wife, Pat Lowe, recording his early life (Fig. 5.17b).²⁶² After the Second World War, Pike, then an adolescent, went to live on Cherrabun Station and it was the first time he had seen fences, windmills, houses and cars (Lowe & Pike

²⁶¹ Axel Poignant made the 1947 film, and it was his widow Rosyln Poignant who wrote the 1995 article.

²⁶² The Lowe and Pike books include *Jilji – Life in the Great Sandy Desert* (1990), *Yinti Desert Child* (1992), *Desert Dog* (1997) and *Jimmy and Pat Meet the Queen* (1997).

2000: 117). Later he worked on a number of cattle stations, farms and building sites, and he learnt to drive a car and tractors and attended Pundulmurra College in Port Hedland to learn welding and mechanics (Lowe & Pike 2000: 117). Other boab nut artists including Billy Lewis and Patrick Mung Mung also produced artwork that reflected upon their life on cattle stations.



Fig. 5.15: *Whiteman's Justice*²⁶³
 Jack Wherra
 Mowanjum, c. 1963–66
 L 200mm x W 105mm
 Jack Wherra Collection No. 1
 NMA 2003.0057.0001
 Photo: Jason McCarthy, NMA



Fig. 5.16: *Stockmen at a Rodeo*
 The other side depicts a long-horned steer being roped.
 Northern Western Australia, c. 1969
 L 150mm x W 90mm
 Lang Private Collection

²⁶³ NMA description: A tremolo engraved unpainted boab nut decorated with three rows of inscribed scenes in a series of frames, like a cartoon. Each caption below describes a frame, which are indicated as f.1, f.2 etc. Top row; f.1; an affair discovered, f.2; watching for police, f.3; the police patrol, f.4; the ambush of police. Central row; f.1; spearing the rival of husband, f.2; hanging the murderer, f.3; shooting of an Aboriginal by a whiteman, f.4; hanging the whiteman. Bottom row; f.1; snake, f.2; two blue-tongue lizards, and f.3; echidna. 'JACK WHERRA' is engraved around the top.

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Fig. 5.17a: *Branding Cattle*²⁶⁴ 2015
Alan Griffiths
56cm x 70 cm
ochre pigments on paper
(Kimberley Aboriginal Artists 2015: 41)

Fig. 5.17b: Book illustration by Jimmy Pike
Desert Cowboy 2000
Jimmy Pike
(Lowe & Pike 2000: 66)

The pearling industry and its impact

Crawford summarises the seasonal movement of the Wunambal, indicating that marine resources account for two-thirds of the annual food economy:

In May, there was a general migration south, with reliance on island and riverine resources such as tubers; the land was burnt, hunting took place, and the seas were closed by the south-east trade winds. In September, there was migration to coastal regions, and, especially in the following two months, heavy reliance on fish, stingray and shellfish resources. In November, the northern Wunambal and Gambre[re] made their way north. With the coming of the wet season in December–January, they started to exploit the islands and reefs of the Institut Archipelago, taking large fish, dugong and turtles, and this continues until April. (Crawford in Smyth 2007: 14)

The pearl shell that was collected during seasonal low tide gathering was used for phalacrotyps, neck pendants and for the rain-bringing ceremony (Akerman & Stanton 1994; Mountford & Harvey 1938: 119–26). Mountford and Harvey (1938) mentions that Martin and Panter, during their exploration of the Glenelg River in the 1860s, noted the pearl shell's use as ornaments suspended from a waistband; Campbell reported them at Sunday Island in 1914 as being worn during initiation, and later Love recorded Worora men and women wearing them attached to waistbands, necklets and forehead ornaments (Mountford

²⁶⁴ Caption for Figure 5.17a: 'That's the Wallaby Springs open muster camp. No fences. Just stockman holding cattle in one place. Sometime around 1940's [sic] at VRD station. We used to brand'em, Tie'em up, rope in the neck and through the fork of a tree branch, tie'em back leg, front leg. Brand'em and let'em go. Muster'em up again the next day' (Griffiths in Kimberley Aboriginal Artists 2015: 40).

& Harvey 1938: 115–16). The pearl shells noted by Campbell were ‘richly ornamented’ rather than plain pearl shells and he claimed a ceremonial connection (Campbell in Mountford & Harvey 1938: 116), not unlike Basedow’s observation on boab nuts that: ‘Occasionally these nuts are introduced into ceremonial dances by the men; they are then elaborately and beautifully carved’ (Basedow 1925: 374). Perez (1977) records that at Kalumburu mission only ceremonial objects were decorated, while other similar everyday items were not (Perez 1977: 63; see also von Brandenstein 1972: 223). Peggs (1903), an English woman living on a station at Roebuck Bay between 1898 and 1901, wrote that:

In the midst of them was a man wearing what my husband told me was a girdle of chastity, in the form of a large pearl oyster shell decorated with a sort of key-pattern, the pattern scratched in with a pointed nail and *wilgy* rubbed in until the shell has the appearance of being inlaid. (Peggs 1903: 327)²⁶⁵

Similar to the pastoral industry, the foundation of the Kimberley pearling industry was facilitated through the enforced participation of Aboriginal people. Forty years earlier, after the arrival of pastoralists in the Roebuck district, the Aboriginal method of beachcombing and collecting shells at low tide was utilised and: ‘there was no shortage of experienced shell-gatherers when flour was offered as an inducement but an even more persuasive article was tobacco’ (Bain 1982: 16).²⁶⁶ The pearl shell collected was the nacre-producing *Pinctada maxima* which was ‘appreciated’ for the large shell size therefore being more economic in manufacturing (Gregory & Gregory 1884: 73). The global interest in mother-of-pearl buttons, accessories and furniture inlay expanded the north-west pearling industry from 10 boats in 1868 (Durack 1969: 11) to 48 vessels in the early 1870s, which collected in 1,874, 275 tonnes of pearl shell (Bain 1982: 23). Aboriginal crewmen were ‘paid’: ‘a shirt, a pair of trousers and a blanket each at the commencement and end of a season with weekly rations of flour, tea, sugar and one plug of tobacco when at sea’ (Bain 1982: 28). A decade later the crewmen received between 10 shillings and one pound per month and ‘1/2 pound of meat each day and tea and sugar with every meal’ (Durack 1969: 143). In contrast, the industry raised over £100,000 a year between 1886 and 1890 (Battye 1924: 364).

Between 1847 and 1897 over 1000 indentured Chinese men came to Western Australia, with approximately 18 per cent of these working in the north in occupations such as shop

²⁶⁵ This key pattern is the interlocking design discussed in Chapter 3. Peggs notes that *wilgy* is a mixture of red sand and fat, and is also used in their hair to denote mourning (Peggs 1903: 338).

²⁶⁶ The 1871 Pearl Shell Fishery Regulation Act was an attempt to protect Aboriginal people from the practice of blackbirding and abuse (Yu 1999: 60).

and boarding-house keepers, cooks, market gardeners and station workers (Choo 1995: 94). In 1907, Father Bischoff, acting superior at the Pallottine's Beagle Bay mission, writing to the Aborigines Department reported that:

At different times in the year about 200 pearling luggers come into Beagle Bay for water and firewood and about 100 lay up for repairs within 20 miles of it and remain there for the whole wet season. Each boat has a crew of about five Japanese, Malays and Manilamen ...

(Bischoff in Durack 1969: 163) (Fig. 5.18)

As pearl shells became rare in the shallow water, the Aboriginal divers, according to Sickert, were:

beaten and were forced to hang by their hands in the rigging all night if they refused to dive. Shark attack, drowning, fever, scurvy, blood poisoning, lung infections and extreme exertion were but some of the dangers faced by divers. From daybreak to sundown they repeatedly went down in search of shell, and if a diver spent too long regaining his or her breath, their knuckles would be rapped with a heavy wooden stick, and they would be forced to go down again.

(Sickert in Smyth 2007: 19)



Fig. 5.18: Pearling lugger crew
Broome, 1900
black & white negative
K1349 10148411
Australian News and Information Bureau
National Archives of Australia

The centre of the pearling industry transferred south to Broome and this expansion of the industry witnessed, by 1920, the population of Broome made up of over 2000 Chinese, Japanese, Malays and other workers, with a European population of 220 persons and over

300 vessels (Stuart 1923: 2).²⁶⁷ Ganter (2006) argues that the sheer number of non-European communities in the Kimberley led to changes in ‘pearling, trepanging, haulage by camel and hawking’ (Ganter 2006: 29). The value of pearls harvested in 1923 was £57,820 and the pearl shell was valued at £264,918 (Stuart 1923: 2).

Aboriginal women had always been part of the pearling industry, in the beginning as divers, and on shore as domestic workers, partners and mothers (Martínez 2011: 180). Coastal Aboriginal people often were killed as they attempted to jump ship as a result of being maltreated and with many women suffering abuse (Yu 1999: 60).²⁶⁸ Yu (1999) argues that some trade in women²⁶⁹ was ‘sanctioned’ for Asian crews: ‘Many of the older Aboriginal men also traded their young wives. In traditional Aboriginal society such exchange is culturally acceptable if payment is negotiated and given’ (Yu 1999: 62)

Eventually Aboriginal divers were replaced by indentured Asian divers using diving apparatus; however, Aboriginal people were still vital to the industry as boat crew, builders, shell processors, onshore storemen etc. (P. Smith 2000: 77). Broome was predominantly an Asian town, in which Aboriginal people worked, traded and socialised with Asian crews (Ganter 2006), and where cultural traditions were shared, although European colonial views remained strong. In 1970 Broome’s pearling industry introduced new diving methods and cultured pearls, and the Asian and Aboriginal workers started to receive award wages (Kaino 2005: 168). The complete abolishment of the White Australia Policy in 1973 meant that changes were made to immigration and the indentured system (Kaino 2005: 168). Images from Broome’s pearling history and images of ships and luggers have been depicted on boab nuts throughout the twentieth century (Figs 5.19 & 5.20).

²⁶⁷ For a detailed examination see ‘Asian Men on the West Kimberley Coast 1900–1940’ (Choo 1995).

²⁶⁸ Yu (1999) discusses ‘blackbirding’, the forced kidnapping of Aboriginal people to work in the pearling industry, and notes that the Fisheries Inspectors ‘ran trade markets on nearby islands in which Aboriginal divers were allocated to particular pearlers’ (Yu 1999: 60).

²⁶⁹ Redmond and Skyring (2010) note that there was also ‘trade’ in women through marriages to local non-Indigenous small-time pastoral owners/managers and stock workers, for example, in the 1920s the small station holders, Sahanna and Sultan, Indian cameleers, and classified as ‘Asiatic’ under the 1905 Act; and the Scottish-born men, Rust and Salmond, who were establishing Karunjie Station for the Duracks. These were illegal marriages to Aboriginal women with whom these men sought alliances with the local Aboriginal population as their workforce (Redmond & Skyring 2010).



Fig. 5.19: Pearling lugger
Broome, 1998
L 220mm x W 140mm
Lang Private Collection

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Fig. 5.20: Incised boab nut depicting a steamship²⁷⁰
[Northern Western Australia], c. 1910
Mr Robert Edwards, ex Christensen Fund
MV X9978
Museum Victoria
MV description: Elaborately carved nut of the Boab or
Bottle Tree with panels depicting an Aboriginal carrying a
bullock's head, an ocean liner and a light house. Ref 92/2

The mining industry and its impact

As mentioned previously, the discovery of gold in the 1880s heralded an influx of 2000 men from the Eastern states to the region now known as Wyndham and Halls Creek. In 1885 ships and steamers began to arrive, bringing men from New South Wales, Queensland and New Zealand, and between June and August 1886 'twenty-eight ships landed 2,260 passengers with their mining equipment and horses' (N. Green 1997: 56). The impact of such significant numbers of men led to hostility with local Aboriginal groups, resulting in punitive actions. Reports of gold finds from the Ord River country in *The West Australian* and *The Inquirer* raised general excitement throughout Australia (Battye 1924: 365) and, in conjunction with the establishment of pastoral properties and the pearling industry, meant that more Aboriginal people were incorporated into an unpaid workforce. These gold rushes were the first commodity boom in Kimberley history and led to industrial infrastructure such as railways, roads, and ports, and social infrastructure such as towns, hotels and community facilities. At Wyndham, shops and hotels were established to supply the miners on their way to the goldfields and in 1885 the first track linking the settlement to Halls Creek was established (Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley 2007: 8). By 1926 Wyndham had 'several stores, a Chinese tailor and Lee Tong's dry goods store, a

²⁷⁰ See Chapter 7 regarding early-twentieth century exceptions in the NMA collections, possibly through technical training on missions. Unable to be verified however it is possible the artist could be a mission staff member.

police station including lockup and staff quarters, courthouse, hospital and the imposing two storey hotel with its double verandah giving little shelter from the heat' (N. Green 1997: 132).

The minerals mined included the Yampi Sound iron ore by Australian Iron and Steel Co. in the 1930s, which was used domestically and was to be exported to Japan, before the Second World War meant that this was vetoed (Preston 1998: n.p.). One-hundred-and-thirty kilometres north of Derby, tons of iron ore were mined from Koolan and Cockatoo islands (Fig. 5.21) in Yampi Sound and there was a massive investment in the development of equipment for extraction and crushing, as well as in housing, refrigeration, bakery, ambulance stations, and barges and other vessels, totalling in excess of £100,000 (*The West Australian* 1945: 4). McKenzie²⁷¹ (1969) noted that the move from Kunmunya mission to Wotjulum²⁷² exposed the Aboriginal people to the white men from Cockatoo Island, who visited Wotjulum 'out of curiosity and most of the Aborigines deeply resented being stared at and patronized' (McKenzie 1969: 201). Later, bauxite deposits were discovered on the Mitchell Plateau, with 'the plant capacity of 900,000 tonnes per year being shipped out of Derby' (Preston 1998: n.p.); 10 per cent of the work force was Aboriginal (Preston 1998: n.p.).



Fig. 5.21: Mining iron ore, Cockatoo Island, Yampi Sound 1952
Photographer: W. Pederson
black & white negative
NAA A1200 L14856
National Archives of Australia

²⁷¹ Maisie McKenzie, OAM, was the wife of the Uniting Church Minister Doug McKenzie and has written a number of books on mission work including *Mission to Arnhem Land* (1976) and *Holy Mackerel! Rev. Doug & Maisie McKenzie, 20th century pilgrims* (2004).

²⁷² This is a reference to the Presbyterian mission established at Wotjulum in 1951, not the United Aborigines Mission for Aboriginal people removed from Sunday Island 1934–37.

Barrow Island was producing 25,000 barrels of oil a day in 1962 (McKenzie 1969: 261). The search for mineral wealth resulted in many visitors to the Kimberley, with Perez (1977) recording that in September 1964 at the still-remote Kalumburu: 'in the morning the French geologists, at noon, the Theda mob; in the afternoon four Doctors from Melbourne, who piloted their own Cessna, plus two sailors from Dolphina moored' (Perez 1977: 146).

At the end of the 1970s, the mining leases and oil exploration permits around Noonkanbah Station²⁷³ near Fitzroy Crossing were disputed in court. The Mining Act was upheld, with the court stating that: 'In coming to Australia, the white man brought this form of law. That law stands and cannot be over-ridden by moral or spiritual arguments' (Cook 2013: 39).

It was during this period that the Kimberley Land Council was formed to represent all Aboriginal communities in the West Kimberley (Blundell 2003: 170). Noonkanbah became the locus of important ceremony and political gatherings. The Kimberley Land Council gained union and church support, along with media coverage. At the high point of the dispute in August 1980:

a convoy of trucks under police protection, carrying mining equipment, was stopped by a crowd of local Aborigines, with black and white supporters, on the only road that gives access to Noonkanbah. (Moizo 2011: 4)

The diamond, oil and gas finds of the 1980s resulted in a boom economy in the Kimberley. The open pit, Argyle Diamond Mine, near Lissadell Station, was the largest producer of diamonds in the world by volume, supplying pink and coloured diamonds. Doohan (2007) explains the relationship of the Argyle diamonds to Country:

Aboriginal people's ability to talk to the Barramundi (by way of performance, song, body paint) and the Barramundi's ability to talk to some of the local Aboriginal people (as embodied smoke and the presence of 'more' diamonds) clearly demonstrate that the Barramundi, at Argyle, is not some external phenomenon that has to be placated. Rather the Barramundi is a fellow traveller in life. She is embedded in the landscape and embodied in smoke and diamonds. Although the Barramundi exists in a different 'space' from that of Aborigines and Miners at Argyle, she engages with them in the contemporary context of an operating diamond mine, their country. (Doohan 2007: 200)

²⁷³ This station was the site of 'walk out' by local Yungngora community, originally made up of Nyikina people in the late nineteenth century and then joined by Walmajarri people in the early twentieth century. Due to appalling management, all the Aboriginal people left the station one night in August 1981 with the help of relatives from Fitzroy Crossing (Moizo 2011: 2). Eventually this led to the formation of the Kimberley Land Council in 1978.

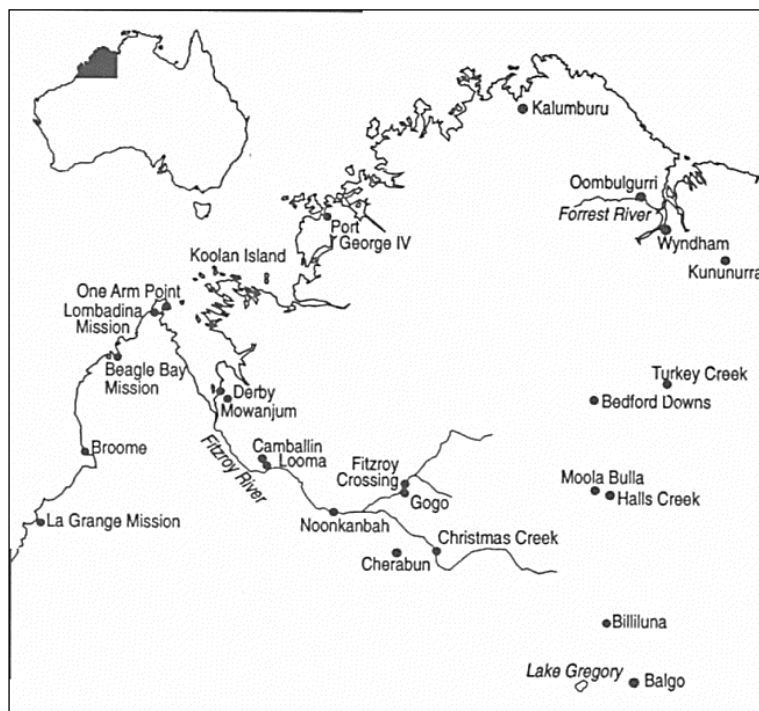
The mining industry in the Kimberley and elsewhere has destroyed or damaged sacred sites, the links between significant sites, and the associated rock art. It has removed access to these sites for many Aboriginal people. It allows inappropriate people such as miners etc. to visit these sites, which are often gender-associated (O’Faircheallaigh 2008: 32–3). The additional road infrastructure allows tourists and their cameras to travel into remote areas, and rock art images are also used/appropriated in travel advertising, as well as by pastoral owners (Blundell 2003: 170). As O’Faircheallaigh (2008) states, mining development requires a ‘balancing act’ and that:

Aboriginal people are not standing in the way of development but neither are they intent on peddling their heritage in return for material benefits provided by developers. They are driven by needs and ambitions that are part material, part cultural and spiritual.

(O’Faircheallaigh 2008: 33)

The impact of missions and the beginnings of an ‘arts industry’

Towards the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries missions were established, both Catholic and Protestant: the former at Balgo, Beagle Bay, Kalumburu, LaGrange and Lombadina and the latter at Forrest River, Kunmunya, Mt. Barnett Station and Sunday Island. The government settlements of Moola Bulla, Munja and Violet Valley were also established (Clements 1991; Lang 1999; Yu 1994).



Map 5.4: Settlements and missions established in the Kimberley (N. Green 1997: 10).

In many areas, the displacement of Aboriginal people from their land or their exclusion from their ancient patterns of food gathering meant that they became more dependent upon pastoralists and missions to various degrees, according to opportunity and policy. The movement of people from their land meant they were unable to maintain their cultural obligations and, for example, at Fitzroy Crossing and Warmun, prompted the introduction of ‘desert art’ into these communities with an influx of people from the south with different language and art styles (Berndt 1979: 5; Stanton 1986a; Akerman 1993). Lane (2003) makes an important point about the different groups located together in ration camps, a point that could equally be made for other congregating sites: that ‘the wet season became characterised by a different pattern of social relations, as family groups travelled in different directions and joined with other groups independently of those they resided within the ration camps’ (Lane 2003: 70).

The history of missionary settlement in the Kimberley started in the latter half of the nineteenth century but more enduring contact was made after 1900. For example, Presbyterian missionaries at Port George IV²⁷⁴ made contact with the local Aboriginal group in December 1912 and:

The visiting party exchanged artifacts for European items. Their visit was followed by those of other Aborigines, some of whom were recruited to work on the mission grounds. Aborigines increasingly came to the mission to obtain European goods and for treatment of various sores, infections and injuries. (Blundell 1980: 105)

In return, the Worora gave gifts of hair girdles and ornaments, spear heads and kangaroo meat (McKenzie 1969: 26).

Kunmunya Mission records show large variations in the numbers of residents²⁷⁵ and Reverend J.R. Love²⁷⁶ recorded ‘substantial ethnographic data’ and made many photographs during the 1930s (Blundell 1980: 105). In 1936 Love also donated artefacts to the British Museum,²⁷⁷ noting that:

²⁷⁴ Port George IV mission eventually moved to Kunmunya, then Wotjulum, from there to Old Mowanjum mission and eventually to the current Mowanjum community.

²⁷⁵ This variation in numbers is associated with traditional patterns of mobility centered around the times of year and ceremony.

²⁷⁶ James Robert (Bob) Love, 1889–1947, was superintendent from 24 August 1927 to early 1940. Love had worked previously at Port George Mission in 1914 (Love 1986: n.p.).

²⁷⁷ Regarding a raft sent to the British Museum, Love noted the unfortunate improvement by the maker of the use of iron wire on the poles thus ‘tainting’ the raft with a lack of authenticity (Sculthorpe 2015: 230).

The government of Western Australia does not forbid the export of these objects but does forbid their export without official permission ... [and the] somewhat exasperating attitude of the Government departments makes such collecting less pleasant.

(Love in Sculthorpe 2015: 230)

Love permitted people to visit their Wandjina sites, and hunting wildlife was encouraged allowing the preservation of many customary practices (Jebb & MAC 2008: v).

Many Aboriginal people were ‘converts’ to Christianity and, as Mowaljarlai (1993), who was born at Kunmunya around 1930, remembers:

My father and my grandparents were among the early mission converts, but they also stayed in their old culture. My father, Micky Dirrgal, was a big boss man, a spokesman at ceremonies and a counsellor at offerings, at sacrifices and marriage ceremonies.

He was a peacemaker who would talk all night. He counselled reason with stories and parables. Before a dispute was taken up, they always danced first, they had a corroboree to remember the stories of the Law – and to let off steam...

He was also a church elder, concerned to bring the tribal and the Christian teachings together, to bring our kids to Christianity, to give them both, our culture and our church.

(Mowaljarlai in Mowaljarlai & Malnic 1993: 107–8)²⁷⁸

At Kunmunya, under Reverend Love, young people were encouraged to learn hunting and food-gathering skills, at the same time as mustering and branding cattle and horse and donkey handling; gardening²⁷⁹ skills were also taught (Mowaljarlai & Malnic 1993: 108–19). Leatherwork was taught for making saddles, straps, lassos and leg ropes (Mowaljarlai & Malnic 1993: 113), and carpentry classes produced cupboards, stools and tables (McKenzie 1969: 125). The mission children drew and it was recorded that ships and stock horses were ‘particularly well executed’ (Love 1936: 120). This mission population moved south to Wotjulum and then to the Mowanjum Mission, Derby, in the 1950s. Their art practices will be discussed in Chapter 6.

In the North-east Kimberley, the first attempt at a mission at Forrest River failed, due to hostile relations with the local Aboriginal group, although 1913 saw a final attempt to re-establish the mission. The port nearest to Forrest River, Wyndham, was unlike the West Kimberley pearling centres, it catered for miners who flocked from the eastern states to the

²⁷⁸ Watty Nyerdu (Ngerdu), then a teenager, became a church elder, and later a well-known artist at Mowanjum (Mowaljarlai & Malnic 1993: 115).

²⁷⁹ Mowaljarlai recalls tomatoes, cabbage, watermelons, and pumpkins (Mowaljarlai & Malnic 1993: 113).

Kimberley goldfields and it was this increased influx of transitory men that provoked hostile responses from local Aboriginal people. After the mining boom died down, the growing cattle industry of the north-east of Australia expanded into the Kimberley and was exporting stock offshore. In 1913 Wyndham's population was made up of 23 Europeans, a few Chinese and Afghans, and a number of Aboriginal prisoners in the regional prison (N. Green 1988: 13). Green (1988) reports that by 1913 Japanese ships were 'regularly loading live cattle for the Philippines' (N. Green 1988: 14).

Both the missionaries and materials for the mission came through Wyndham, and by the end of 1913:

Work on the mission house was speeded up. Spy holes and rifle slits were cut in the iron walls to convert the hut into a fortress if a massed assault came. Aboriginal attacks increased and the remaining three whites and the Manila men lived in constant fear.

(N. Green 1988: 15)

Eventually, relations were restored, and in 1922 Bishop Trower on a visit to the Forrest River Mission reported that men, women and children made an offering to God:

And what a collection! – spears and spearheads (flint), painted woomeras, head ornaments of feathers, etc. spun goat's yarn and kangaroo corroboree ornaments. There were handed to me to sell for the Cathedral fund, and I hope to do a good trade with the American astronomers due here on their way to Wallal to see the eclipse.

(Trower in N. Green 1988: 38)

Less than two years later, the Chief Protector A.O. Neville²⁸⁰ established the Munja government ration station to prevent the ongoing hostilities over stock, and police were used to remove Aboriginal groups 'from the pastoral leases, destroying their dogs and spears, and arresting leaders or individual trouble makers' (Jebb 2002: 74).

Father Joseph Bischoff, from Beagle Bay Mission, in his 1907 report to Aborigines Department notes that:

About 300 natives are under the influence of the mission. Of these about 200 only visit it from time to time and then go back to their camps, but the remaining 100 live with us always.

(Bischoff in Durack 1969: 162)

Vegetables and rice, and meat (Durack 1969: 143) were given to these visitors daily, with the Aboriginal people reciprocating with gifts of bush honey, shells and other items (Perez 1977: 16). Meanwhile, Father Nicholas Emo, a Trappist monk who stayed on at Beagle Bay after his fellow monks returned to France, was collecting and then selling artefacts

²⁸⁰ Neville visited Munja in 1928 with A.P. Elkin (Jebb & MAC 2008: 65) as discussed later in this chapter.

from Dampierland men who ‘gladly bartered their handiwork for tobacco, sugar and tea’ (Durack 1969: 182). He was also gifting weapons confiscated from men and women on the mission to other Kimberley settlers, for example, the Peggs in Roebuck Bay had been given an: ‘almost a complete collection of native weapons ... many of them stained with blood, and were actually taken by the Father from the natives when fighting’ (Peggs 1903: 350).²⁸¹

In May 1906, on a visit to the Kimberley from Perth, Abbot Torres reported that the monks encouraged art activities and supplied easels and canvas to men who were interested (Perez 1977: 23). Around the same time in 1914, to the east, in Arnhem Land, Baldwin Spencer commissioned 50 large bark paintings from Oenpelli in the rock art style. As increasing fieldwork was undertaken by academic anthropologists, a number of other artworks were commissioned from the Central Desert and Arnhem Land regions (Newstead 2014: 101), establishing the beginnings of bark painting production. In the Kimberley by 1929, the decision to develop small communal industries was made (Durack 1969: 224) due to the over-hunting of local kangaroos and, as ‘the natives [sic] are forbidden to fish in the creeks’ (Alroe 1988: 35), a lack of food resources and the necessity to fund the difference.

The importance of such exchange is illustrated at the Anglican Forrest River Mission, established in 1913 near Wyndham, as ‘spears, shields and dilly-bags etc, were received in exchange for tobacco, and work was done’ (Gribble 1930: 155). Missions and government ration stations were to become a site for exchange in some cultural practices as groups of Aboriginal people were forced into living together. For example, Elkin in his 1929 newspaper report mentions that at Forrest River²⁸² with over 100 Aboriginal people, the ‘majority are children, about a third of whom are half-castes [sic] gathered from the Eastern Kimberley’ (Elkin 1929: 8), a large area with many different language groups.

²⁸¹ The collection given to the Peggs included women’s fighting sticks, a carrying stick for the *pingyn* (wooden cradle), head decorations, charms, and polished turtles’ shells (Peggs 1903: 350–1).

²⁸² Forrest River, near Wyndham, is the site of the last recorded massacre, in 1926, which was still within the lived experience of artists in the later twentieth century.

At Kunmunya, labour was exchanged for tobacco, bread, porridge, rice and tea (Love 1936: 31–2). At the same time, Reverend Love, the Superintendent and amateur anthropologist at Kunmunya near Derby, observed the traditional trading during the ceremonial gatherings, recording the process as:

Mission men, being the plutocrats of the Aboriginal world, having tobacco and flour which they got as rations for work done, or bought with their scalps of turtle shell, may place in a heap a part of the bag of flour, or several sticks of tobacco. (Love 1936: 191)

As mentioned in Chapter 3, it was in 1927 that Reverend George Homes,²⁸³ the Industrial Assistant at the mission, gave pearl shell carving lessons to some of the young men, most notably Alan Mungulu, who was to be a major artist of decorated boab nuts, pearl shell and emu eggs at Mowanjum in the 1960–1970s (McKenzie 1969: 135).

After the Depression a number of missions in central and western Australia encouraged ‘the production of craft for sale to a wider market and provided major collections for museums in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne’ (Morphy 1998: 27). Scientific interest in Aboriginal people intensified attention on the collection of Aboriginal curios. For example, while at Kunmunya in 1933, Henry Balfour, the first curator of the Pitt River Museum in England, had commissioned artefacts and donated them to the British Museum (Jebb & MAC 2008: 78).²⁸⁴ Mission staff encouraged the bartering of these objects for tobacco, tea and sugar (Durack 1969: 182; Worms 1970: 372). Worms (1970) noted that, at Beagle Bay, ‘honey, weapons, shells and bush fruit [were exchanged for] sugar, hair oil (strongly perfumed), tobacco, toys and other commodities’ (Worms 1970: 372). As Rowse (1998) notes for central Australia, the sale of painted and carved wooden artworks to visitors to the Finke River Mission enabled people to get that ‘little extra flour, tea and sugar so much coveted by most of them’ (Rowse 1998: 90).

After the Presbyterian Mission’s move to Wotjulum in 1951, the carved shells and incised boab nuts were sold to tourists and visitors (Jebb & MAC 2008: 78), and a potentially viable artefact industry was being established. At Wotjulum, the Acting Superintendent, in correspondence to the Commissioner of Native Affairs, wrote that Alan Mungulu could be self-supporting, making mother of pearl jewellery for sale and realising around £5 per week (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 150–1). Jebb and MAC (2008) note that, with the increased child endowment payments to the mission, people received cash wages, and

²⁸³ Homes had learnt this skill while in northern Queensland (McKenzie 1969: 135).

²⁸⁴ Some footage from this documentary of the Worora and Ngarinyin people is held in the Museum Victoria (National Film and Sound Archive 2007: 56).

‘each worker opened a bank account’ (Jebb & MAC 2008: 78), and could buy goods at the community store. The jobs of the Aboriginal people included truck and tractor driving, lugger skipper and team, woodworkers and bread cooks, amongst others (Jebb & MAC 2008: 78).²⁸⁵ Eventually Wotjulum failed due to lack of water, devastating cyclones, and a decline in staffing. The Presbyterian Church offered to provide some funding to move to the Mowanjum site, near Derby; this move took place in 1956 (Jebb & MAC 2008: 80). The history of Mowanjum community and their art practice will be discussed later in Chapter 6.

The Sunday Island mission (Figs 5.22a & 5.22b) was closed in 1957 and the Bardi people were moved to Derby. Green reports that:

The time spent in Derby for the Bardi and Djawi people of the Buccaneer Archipelago was a time of great unhappiness. Living on a town reserve at the edge of the salt flats, many people were for the first time exposed to alcohol and boredom. The lack of fish (the previous dietary staple), the number of sandflies and mosquitoes, inadequate housing and being away from their traditional homeland, promoted their move back to Sunday Island in 1967, and then to One Arm Point in 1972. (N. Green in Smyth 2007: 20–1)



Fig. 5.22a: Elkin’s 1929 newspaper article photograph of Sunday Island Mission Buildings [detail]
Note the buildings and palm trees in front centre and right
The Sydney Mail, Wednesday 13 February 1929
Photographer: A.P. Elkin 1927
(Elkin 1927: 8)

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Fig. 5.22b: Incised boab nut depicting houses believed to be the Sunday Island Mission²⁸⁶
L 160mm x W 95mm x D 85mm
Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection
NMA 1985.0073.0044
<http://collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/object/15936>

²⁸⁵ Jebb and MAC (2008) note the employment of the well-known boab nut artists in the 1960–1970s employment: Albert Barunga was the lugger skipper, Alan Mungulu and Locky Nollier ‘were carvers and teachers’ (Jebb & MAC 2008: 78).

²⁸⁶ Elkin was on Sunday Island in late 1927 or early 1928 and he records he spent nearly six months ‘between La Grange, eighty five miles south of Broome, and Sunday Island’ (Gray 1997: 33), followed by visits to Walcott Inlet, Port George IV, Forrest River and Wyndham (Gray 1997: 33).

The government ration station of Moola Bulla, near Halls Creek, was established in 1910 and gazetted as an Aboriginal reserve. This station was seen as a 'peace settlement' and an economic solution for the government, as many Aboriginal people outside the pastoral and mission systems were incarcerated in prison (Olive Pink Society 1994: 15). The Aboriginal people residing at Moola Bulla were under strict control and were known as 'inmates' (Olive Pink Society 1994: 15). It wasn't until the 1950s that some workers were paid wages,²⁸⁷ and in 1955 the station was sold and many of the Aboriginal people trucked out to Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing (Hawke 2013: 94). Seventy-five inmates of Moola Bulla, 30 of them children, were initially admitted to the United Aborigines Mission at Fitzroy Crossing in July 1955 (Hawke 2013: 94). Hawke (2013) reports a missionary at the time recorded that:

the truck that came a couple of days later, they were on that truck as thick as they could stick. Every available spot was taken up with someone hanging on, either sitting of the bonnet or on the hood on the top, or else sat in ... The man who brought them, he left straight away to come back for another load ... I think it was over a period of about two weeks, they finally all came in. It was about a hundred and fifty, plus the number that was already here. (unnamed missionary in Hawke 2013: 94)

The conditions at the Native Reserve at Fitzroy Crossing in 1969 were described by Jan Richardson in the following terms:

In Fitzroy Crossing this native reserve was extremely barren. It was cold, it was rough, it was rocky, it had nothing in it. However, the government had provided one facility, which is one tap for 100 people. The people were left to build their own houses. So all they could do was scrounge tin and bits of canvas that they could find off rubbish tips and wherever and build themselves little humpies. If they were unlucky and they couldn't find tin and bits of canvas, then some of them had to sleep in old car bodies. If they were lucky and they got those bits of old tin and canvas, they had to make a very low humpy. This was for two reasons: one is it was too hard to bash a star picket into that rocky ground to keep your canvas down; and the other was the wild winds that came up and just whistled through and took everything with them.

Out of those humpies in the morning the adults would crawl. They would crawl out, and the women had to get their children ready for school. They had to walk a couple of kilometres up to the Fitzroy Crossing government school. So it was expected that these mothers would get their children prepared and ready for school, having had breakfast,

²⁸⁷ In 1960 Mowanjum station workers earned £3.15s., more than other Aboriginal pastoral station workers elsewhere in the Kimberley, and in Kalumburu, Forrest River and Beagle Bay missions pastoral workers only received 'pocket money on special occasions' (Jebb & MAC 2008: 93).

wearing clean clothes, having their teeth cleaned, their hands and their face washed, and their hair done. (Richardson 2009: n.p.)

Finally, this area was declared a national emergency in the early 1970s by the Federal government (Olive Pink Society 1994: 15).

With the missions closing in the late 1960s and 1970s, towns like Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Wyndham and Derby greatly increased in population. For example, the population of Fitzroy Crossing increased from 100 in 1970 to over 2000 in 1975, with smaller but still substantial population increases in Halls Creek, Wyndham and Derby (Yu 1994: 26).

Policing and incarceration and its impact

Incarceration in prisons led to the interchange of ideas and skills between normally separated Aboriginal groups. Akerman and Bindon (1983) report the Aboriginal prisoners confined to Rottnest Island and Broome Regional Prison manufactured biface spear points from bottle glass for barter with prison staff (Akerman & Bindon 1983: 77). The early practice of making of artefacts while in prison is confirmed by Peggs (1903), who lived in Roebuck Bay and wrote in 1899:

Mr. Macpherson (the Superintendent) gave me over a dozen black cowrie shells, and Mr. Kenny three glass spear-heads, which the prisoners in the prison opposite where we are living had made, one is of white glass, one green, and one dark smoke-colour.

(Peggs 1903: 328)

The north-west frontier in the late nineteenth century witnessed considerable tension between police and Aboriginal people under the 'the informal advice and influence of those with vested interests' (Owen 2003: 105; see also Clements 1989; N. Green 1997). For most part these interests belonged to the pastoralists who competed with Aboriginal people for land, water and food resources. In 1890, 25 per cent of the Western Australian police force were stationed in the Kimberley region, after Broome, Derby, Halls Creek and Wyndham had been established (Yu 1994:24). The cattle industry was depressed after the 1886 Halls Creek gold rush until the discovery of the Kalgoorlie goldfields in 1893 increased the market for beef, prompting the opening of the Wyndham meat-slaughtering trade. Many Aboriginal people worked in the burgeoning pastoral system, and those who 'continued to live a traditional life and did not, or would not, work or "sit down" and camp on the stations were called "bush blacks" by the colonists' (Owen 2003: 108) and 'the pastoralists put a bullet in them' (Owen 2003: 108). Smith (2000) states that: 'oral histories

leave no doubt that the Nyininy/Djaru competed with the cattle for water and were hunted and maimed or killed to discourage them from using the waterholes' (P. Smith 2000: 80).

A number of sources describe the killing of cattle by Aboriginal men and the punitive actions by pastoralists, police and the judicial system (N. Green 1997: 33–52, 72–3; Jebb 2002: 36–42; Choo & Owen 2003; Owen 2003: 110). At the same time, pastoralists, stockmen, squatters and police were speared and homesteads attacked (Owen 2003: 110; Yu 1994: 24). Cattle killing became a criminal offence in 1892 and Aboriginal people were captured and dealt with summarily or marched to Wyndham and Fremantle gaols; with incarceration in the Derby and Wyndham lock-up boab trees on their way (Figs 5.23a & 5.23b).²⁸⁸



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Fig. 5.23a: Aboriginal prisoners in chains, posed with a policeman and Aboriginal trackers [North Western Australia], c. 1890
12cm x 15cm
photographic print, black & white
Call number 7816B
Battye Library, State Library of Western Australia

²⁸⁸ See Fig. 5.26 for an image of the Derby Prison Tree incised on a boab nut by Jack Wherra.



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Fig. 5.23b: Bringing in prisoners for spearing cattle
Wyndham, 1930
Photographer: Ernest Lund Mitchell (1876–1959)
11 cm x 17 cm
photographic print, black and white
Call number BA684/31
Battye Library, State Library of Western Australia

Between 1904 and 1908 the Isdell Police Post recorded that, for alleged cattle killing, police and trackers caught and marched to Derby: ‘283 men and fifty witness who were in all except few cases, women’ (Jebb 2002: 40). Jebb (2002) records that, by December 1908, 92 Aboriginal men had been arrested by the Isdell police and prosecuted for cattle killing and sent to Carnarvon, Broome and Wyndham gaols (Jebb 2002: 42). In 1909 the Wyndham Courthouse reported 95 arrests and sentencings for spearing cattle (Shaw 1986: 292). The *Aborigines Protection Act 1886* made it profitable for police to arrest as many people as possible, with an allowance of 2s.5d. per head per day (P. Smith 2000: 77).

As late as 1942, Aboriginal men were removed to Moola Bulla in chains to reside there under disciplinary control, despite not being charged with an offence. Hawke (2013) records that a haulage contractor was used as the most economic means available to move the men from Christmas Creek Station to Moola Bulla, and the Fitzroy constable reported that:

together with the warrants and in order to assure the safe custody of the male prisoners through their own country, Mr Sharpe [contractor] placed them on the chain. I have no idea what view you take of the procedure, but I can assure you that it was quite necessary to secure these natives. (unnamed constable in Hawke 2013: 54)

The Commissioner for Native Affairs approved the action.

Both the Derby²⁸⁹ and Wyndham prison boab trees are still living and are notorious tourist spots. These hollow and very largely girthed boab trees were overnight stopping places for police and their prisoners. The chained Aboriginal people were forced into the boab tree to ‘spend a terrifying night’ (McKenzie 1969: 265), especially considering the significant narratives associated with boab trees. That this treatment of Aboriginal people was an important part of their history is reflected in the depiction on decorated boab nuts of cattle and cattle hunting and the resultant chaining of Aboriginal men (Figs 5.24a, 5.24b, 5.25 & 5.26).

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Fig: 5.24a: Policeman leading chained Aborigines [sic]
Basil ‘Biggie’ Albert
Broome, c. 1970
L 25cm
Lot 64 (Sotheby’s 2006)

Fig. 5.24b: Incised boab nut depicting chained
Aboriginal men
unknown, c. 1870s
[size unknown]
Cat. No. X85153
Museum of Victoria (Akerman 1993: 106)

²⁸⁹ The Derby Prison Tree, believed to be 1500 years old, is called *Jilapur* and is a camping place for the *Nyikina* Creation Being *Woonynoomboo* (Akerman, Skyring & Yu 2010: 29).



Fig. 5.25: Depiction of cattle slaughtering
Northern Western Australia, 1975
L 225mm x W 130mm
Lang Private collection

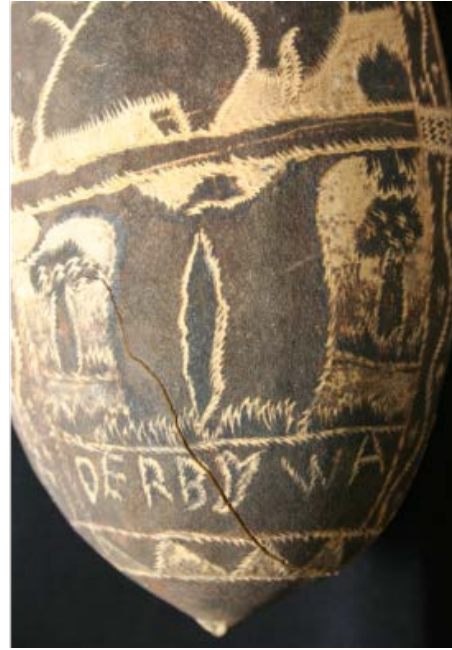


Fig. 5.26: Detail of Derby Prison Tree
Jack Wherra
[Broome], c. 1960–70
L 205mm x W 100mm x D 100mm
Enid Bowden Collection
NMA 1987.0050.0315

Kleinert (2001) notes that until recently scholarship was focused on the meaning and uniqueness of Aboriginal art and failed to appreciate ‘the symbolic place of the prison in the collective cultural experience of Aboriginal people’ (Kleinert 2001: 1). Importantly, Kleinert (2001) argues for ‘its importance in the collective cultural memory of Aboriginal people as a locus of cultural heritage’ (Kleinert 2001: 1). She claims that nineteenth-century ‘Aboriginal drawings produced in custody reflect particular historical experiences’ (Kleinert 2001: 5) and are no different from those produced in other institutionalised settings such as in missions and reserves, where the legal restrictions held Aboriginal people in custody (Kleinert 2001: 5). The *Aborigines Act 1905* created a permit system confining Aboriginal people to pastoral stations, and where leaving the station without permission could result in imprisonment, or being forcibly returned to the station or to a mission or ration station elsewhere.

As discussed in Chapter 3 and 4, the imprisonment of the boab nut artist, Jack Wherra, resulted in the creation of his innovative ‘comic book’ style decorated boab nuts, produced by him while in the Broome Regional Prison (Akerman 2003; Jebb 2006 & 2008) (see for example, Figs 4.8, 4.11 & 5.27a). His realistic Western-style landscapes were sometimes paired with Wandjina figures and associated animals and birds. In 1940 Wherra was

imprisoned for upholding the Law and killing a man who was not a women's promised husband. This was a traditional punishment because to marry another when promised to a particular woman was considered a crime within the moral code of Aboriginal Law. He was released when the Japanese were interned during the Second World War. In 1945 Wherra was imprisoned again for another crime and finally pardoned in 1964 (Jebb & MAC 2008: 98). While in the Broome Prison he incised and painted boab nuts and either 'gave them away or exchanged them for tobacco and other "luxury items" like Phantom comics' (Jebb & MAC 2008: 98) (Fig. 5.27a). This style was then imitated by other inmates (Fig. 5.27b). On Wherra's return to Mowanjumb, he received a commission from the anthropologist, John McCaffrey, for decorated boab nuts (see Figs 6.6a & 6.6b). As Jebb has argued: 'Wherra was a master of his craft who became famous in the 1960s and was likened to Albert Namatjira for extraordinary artistic ability (Jebb in Jebb & MAC 2008: 99). Wherra's artwork is discussed further in Chapter 6.



Fig. 5.27a: Boab nut incised in 'comic book' style
Jack Wherra
Derby, c1960–1970s
L 205mm x H 100mm x D 100mm
Enid Bowden Collection
NMA 1987.0050.0315



Fig. 5.27b: Boab nut incised in 'comic book' style
Simon Bernard²⁹⁰
Broome, 1964
L 150mm x W 100mm
Lang Private Collection

In 1973 the artist Geoff Buchan set up a print shop in the Broome Regional Prison to teach silk screen printing to inmates, and he records that:

The inmates were scattered around and from a distance, just watched me go through the lino cut process. From their distant observations, my technical tricks must have clicked in their minds as I'd do a print. Eventually they applied their distant observations to their own

²⁹⁰ Simon Bernard was incarcerated in the Broome Prison at the same time as Jack Wherra.

designs. They were good quick learners. I left them to it and went inside the cell, lay on the bunk and read a comic²⁹¹ just to feel something of what it was like to be locked up. I did some silk screens later on, and they printed onto fabric and made their own cloth design.

They did the best original lino cuts of the lot. (Buchan n.d.: n.p.)

Fisher (2011) in discussing the “magic realist style” of Carrolup landscapes from southern Western Australia notes how prison has:

contributed to the continuation of the Carrolup school. Revel Cooper and Goldie Kelly, who were among the original Carrolup child artists, taught painting to fellow inmates in Fremantle Prison in the 1960s and 1970s. To this day there is a strong tradition of Indigenous inmates observing skilled painters while they work before taking up the brush themselves.

(Fisher 2011: 86)

More recently, special prison educational programs in Aboriginal history and culture, traditional skills and art have been introduced (Horton 1994: 902). Jimmy Pike’s artworks were perfected through the prison programs in Canning Vale and Fremantle Prison (Kleinert 2001: 9).

The impact of disease and hospitalisation

Introduced diseases such as influenza, malaria and measles had played a large part in the depopulation of the Kimberley, with a ‘native’ hospital established at Derby in 1936. Jebb (2002) notes that police records mention venereal disease in 1907, only ‘four years after stockmen and police arrived in Ngarinyin country (Jebb 2002: 30). The establishment of Lock Hospital Islands, hospitals built on coastal islands in which Aboriginal people were forcibly incarcerated, was for containing Aboriginal people with venereal disease away from European populations (Jebb 1984). Granuloma, a symptom of infectious disease, was also rife and Aboriginal people with this symptom were also contained in the Lock Hospitals (Jebb 1984: 76–9; Choo & Owen 2003: 124).

Leprosy had been introduced to the Aboriginal community, possibly by Asian pearlsharers, in the nineteenth century, initially with six cases reported by 1924 (Spargo 2003: n.p.), increasing to 161 new Kimberley cases between 1931 and 1935 (Horton 1994: 617).²⁹² This increase may have been due to the lack of cross-protection provided by less exposure

²⁹¹ See Jebb (2006, 2008) for the influence of comic books in prison on Jack Wherra’s boab nut style.

²⁹² See Jebb for detailed language group statistics for the Derby Leprosarium (*Bungarun*) admissions (Jebb 2002: 136–9).

to those with tuberculosis in the general populace²⁹³, a consequence of the isolated settlements and missions (Spargo 2003: n.p.). Spargo (2003) argues that the full extent of the spread of the disease was not realised as:

Occasional large ceremonial congregations, intertribal marriage customs and trade route activities, principally for pearly shell, guaranteed intergroup transmission. Also the policy of walking leprosy patients over long distances to Derby must have contributed to widespread transmission of the disease. (Spargo 2003: n.p.)

Observing on the policing of this policy, David Mowaljarlai remembers that while at Murray Springs Station:

In the middle of the night the police came in. Police used to come during the night, to pick up the people who were sick with leprosy, very quiet. There was this law that sick people had to be chained up, laid on a horse and brought down to Derby Hospital.

These boys [with the police] woke up my father, they were his relations: 'We have come to pick up our sick people to take them to the leprosarium. Will you and your little boys be a guide to take up to those people who are sick?'

...

Those sick people did not really want to go to the leprosarium. The police boys just had to put a chain onto those that could walk, otherwise they would have escaped.

(Mowaljarlai in Mowaljarlai & Malnic 1993: 117)

Settlements such as Munja were affected badly, with 19 adults and children removed to Derby in 1938, and by 1941 a caged compound had to be built at Munja to stop infected people running away (Jebb & MAC 2008: 66–7).

A leprosarium was built in 1936 at Bungarun near Derby and eventually closed in 1986. In 1937, the St John of God Nuns from the leprosarium produced a pamphlet, acknowledging that for Aboriginal patients at the hospital the:

arts and crafts have played a large part in fostering interest. Patients, some highly gifted, have produced exhibits well above average. Wood and nut carving are a speciality with them and have won high praise from authorities in art. The native [sic] today paints in a more normal setting than did his forefathers, who used the walls of caves and painted with a twig with the reds and yellows, colours that seemed more easy for them to come by. Trees, especially the boab of which he is particularly fond, form the subject of his art, as does the wildlife of the bush. Our sunsets are a delightful splash of colouring especially during the monsoon season. The patients, some of them, have committed to canvas in oils or water

²⁹³ Tuberculosis and leprosy are different species of mycobacteria and in the early twentieth century scientists had made a connection between resistance built by exposure to tuberculosis and leprosy (Pickrell 2005: n.p.)

colours²⁹⁴ these gaily coloured cloud settings, and have illustrated their capacity for detail, reproducing light and shade *with realism*. We are not surprised at this, as natives [sic] are lovers of nature and in the far North they see beauty in the wilderness where a great silence prevails, enabling viewers to study the grandeur of plant and animal. Their art is quite unsophisticated, like themselves. The unspoilt native [sic] shares his art as he shares everything else.

(Daly 1986: 16, my emphasis)

A visitor to the leprosarium in 1945, Mrs F. Cardeli-Oliver, reported that: ‘The patients display skill in wool-work, carving, colouring boab-tree nuts and gardening’ (The West Australian 1945: 7). She further comments that: ‘The children in their school work compare favourably with ordinary school children of similar ages’ (The West Australian 1945: 7).

By the 1950s and 1960s, concerts were being performed for visiting tourists to the leprosarium by the patients, and ‘waggas [sic] and corroborees were permitted, along with sports, artefact making, boab nut carving, and fishing at the marsh nearby on Saturday or Sunday’ (Jebb & MAC 2008: 89).



Fig. 5.28: String section, Derby Leprosarium orchestra, Derby 1948 (Jebb & MAC 2008: 89).

²⁹⁴ Ngarinyin artist Wattie Karuwara completed a series of watercolours while at the leprosarium, and McCaffrey noted that Karuwara painted ‘sometimes up to eight hours straight, in a trance-like state with eyes open’ (McCaffrey in Newstead 2014: 151).

Medication to control relapse eventually became available and the Derby Leprosarium was closed in 1986 (Spargo 2003: n.p.).²⁹⁵ Prior to this, the recovery therapy of patients involved participating in activities such as gardening, sewing, music and creative arts in a Western style often bordering on or crossing over to 'ethno-kitsch' (Graburn 1976: 6; Altman 1990: 13; Lang 1999: 43; Akerman 2000: 543).

The Second World War and its impact

The departure of many white stockmen to join the armed forces during the Second World War meant greater responsibilities fell to the Aboriginal people who remained behind (Shaw 1986: 9). With the shortage of labour and interactions with different groups of people, the war provided new possibilities in managing pastoral activities and other employment in construction etc (Crawford 2001: 246). The Japanese bombed Darwin in February 1942 and Wyndham and Broome in March.²⁹⁶ In 1943 Kalumburu was bombed, as its outstation at Drysdale was a Royal Australian Air Force base, and even under threat of Japanese ground invasion, the Army still would not equip Aboriginal people with guns (Haebich 2008: 187). With both Australian and American personnel deployed along the northern coast, local Aboriginal people living in the bush were told to go to settlements for protection (Crawford 2001: 245). At the missions restrictions and supervision were relaxed and many Aboriginal people felt a sense of freedom. Connie Nungulla McDonald recalls that because most of the mission staff had been evacuated from Forrest River Mission, the remaining Aboriginal people had:

a glimpse of what life must have been before the gudiyars [white people] ... [This experience] enabled me to see more clearly what the government system was doing to us and to realise that some of the missionaries treated us like animals or convicts.

(McDonald in Haebich 2008: 187)

The RAAF personnel stationed at Truscott radar base²⁹⁷ visited Kalumburu for meals with the remaining missionaries and were entertained by the Aboriginal men (Perez 1977: 103;

²⁹⁵ Between 1936 and 1986 approximately 1200 Aboriginal people were quarantined at Bungarum (Jebb & MAC 2008: 88).

²⁹⁶ Mowaljarlai was working on the Kunmunya mission lugger and witnessed the internment of Japanese pearl-ers in Broome (Mowaljarlai & Malnic 1993: 120–1).

²⁹⁷ Truscott is located on the northern point of the peninsula between Vansittart Bay and Napier Broome Bay (Crawford 2001: 250). Albert Barunga, Alan Mungulu, David Mowaljarlai and Watty Ngerdu helped the American construction crew building a radar station in 1940 on an island near Kunmunya (McKenzie 1969: 168).

Ryan 1993: 127). The aeroplanes inspired songs and at corroborees: ‘the dancers carried imitation aeroplanes on their heads’ (Crawford 2001: 256).²⁹⁸ Mary Pandilow recalls that:

The soldiers used to come and bring us goods – flour, sugar, tea and tinned meat. They were friendly people, and they used to bring the tucker from Truscott to Kalumburu in the barge ... The men [from Kalumburu] used to go and work in Truscott ... My father and uncles were working there. After the bombing of the mission, they worked at Truscott.

(Pandilow in Crawford 2001: 250)

A small number of Aboriginal men were enlisted into the Army after 1939 and their pay, like their fathers before them, consisted of a ‘weekly issue of three sticks of tobacco’ (Hall 1980: 77), as well as their equipment. After 1942 they received five shillings per week, clothing, medical treatment, rations and a ‘walkabout’ period. Albert Barunga worked with the Americans as a guide to the islands (Crawford 2001: 252), while other men loaded bombs on Liberators and Mitchell bombers (Crawford 2001: 254). Towards the end of 1942 a secret commando group of 20 men, the North Australian Observer Unit or ‘Curtin’s Cowboys’,²⁹⁹ arrived at Kalumburu and set up camp across the Forrest River at Bremlah. These men were to engage in guerrilla action if the Japanese landed troops on the coast (N. Green 1988: 91). Local men such as Ernest Unbah, Ronald Morgan, Frank Martin and George Bamba were guides (N. Green 2012: 19).

Army personnel were also involved in running the supply store at Kunmunya (Mowaljarlai & Malnic 1993: 122) and ammunition dumps in the Great Sandy Desert, which forced Aboriginal people into Balgo Mission (Ryan 1993: 127). Mowaljarlai, on his return to Kunmunya, helped surveyors working on the construction of a naval base on Champagne Island, and on joining the Navy he skippered the barge – while in US uniform, because the naval bases were under the command of the US Navy (Mowaljarlai & Malnic 1993: 122). There was greater movement over the region ‘as a result of the influx of military motor transportation’ (Worms 1970: 367). Crawford (2001) argues that ‘the Second World War probably did more to disrupt traditional life along the northern coasts of the Kimberley than any other single factor’ (Crawford 2001: 245).

²⁹⁸ Akerman and Stanton (1994) note another aspect of this motif in that pearl ‘shells bearing pictures of aeroplanes are reputed to be effective agents in inducing “spirit travelling” experiences’ ... [that]... “spirit” or “dream” travelling is a skill used by knowledgeable men and women, often requiring complex ritual objects incorporating crystal or shell “lights” to fly to distant places’ (Akerman & Stanton 1994: 46). A pearl shell collected by A.P. Elkin in 1927 is incised with an aeroplane motif on one side and an interlocking key design on the other (NMA 1985.0073.0041).

²⁹⁹ Their commander was the anthropologist Major W.E.H. Stanner (N. Green 2012: 19).

The opportunity to record the rock art of the Kimberley and Northern Territory was undertaken by the RAAF personnel including Wing Commander Gordon Oxe, who notes the ‘still numerous aborigines throughout the North-West’ (Oxe 1944: 1) and reports that:

the whole ridge abounded in suitable ‘canvases’. In most of the pictures the anatomical and physiological aspects of sex are emphasized in a rather crude way, and in the majority it is clear what the drawing is meant to represent. It is interesting to note that several show the act of parturition, the sex of the individual portrayed being indicated by the exaggeratedly sagging mammae ... This hill had one good representation of an animal like a fox or dog, the only such seen on any of the hills. There were also several designs like the Greek letter phi.³⁰⁰

(Oxe 1944: 2–4)

The number of American and Australian troops in the region increased craft activity in the form of making souvenirs and encouraging innovation in a number of other ways too, most obviously in the introduction of new materials and metal tools (Lang 1999: 31–2), as well as providing the locals with new experiences to include in public ceremonies. Sculthorpe (1990) notes the introduction of patriotic motifs and demonstrates this with a Museum of Victoria boab nut (X48021) which depicts an emu, kangaroo and the words ‘Advance Australia’ (Sculthorpe 1990: 45). The depiction of emus and kangaroos are common on boab nuts generally and are part of the Dreaming narratives throughout Australia. Such ‘patriotic motifs’ are potentially understood differently by non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people (Fig. 5.29). For example, for the emu and kangaroo emblems of the colonised Australia, there does not appear to be a schism/contradiction between their uses as a resource, e.g. food, sinew for binding, and their position/affectiveness as a Dreaming Ancestor and for the appropriate individuals in ceremonial contexts as being the emu or kangaroo itself.

³⁰⁰ While certainly unrelated to the Greek alphabet, for an example of this type of motifs resembling Greek letters or Roman numerals see NMA 1985.0073.0045. See Donaldson and Kenneally (2007: 132) for an example of a similar rock engraving in the Napier Ranges.



Fig. 5.29: Boab nut incised with map of Australia with emu and kangaroo unknown, c. 1950
L 160mm x W 90mm
Lang Private Collection

The impact of town life, mobility, tourism and the rise of art centres

The Kimberley supports very few towns and only two major roads, one from Derby along the Fitzroy valley to Wyndham,³⁰¹ the other being Gibb River Road,³⁰² constructed in the late 1960s for cattle trucks to cross the ranges.

Town life on the west coast: Derby and Broome

The town of Derby, established in 1883, was essential for the transport by ship of cattle and wool from the fledgling pastoral industries. In the late nineteenth century the jetty and tramway were developed, and a police detachment was based there to support the pastoralists and subdue the local Aboriginal people. A newspaper, telegraph station, and courthouse and lockup followed (Fig. 5.30).

The early twentieth century saw a school established in Derby, as well as the arrival of a manual telephone exchange and air service, and in the 1930s the Royal Flying Doctor. Andreas Lommel, as part of the Frobenius Expedition in 1938, was researching the Ungarinyin, the Worora and the Unambal peoples (Lommel 1950).³⁰³ He noted that:

There were aborigines living in contact with modern culture of the farm, the mission and the Government Station. These men, stockboys and station-hands, wearing European clothes, had preserved fragments of their language, but apparently little else. Their model

³⁰¹ This links the pastoral areas and the gold rush region (Jebb 2002: 4).

³⁰² Jebb (2002) makes an important point that this road over Napier and King Leopold ranges crosses Dreaming tracks, links language groups, and traverses station cart tracks and walking tracks (Jebb 2002: 5).

³⁰³ This is the Ngarinyin, Worrorra and Wunumbul peoples.

was the American cowboy as they knew him from Wild West films in the open-air cinemas of the coastal towns. (Lommel 1950: 69)³⁰⁴



Fig. 5.30: Main street of Derby March 23rd, Derby, 1916
Photographer: Herbert Basedow
L 100mm x W 125mm
print from glass plate negative
NMA 1985.0060.1414

There were increasing numbers of non-Aboriginal people who came to Derby for employment, which was often temporary, or tourism. This influx of people encouraged the development of an arts industry in the nearby Mowanjum community in the 1960s, as discussed in Chapter 6. By late mid-century, in Derby, as observed by McKenzie (1969), there were:

ships and planes, people are on the move too. Tourists come and go, for the cruise up the west coast from Perth is a popular one. Teachers, bank officers, clergy, administrative staff and airways staff all come and go as well. This is a regular pattern. A few now stay, but most of them make their contribution and then move on. (McKenzie 1969: 266)

McKenzie (1969) also recorded increased transporting and shipping at the jetty as the Derby Meat Processing Co. Ltd moved carcasses overseas to Singapore, the Middle East, the United Kingdom and America (McKenzie 1969: 266). At the airport, next to Mowanjum, MacRobertson Miller Airlines Ltd. transported goods for local use and mail, and passengers,³⁰⁵ and the airport was used by private planes and the Flying Doctor aircraft (McKenzie 1969: 266). These increasing opportunities for employment of Aboriginal

³⁰⁴ See also Jorgensen (2013) for the importance of the cowboy, and further discussion on this point in Chapter 6.

³⁰⁵ In June 1968 MacRobertson Miller Airlines flew in 7095 passengers (McKenzie 1969: 266).

people away from the missions and stations to earn money was the beginning of a move towards self-determination. For example, Hawke (2013) notes that in 1960 the Welfare Officer in Derby was:

approached by Alex Rogers and given five pounds to place in his account in Derby. Alec Rogers is a native who approached me last visit and wanted to buy a block of land build a house and get his children out of the mission to come and live with him. So far I have started off his bank account and this deposit will bring the balance to ten pounds

(Welfare Officer in Hawke 2013: 114).

Increases in the number of primary and secondary schools throughout Western Australia and changes in government policy on school attendance for all children meant a non-Aboriginal education was becoming increasingly available for Aboriginal children, ultimately contributing to the development of Western realism in Kimberley artwork. For example, Derby's District High School was built in 1957 and increasingly attended by Aboriginal children from the Mowanjum community.³⁰⁶ The Holy Rosary School was established by the Sisters of St John of God in 1954. In 1961 there were 74 students, increasing to 185 in 1969 (Sisters of St John of God Heritage Centre [SSJGHC] 2014: 14). Students were encouraged to 'participate in town events, concerts, music and sport activities' (SSJGHC 2014: 15). All Aboriginal children living on stations were required by the government to attend school; as the numbers increased a number of hostels were built in Derby. The St Joseph's Hostel, attached to the Holy Rosary School, was built, and the Derby Hostel, also called the Amy Bethel Hostel, was established by the United Aborigines Mission in 1956, the same year the Mowanjum was established. This mission was subsidised by the Department of Native Welfare until the Department for Community Welfare took over the hostel in 1976. In 1971 there were 14 primary and 45 secondary Aboriginal students, decreasing to 25 children in 1979 from Christmas Creek and Looma Stations, One Arm Point and Pandanus Park (Signposts n.d.). In 1980 Watts prepared a paper that gave Aboriginal perspectives on and expectations relating to schooling for Aboriginal people: all the Kimberley responses wanted bicultural and bilingual education and attainment of work skills, as well as continued learning of traditional ways. Included in the paper was reference to the Aboriginal Consultative Group's Kimberley Investigation of 1975, which reported that the Bardi people wanted the best possible education in non-segregated schools so that their children 'would be able to live equally in whichever society they chose to live ... [and] to see more Adult Education opportunities' (Watts

³⁰⁶ See Chapter 6 for further details of the importance of school attendance to the Mowanjum community.

1980: 45). The Christmas Creek people at Fitzroy Crossing requested opportunities for ‘people to go to Pundulmurra [College] to have good training in different kinds of work – mechanics and building’ (Watts 1980: 46). The people living at Looma and Go Go also wanted their young people to have the opportunity to attend government schools with non-Aboriginal people, requesting that the ‘traditional ways should be taught to Aborigines in their camps and reserves ... Aborigines could also be taught to be electricians and nurses, teachers, mechanics and carpenters’ (Watts 1980: 46). All of the Aboriginal people believed it to be important for their children to learn ‘both ways’. A discussion on the importance of children attending school for the development of Western realism in artworks follows at the end of this chapter.

As previously discussed Derby, like Broome, had been part of the pearling and marine industries and the employment of Asiatic men, many of whom had families with Aboriginal women (Choo 1995, Kaino 2005; Ganter 2006). This cultural diversity is reflected in the advertising in the program for the 1968 Boab Festival at Derby, which was the first major regional festival. The program highlights some of these family businesses: the Hongkong Café, which offered Chinese and Australian meals, the Golden Shower Bakery and the local garage, owned by members of the Ah Chee family (Boab Festival 1968: 5–6). The Boab Festival³⁰⁷ program also declares:

Shopping can be varied and interesting in the numerous stores of the town, and genuine native art is available for the visitor requiring souvenirs.

The people of Derby, both black and white, mingle without restraint and teams of sportsmen and women from the missions and town fight their battles on the basketball courts and playfields. (Boab Festival 1968: 7)

In Broome the annual Shinju Matsuri – Festival of the Pearl – was established in 1970, uniting the Japanese, Malaysian, Indian, Filipino and Chinese cultural groups. Initially the festival was run with volunteer and donated assistance from local families and businesses, and showcased both performing and visual artists. Kaino (2005) argues that the various Asian communities had been reluctant to celebrate their traditional festivals with the general public but had eventually negotiated the Shinju Matsuri Festival (Kaino 2005: 168). This festival included ceremonial lanterns at the Japanese cemetery, a lugger boat

³⁰⁷ The 2015 program for the Mowanjum Festival, which was established in 2000, offers free workshops for ochre painting, traditional medicine, didgeridoo playing and boab nut carving (Mowanjum Arts & Culture Centre 2015). The programs in the previous years have offered race meetings, float parade, rodeos, the Kimberley Art Prize, football games, film festival, and the Great Kimberley Art Auction near the end.

race and picnic, a parade, a Pearl Queen competition, rodeos, corroborees (Kaino 2005: 19) and food:

They were treated to *kamaboko* fishcakes made by the Japanese from freshly caught north-west Spanish mackerel, *sushi*, *sashimi* and other delights, such as *shishime* the traditional Japanese folk dancing; and *enka*, the solo performances of traditional folk songs.

(Kaino 2005: 167)

It was these events and celebrations, like those of the Derby Boab Festival, which confirmed the identity of the communities and underpinned their cultures.

Broome was a culturally mixed town, even after the downturn in the pearling industry, with many diverse families groups. Beagle Bay-born man, Philip Dolby, recalls the 1950s in Broome:

It was all Asian people. The only thing I can remember seeing as a kid, is the pearling masters. I can't remember seeing any other white people in Chinatown.³⁰⁸

We used to go for kerosene from old Yusef. He had a restaurant, curry and rice, steak and eggs, long soup. We were going to Yusef's place, opposite Tang Wei's. Used to be Japanese quarters, then Malay quarters. When we used to go past to the shop, old man Sarrip, on the verandah on top, he used to play his ukulele. The music used to be beautiful, Malay songs.

(Dolby in S. Yu 1999: 68)

In 2008 Sally Bin Demin, born in 1942, interviewed on her experience of growing up in 1960s in a multicultural Broome, recalled on segregation:

I can't think of it directly. It probably happened all the time, I had not noticed. Now I'm seeing it more. At the time, we were the majority. It was our town. If they didn't like us, too bad. It didn't worry me. We didn't care. But ... [Sally] remembers the imposed seating arrangement at the Sun Pictures where she whispered with her friends, 'If you're white, you're all right; if you are brown, hang around; if you are black, stand at the back'.

(Bin Demin in Wall & Hunt 2008: n.p.)

Broome had a large Asian population but still discriminated on the basis of race, for example, the segregated seating at the Sun Pictures (Fig. 5.31) designated cane chairs with cushions for elite Europeans and lesser seating on the left-hand side for the other Europeans, the children in deck chairs in front, with deck chairs behind the Europeans for the Japanese and Chinese people; the lugger crews (Malays, Koepangers, Filipinos and Aboriginals) entered through a different door and sat on benches at the rear (S. Yu 1999:

³⁰⁸ Morgan's Camp in Broome's Chinatown was where the luggers were moored during the 'lay-up' (Kaino 2005: 165).

60, Sun Pictures History n.d.). This overt discrimination, while diminishing over the 1950s–1960s, continued until the 1967 racial discrimination legislation had been enacted.



Fig. 5.31: Sun Pictures c. 1950 Broome
(Sun Pictures History n.d.)

Movement and mobility around the Kimberley

By 1968, the Forrest River Mission in the northern Kimberley was struggling and the Anglican Church closed all service facilities (Young 1984: 24). People then moved to the unserviced fringes of Wyndham (Jebb 2002: 3; P.Yu 1994: 26) and other towns, and it ‘proved very traumatic – alcohol consumption rose and both family and tribal structures broke down’ (Young 1984: 24). Eventually a small group returned to Oombulgurri (Forrest River) and a number of projects were initiated with the help of the Institute for Cultural Affairs, an American religious group previously known as the Ecumenical Institute (Young 1984: 24). With the flooding of Lake Argyle, Miriwoong and Kadjerong people and other Aboriginal groups moved into Kununurra for construction work and seasonal work on the cotton farms (Lane 2003: 84), and after 1963 for the social security benefit (Sullivan 1996: 8).

Many Aboriginal men had numerous seasonal jobs all over the Kimberley following the Second World War: for example, in the north-west, Mowaljarlai was a mailman, supervised rationing for Mister Male’s pearling and fishing company, and was also a mechanic and storeman (Mowaljarlai & Malnic 1993: 124); on the other side of the Kimberley Edgar Birch was a mechanic and blacksmith, a bore mechanic in Kununurra,

transport driver in Darwin, and did construction work for the Roads Department in Wyndham; and Tommy May worked as a drover in Halls Creek and then for Vestey's³⁰⁹ working across the Northern Territory to Tennant Creek (Shaw 1992: 161–2; Hawke 2013: 104).

Lane (2003) details changes in mobility on pastoral leases and missions, noting that freedom of movement developed 'as increasing numbers of young people travelled to Derby, Perth and Darwin to receive education or seek employment' (Lane 2003: 91). However, even into the late 1960s regulations still controlled Aboriginal people's movements, as Donny Woolagoodja recounts when he and his brother Monte:

were invited to Canberra to visit a missionary who had worked at Mowanjum, they needed a letter of permission from the Commissioner of Native Welfare in order to leave the state.

(Woolagoodja in Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 101)

The Gibb River Road opened services and activities to Aboriginal people in the North Kimberley. As increasing numbers of vehicles became available in the Kimberley, access to them contributed to this ceremonial mobilisation. Jebb (2002) provides an example:

The Mowanjum mission truck, from the reserve outside Derby, arrived at Mount Elizabeth station for wet season ceremonies within weeks of completion of the roadworks across the Phillips Ranges in 1969. (Jebb 2002: 5)

Ten years later, it was reported in the Aboriginal Arts Board Newsletter (AABN) that, for the initiations at Turkey Creek (Warmun) in November 1978, 'dancers and elders were summoned from Mowanjum, Halls Creek, Gibb River Station, Mount Elizabeth Station and Mount House Station for the ceremonies' (AABN 1979: 4). While the Mowanjum group travelled via the hired Derby school bus, the Turkey Creek community used their Bedford truck to carry a large number of people to the ceremonial site. After a few days of dancing 'all the men, women and children join in the Walungari dance. This is the ceremonial ring-dance of the Native Cat Dreaming³¹⁰ of the Mowanjum people' (AABN 1979: 4). In December, a number of boys were initiated at Mowanjum and:

When a boy is ready for initiation, his body is painted ... When he travels around the communities, everyone knows that he is Wongii – the initiate. The decoration is an automatic summons to all concerned; it is a symbol or message about what is to happen.

(AABN 1979: 4)

³⁰⁹ Vestey's Northern Agency Company was an English enterprise with holdings in the Northern Territory with some cattle being sold through Wyndham (Hawke 2013: 104).

³¹⁰ See NMA 1985.0073.0042 Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection c. 1927 for a possible native cat figure.

Intrepid non-Aboriginal visitors had begun to tour the Kimberley after the First World War. Elkin (1929) recorded a number of visitors to the Kimberley during his fieldwork in 1927–28. Elkin himself travelled by ‘cars and lorries on the beaten tracks, mules in a sulky, donkeys in carts, pack-horses and pack-mules, walking, motor launch on the Forrest River, and luggers along the coast’ (Gray 1996: 110). Not only were there non-Aboriginal workers, but some were ‘holiday making’ in the East Kimberley; Elkin reported:

The Western Australian Meat Commission with two cars moved from station to station inquiring into the ills and possible cure of the meat industry; the Chief Protector of Aborigines was making his triennial tour over much the same track, and was able to give an anthropological student a lift along [Elkin]; the travelling manager and accountant of Vestey's Ltd., were doing the rounds of their stations, six of which, covering several million acres, are situated in the Kimberleys ... their outfit consisted of an old, but speeding, single-seated Buick-six and a lorry ... There was also MacRobertson's party with its two six-wheelers, lollies, wireless, and ‘pictures’. Michael Terry was there with a six-wheeler searching for gold, and others were holiday-making, and record-breakers circum-motoring Australia. (Elkin 1929: 9)

The missions sold and exchanged Aboriginal artefacts, with the hospital in Derby selling Alan Mungulu's pearlshell carving to visitors³¹¹, and prisoners were allowed to sell artwork to visitors³¹² and workers, particularly the incised boab nuts (Basedow 1925: 311; Davidson 1937: 65; Lang 1999) and the glass spear points, which were unique to the area (Akerman 1993: 108; N. Green 1997: 24–5, 31). Woomeras, spears, bark buckets, boomerangs and shields were being made to satisfy collectors and the tourist trade, and ‘competition for quality art and artefacts was fierce’ (Newstead 2014: 148).

Local events, such as the race season (Fig. 5.32a), are documented on incised boab nuts (Fig. 5.32b) over a long historic period.³¹³ For instance, in the early twentieth century, at Wyndham the annual race meeting was an important event when for the white population and:

The black stockmen who sweated their masters' horses round the racetrack to the cheers of the predominantly white gathering, retired at night to the bush camps where time was shed

³¹¹ Alan Mungulu's contribution to the art of Mowanjum will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

³¹² Lang's private collection includes six incised boab nuts, which were purchased in 1964 from the Derby and the Broome ‘lock-up’ by Clive Turner, a surveyor. The two boab nuts from Broome are both in a realistic style with segmented ‘comic book style’ scenes (one has hunting scenes and the other marinescapes); and the four boab nuts from Derby are all figurative, featuring individual motifs of crocodiles, emus, and fish or turtle or lobster.

³¹³ Sculthorpe (1990) mentions a c. 1890 carved boab nut with images of two jockeys and the words ‘Derby Race Club’, held by the Ulster Museum, Ireland (Sculthorpe 1990: 45).

with their stockman's garb and the night vibrated with the affirmation of the East Kimberley culture.

(N. Green 1997: 133)



Fig. 5.32a: Crowd gathered around start of a horse race, possibly in Derby c. 1898
F.M. House collection of photographs taken in Derby
9cm x 14cm
black & white photoprint
BA954/6
State Library of Western Australia



Fig. 5.32b: Incised boab nut with jockey and racing accoutrements;
on the other side are a horse, pig and cow and man with a hat
unknown, c. 1960s
L 140mm x W 100 mm
Lang Private Collection

By the 1950s at the Fitzroy races Aboriginal people had 'money in their pocket' (Hawke 2013: 78), with local District Officer Pullen reporting that:

Between the 31st August and 2nd September, 500 or more natives, in family groups, were congregated at Fitzroy Crossing. Race time is now regarded as their principal holiday time,

when they foregather to renew old acquaintances, entertain and enjoy the racing and sporting events. (Pullen in Hawke 2013: 78)

District Officer Pullen also observed that:

Trade boomed in the local store ... Dress materials were in great demand so that the women, perhaps for the first time, participated in the spending feast. They appeared to be careful buyers and thought hard and long before committing themselves to purchase – one Manager told me that he thought the payment of wages was contributing to the emancipation of the women. (Pullen in Hawke 2013: 78)

On the other side of the Kimberley, this season now hosts the Derby Boab Festival. The program for the 1968 Boab Festival at Derby³¹⁴ explains to visitors that: ‘Displays of Native Art at the Derby Civic Centre during Boab Week have always been a major attraction for visitors and most articles are available for purchase at the conclusion of the festival’ (Boab Festival 1968: 4). McKenzie (1969) retells the story of the first three Boab Festivals and Mowanjum’s community decision to take control of their contribution, in the following words:

The first year the Boab Committee asked the Mowanjum men to put on a corroboree on a Sunday night. The Mowanjum men said they were willing to do a corroboree, but not on a Sunday. However, the plans could not be altered at that date, for all the other nights had been arranged with programmes that could not be altered. In view of this, the tribe reluctantly agreed to do it that year, but made a point of asking the Committee to arrange it for another night the next year, if they still wanted it as part of the Festival. The next year came, and the Committee again wanted them on a Sunday night and said they were unable to change the programme. This time, however, the Mowanjum men were adamant; they would not do it on a Sunday. This meant that there would be no corroboree for the Festival and, as it was one of the main attractions, the Aborigines took the initiative and decided to conduct their corroboree on their own property – at Mowanjum – on Saturday night of the Festival week. They advertised it in town and erected a huge poster on the side of the mission truck that went in and out of the town several times a day. The staff was not over-confident that many people make the six-mile journey from Derby, particularly as there was a conflicting entertainment in town. To their astonishment, an enormous crowd turned up – and they were an enthusiastic, encouraging audience. The third year an invitation came, very early, for the Mowanjum men to perform a corroboree for the Festival, on a week night! (McKenzie 1969: 256)

³¹⁴ Wattie Ngerdu was a member of the 1968 Central Committee for the Boab Festival at Derby (Inc.) in charge of Native Corroborees (Boab Festival 1968: 6).

The development of a regional art industry

By the early 1960s the increasing sales of curios, including boomerangs and kangaroo-hide moccasins, led to the Native Welfare Department in 1965 to create the position of Superintendent for Economic Development. Subsequently, the Native Trading Fund was established to promote the sale of such curios through a Perth-based wholesale sales centre (Berndt & Berndt 1970: 58). In the late 1960s the Australia Council (now the Australia Council for the Arts), on advice from an Aboriginal arts advisory committee, began funding art advisors in remote communities (Newstead 2014: 159).

In the 1960s in towns like Kununurra, small souvenir businesses started selling Aboriginal artefacts, ‘especially carved boab nuts’ (Lane 2003: 180). In an interview with the Kimberley dealer and former Waringarri arts advisor Kevin Kelly in 2001 discussing the 1960s –1970s, Lane (2003) records Kelly as saying:

Well, talking to people like Hugh [?] ... and Alan Griffiths, and Peggy Griffiths, over the years, there was, like, a cottage industry, what we call a cottage industry in the cities, where tourism had an interest in picking up things, basically off the street. The butcher would have a shelf of boab nuts, Doreen’s flower shop would have, you know, some paintings on unstretched canvas, and that type of thing, and you can still see a bit of that around town. (Kelly in Lane 2003: 180)

In 1970s Derby, the Derby Tourist Bureau was displaying and selling incised boab nuts, including those by Basil ‘Biggi’ Albert. When the Derby Cultural Centre was built, an art gallery, museum and information centre were included (Lang 1999: 51)

Mary Fox, who donated two decorated boab nuts³¹⁵ with provenance dating back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, worked at the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) in Derby, running a guest house and training Aboriginal girls. The YWCA opened an artefact shop in Derby in 1973. In the early 1970s mission shops³¹⁶ and souvenir businesses remained the leading sellers of artefacts, with the gradual rise of independent Aboriginal-owned enterprises selling around major tourist spots such as Uluru (Newstead 2014: 162).

In 1971 the Whitlam Government’s Office of Aboriginal Affairs established Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Pty Ltd as a company to market and distribute art and craft to retail

³¹⁵ See NMA 1985.0005.0001 purchased in c. 1969 from a Boab Festival stall with exhibits from the Derby Leprosarium; and NMA 1985.0005.0002 was purchased after the nut had been exhibited at the Boab Festival c. 1975.

³¹⁶ For example, Bima Wear on Bathurst Island, Bagot Reserve in Darwin, Yirrkala in Arnhem Land, and Oenpelli (Newstead 2014: 162).

galleries Australia-wide³¹⁷ (Altman 2005: 4; Berrell 2009, Newstead 2014: 159). This company helped to establish credible outlets (Jones & Birdsell-Jones 2014: 301). The Aboriginal Arts Board (AAB) of the Australia Council was established in 1973, and Mary Mácha and Jennifer Isaacs were appointed as two of the consultants (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 203; Newstead 2014: 161). The AAB comprised 11 Indigenous and four non-Indigenous directors, who knew that, while they were promoting art production: ‘There was already a glut of paintings around the country, and in the absence of sales, many artists were offering art and craft directly to community workers for ready cash’ (Newstead 2014: 173).³¹⁸ In 1983 the AAB had decided to call for a report detailing options for ‘restructuring and funding the industry’, and the ‘views of Aboriginal artists, communities and other interested parties’ would be considered (AABN 1983: 2). At this time the AAB had been using ‘a third of its available income on subsidies for arts and craft activities over recent years’ (AABN 1983: 2).³¹⁹

What is important for the decorated boab nuts held in the National Museum of Australia³²⁰ was the AAB decision that:

Despite operating on just 4 per cent of the total Australia Council annual budget, it began actively purchasing and commissioning art and craft directly from artists and art cooperatives, instead of giving out grants ... [and] offered small collections to galleries and museums. (Newstead 2014: 174–5).

This decision was based on the board’s understanding of the important connection between art, ceremony, and the fertility of resources:³²¹

All Aboriginal people believe in the causal link between art, ceremony, and the abundance of food. Board members deeply versed in traditional culture, such as Wandjuk Marika, participated in yearly increase ceremonies to ensure seasonal abundance. As painting was becoming a new form of ceremonial activity, their decision to encourage the production and purchase of artworks in vast quantity was probably made in order to manifest abundance. (Newstead 2014: 175)

The promotion of Aboriginal art by the AAB and the establishment of Aboriginal-run art centres and other art shops and galleries throughout Australia had facilitated an

³¹⁷ Retail sales in 1970–71 of Aboriginal art made \$900,000 annually (Newstead 2014: 159). See also Acker, Stafanoff & Woodhead (2013) and Altman (2005).

³¹⁸ See also Jones and Birdsell-Jones (2014: 301).

³¹⁹ In the 1982–83 year, expenditure was over \$600,000 with the subsidy ‘split almost evenly between support for the Company and for community enterprises’ (AABN 1983: 2).

³²⁰ NMA AAB No. 2 collection contains nine boab nuts from Mowanjum (purchased 1974, 1991.0024.4196 - 1991.0024.4401, 1991.0024.4520, 1991.0024.4569). See Plates 1.1–1.7.

³²¹ This connection is discussed in Chapter 3.

environment which generated 18 million dollars per year retail, over 1987–88, providing seven million dollars income per year to nearly 5,000 artists (Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Review Committee 1989: 11–12). The increased interest in Aboriginal culture from the 1970s and the push for self-determination in artistic expression and management, in conjunction with a 25 per cent rise in international tourism, had increased this figure by 33 per cent by 1997 (Quadrant Research Services 1997: 17; see also Morphy 1998: 38).

Art centres were seen as a ‘point of intervention’ for government to connect with Aboriginal people and their socio-economic issues, as well as engage with the growing interest in the cultural maintenance of Indigenous peoples (Jones & Birdsell-Jones 2014: 300). The art centre established by the Waringarri Corporation in 1985 in Kununurra, initially in a garage, was provided with government funding for an art centre building in 1988. Other communities had outlets for their artwork, often established by missionaries, but this was the start of a major nation-wide movement of Aboriginal-owned and governed centres. Waringarri Aboriginal Arts sold artwork produced throughout the Kimberley and over the border into western Northern Territory – Kununurra, Warmun, Kalumburu and Port Keats (Lang 1999: 53). It promoted the artwork of artists from the North-east. Importantly, in the late 1980s the ratio of male to female artists was approximately equal, at around 50 per cent each (Lang 1999: 54).³²² Except for paintings, many artworks were sold wholesale to galleries in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Alice Springs and Darwin, and a few boab nuts to Perth and Adelaide (Kelly in Lang 1999: 54).

Other art centres were established, for example, Mangkaja Arts in Fitzroy Crossing developed out of the Karayili Adult Education Centre in the early 1980s; Nagula Jarndu Designs in Broome is a women’s art centre and resource agency that started in 1987; at Balgo, Warlayirti Artists was established in 1987, and the Warmun Art Centre was established in 1998. The history of the development of the early art industry in Mowanjum is presented in Chapter 6. Formed as an artists’ association in 2000, it is now Aboriginal-owned and incorporated with Mowanjum Aboriginal Arts and Culture Centre, which was built in the shape of a Wandjina and completed in 2006 (Art Gallery of Western Australia 2015). Jones and Birdsell-Jones (2014) conclude that Aboriginal art and identity and the developing art centres in the later twentieth century were:

³²² See Lang (1999) for a detailed examination of Waringarri Aboriginal Arts in Kununurra in the 1980s–1990s and the importance of the sale of artwork to female Aboriginal artists.

from 1972 to 1981 ... marked by serious cash flow problems along with a focus on self-management ... the second period from 1981-1989 [w]as the boom years. During this time, economic rationalisation came to dominate the administration of art centres, while exhibition and retail successes led to the entry of Aboriginal art into public collections and international exhibitions, and an association of Aboriginal symbolism with Australian cultural nationalism. (Jones & Birdsell-Jones 2014: 301)³²³

The increase in tourism to the Broome–Derby region in the 1980s was stimulated by the road from Port Hedland to Broome being hard-surfaced, which encouraged visitors to the Broome pearl farms (Clarke 2007: n.p.) and other areas in the region. The increasing tourism to the Kimberley, especially international visitors, meant that for Waringarri Aboriginal Arts in Kununurra at the beginning of the 1990s the incised boab nuts were eagerly collected as souvenirs and returned in most part to European countries (Kevin Kelly, pers. comm., 22 August 1997).³²⁴ Many tourists bought one or two incised nuts as they were not expensive [and] easily portable (Kevin Kelly, pers. comm., 22 August 1997).

The prices of decorated boab nuts at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts were determined by their technical attributes and the artist's profile. On some nuts, the art centre: 'hardly gets a return on because it's our policy to buy everything. We just put them out for sale price, others we mark up to 70 per cent (Kevin Kelly, pers. comm., 22 August 1997). The payment to the artists reflects the quality of the work, which, in turn, determines the characteristics of the decorated boab nuts produced. Kelly reported less than 20 per cent are painted as they are not seen 'as authentic' and do not sell as well (Kevin Kelly, pers. comm., 22 August 1997). The boab nuts which sold most strongly were simple in design with sharp lines³²⁵ and many tourists wanted 'an Alan Griffiths boab nut because they know his art is very simple but he has very sharp lines on it, very striking' (Kevin Kelly, pers. comm., 22 August 1997).

Unlike some other art centres in this period, which sold on commission, Waringarri Aboriginal Arts paid cash for all incised or painted boab nuts offered. This was to encourage people to engage in art production, and young people were being encouraged by their grandparents to incise boab nuts. Kelly recounted that a number of: 'kids muck

³²³ There has been much scholarship on international collecting, marketing and exhibiting of Aboriginal art but this is outside of the thesis argument (for example, Altman 2005; Marcus & Myers 1995).

³²⁴ For discussion on new art developments in the 1980s in the Kimberley see Akerman (2000a: 226-39).

³²⁵ This is related to the Western ideal of neatness, and the concept of legibility. See Chapters 4 and 8 for a discussion of this concept.

around with them, or finish them. The design is put on and then it needs areas blocked in or whatever, and the kids often do that' (Kevin Kelly, pers. comm., 22 August 1997). Even so, it is usually 'the older people [who] make the original design and it goes down the line' (Kevin Kelly, pers. comm., 22 August 1997). In many cases, the middle generation were forced out of work on stations and into town and have not been major producers (Kevin Kelly, pers. comm., 22 August 1997). The younger people have diversions, such as school and television, which 'more frequently reflects the everyday work they see around them imbued as it is with increasingly non-Aboriginal images and values' (Stanton 1989: 6–7).

As Crawford (2001) reflecting on his anthropology research the later mid-twentieth century observes:

I came to see that I had so firmly directed myself towards the documentation of the old way of life, and spent so much of my time with the old people, that I was failing to see how younger Aboriginal people were adapting the traditions in the new environment. These kids are skilled hunters from an early age, using both introduced technology, for example fishing lines and nets, and traditional skills, such as pointed sticks as spears. The boys in particular spend a great deal of time throwing stones at things, and so in the bush are quite capable of knocking birds out of trees or, at the seaside, killing surface-living fish such as mullet with stones ... Of course, the children also go to school, learn to read and write, and to use computers. They live in modern houses, watch TV or videos, go to the health clinic with they are ill, and shop in a supermarket. The immediate impression is of a modern lifestyle with some carryover in bush craft. The old ways are generally respected, acknowledged as having once been powerful and effective, but now largely relegated to the past. (Crawford 2001: 288–9)

Concluding comments

This chapter identified a number of the historic influences on Aboriginal people in the Kimberley and their art practices that have led to their engagement with a Western realistic genre and a Western-style landscape in incised and painted boab nuts, as detailed in Chapter 3. The following chapter provides further evidence supporting the thesis argument by investigating in greater detail Kimberley history and art practices associated with a specific Aboriginal community in the 1960s-1970s.

Contact history has influenced a figurative art style in the direction of Western realism through both the stimulus of new experience and the transformative nature of the

Kimberley exchange practices of Aboriginal life. The *balga* or *joonba* and similar public, or secret ceremonies, enable the inclusion of contemporary experience into the ongoing and all-encompassing Dreaming narratives. Received or revealed dreamed/Dreaming narratives and/or exchange practices allow for the establishment of new performance cycles, with the performances representing an embedded and innovative embracing of transformation. The colonial encounter can be placed firmly within the processes of a customary long historic adjustment, as illustrated by the rock art motifs and ceremony of the region.

The desire to portray visual images on board, canvas or paper, and on incised and painted boab nuts have been integral to the development of Western realistic motifs. The images utilised by the Aboriginal artists cross a cultural divide, and include life histories and contemporary events, as well as their profound narratives. Exposure to Western concepts at school and also to marketing, films, tourism, travel, television, and, later, the internet has encouraged this trend.

While colonial institutions and processes have disrupted Aboriginal culture and individual lives, the deeply entrenched sense of Dreaming and of Country with the associated custodial actions, have meant that change continues to be incorporated in art processes. In the Kimberley, the movement of Aboriginal people from their Country, with the concomitant experience of locational and cultural disruption, has impelled local Aboriginal communities to seek different ways of engaging with their custodial obligations to their Ancestral Beings – through their art practices – leading to the development of an arts industry.

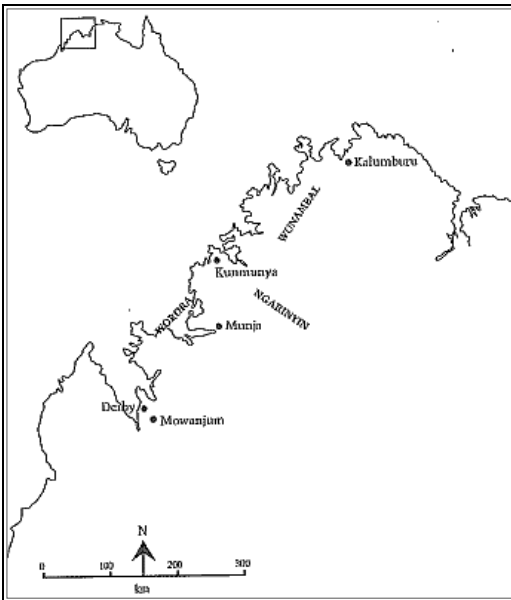
While a number of Kimberley communities incise and paint boab nuts, a detailed discussion of the Mowanjum community and their recognition as the major decorated boab nut producers of the Kimberley in the 1960s–1970s will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6: THE BOAB NUT-PRODUCING CENTRE OF THE KIMBERLEY: THE MOWANJUM COMMUNITY 1960S–1970S AND THE EMERGENCE OF A WESTERN-STYLE LANDSCAPE GENRE

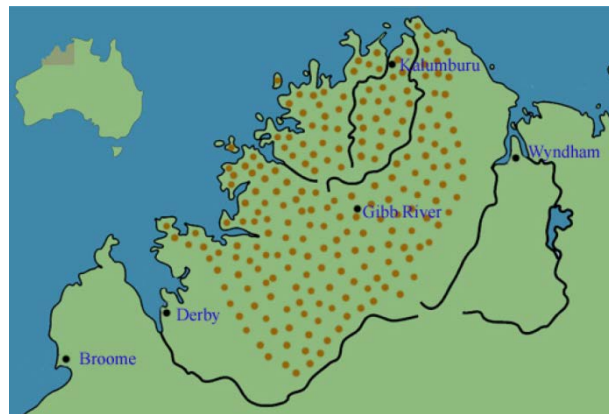
This chapter will include an introduction to the Mowanjum community – described by Akerman in 1993 as the ‘boab nut-producing centre of the Kimberley’ (Akerman 1993: 107). In the context of the Mowanjum community being the major producer of decorated boab nuts in the late 1950s–1970s, the production and style of these artworks will be examined. While Mowanjum and its artists are renowned for Wandjina paintings and much has been written about this art form by scholars, curators, and dealers (for example, Ryan & Akerman 1993; Klingender 2013), by contrast in this thesis, paintings on bark, paper and canvas will only be mentioned briefly, when relevant to a discussion of decorated boab nuts and other artefact imagery and production. The community’s relationship to the township of Derby and its people will also be discussed.

History of the Mowanjum community

The Mowanjum community was moved from settlements further north, from Kunmunya and Munja to Wotjulum, finally settling near the airport just outside Derby in November 1956. The major language groups in the community are Ngarinyin, Worora and Wunambal, and only these language groups are authorised as owners of Wandjina Dreamings and with the authority to reproduce those images. Initially, the Worora came from the coast and offshore islands 200 kilometres north of Derby; the Ngarinyin were further to the north-east, towards the King Leopold Ranges and the Wunambal were located north of the Prince Regent River (Maps 6.1 & 6.2).



Map 6.1: Map showing location of Kimberley area of north-west Australia and the homelands of the Worora, Ngarinyin and Wunambal (Blundell 2003: 156)



Map 6.2: Map of the Kimberley region showing the 'Wanjina Belt' (Akerman 2015: 2).

The land and coast in this North-west region were not well suited for either the pastoral or pearling industry, which meant that the role of the Kunmunya and Wotjulum missions and the Western Australian Government's Munja Native Feeding Station became 'to feed and contain Aboriginal people living between the edges of European pastoral stations and the coast' (Jebb & MAC 2008: v). The influence of the Second World War on the Kimberley coast regions had been substantial, with the relocation of white people to the south and the loss of Kunmunya's lugger and source of supplies to war service (Jebb & MAC 2008: v). After the Kunmunya and Wotjulum missions failed, and with the changes to government policies after 1948, the move³²⁶ to Nygina and Warawar land, near Derby, occurred.³²⁷ The Presbyterian Mission bought:

696 acres freehold ten kilometres from Derby town; a nearby pastoral lease of 47,000 acres; three leasehold blocks of 2,750, 20,000 and 59,000 acres respectively, 600 head of cattle, a furnished house with telephone, farm machinery, sheds and several water bores.

(Jebb & MAC 2008: 93³²⁸)

³²⁶ The Department of Native Welfare was funding the relocation and providing some financial help for the rebuilding at Mowanjurn (McKenzie 1969: 209).

³²⁷ Mowaljarlai recounts the move from Wotjulum to land outside of Derby, by 30-foot lugger (Mowaljarlai in Mowaljarlai & Malnic 1993: 127). Between 1952 and 1955 there were on average 180 names on the Wotjulum ration lists (Jebb & MAC 2008: 78).

³²⁸ See also McKenzie (1969); McKenzie in Utemorrhah et al. (1980: 23–30).

This community was named Mowanjum (Jebb & MAC 2008: v). Albert Barunga describes this decision:

It took us more than six months to make up our minds. We knew we could not go back to our own land, which is what we really would have liked. Wotjulum had failed. Now it became a question of where to go next. Maybe there was no choice. Most of the young people wanted to live by the town, and if the older people had not agreed the tribe would have been split. It was better that we all agreed and in the end that was the decision, though as in the move from Kunmunya there were many, many misgivings. We called the place we were going to a new name. David Mowaljarlai wrote it in the dust with a stick one night in the light of a hurricane lamp when we were all sitting around talking under a boab tree. The name was Mowanjum. In our language it means 'settled at last'.

(Barunga in Jebb & MAC 2008: 92)



Fig. 6.1a: Mount Waterloo from St Patricks Island in the St George Basin, WA, c. 1965-1984
3cm x 4cm
colour slide
BA24801/5.57
State Library of Western Australia



Fig. 6.1b: Aerial photograph of Derby and surrounding mudflats c. 1993
Photographer: Richard Woldendorp
7cm x 6cm
colour positive
BA1611/1820
State Library of Western Australia

According to Maisie McKenzie, writing in 1969, the decision to leave Wotjulum for Mowanjum was not taken lightly. McKenzie relates the story of the community's decision to move just outside of Derby, and notes that James Beharrel of the Department of Native Welfare in Western Australia, who had regularly visited the community at Kunmunya and Wotjulum, recommended the site because he believed that it would solve problems of:

isolation, education, training and employment. Cattle could be run, vegetables grown, and the children could have equality in education by going to schools in Derby, there was also a hospital and plenty of work available. (McKenzie 1969: 203)

The Superintendent of the Presbyterian Mission, Reverend James Hartshorn, decided that the community needed to make their own decision if the move was to be successful. For six weeks arguments for and against the move continued, and were divided along

generational lines. It would have been a momentous decision to reach: it would take the community away from the ‘blue water’ coast and the Wandjina (Fig. 6.1a), and was very close to a town and airport near scrubby mudflats (Fig. 6.1b). After having the opportunity to view the property,³²⁹ and much discussion, the decision was made. Alan Mungulu preached a sermon on the children of Israel and their similarity to the community in meeting the challenges (McKenzie 1969: 206).

The dismantlement of Wotjulum buildings, the movement of stock and goods, as well as the transport of children and older members of the community and their dogs, on the *Watt Leggatt*³³⁰ to Derby took numerous trips through September–November 1956 (Fig. 6.2). The heavy equipment went by the *SS Daylesford* (McKenzie 1969: 207). The community arrived to find:

The straggly acacias, the dry paperbarks, the squat boabs, the ghost gums, all looked exhausted. The sun blazed on the red sandy soil. There were two buildings on the property – a large iron shed, about twenty by thirty feet, with a lean-to to serve as bathroom and kitchen, and behind this a smaller shed, iron also, housing a Petter Diesel lighting plant. This also drove a pumpjack and a shallow bore of about thirty feet, the only water supply at present. (McKenzie 1969: 207)



State Library of Western Australia

Fig. 6.2: Albert and Larry on the Wotjulum Mission lugger *Watt Leggatt* enroute to Derby, 9 July 1955

Photographer: William Edward Wright

3cm x 4cm

colour slide

BA1639/162

State Library of Western Australia

³²⁹ Via a 100-mile trip down the coast in the lugger, *Watt Leggatt II* (McKenzie 1969: 204).

³³⁰ The *Watt Leggatt II* was skippered by Albert Barunga, with David Mowaljarlai as engineer (McKenzie 1969: 208–9).

The people began arriving at Mowanjum twice a week; the men already there were erecting small buildings made of wattle with corrugated iron roofs. That year, 32 houses, six bathhouses and 12 toilets were completed (McKenzie 1969: 208). These houses were built according to the community's design: of rows, 'roughly corresponding to streets, with their leaders, Alan [Mungulu] and Albert [Barunga]³³¹, in two houses in the front of the mission' (McKenzie 1969: 214). These were two- and three-bedroom homes (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 98). A small corrugated iron store was built, with Alan Mungulu as the main storekeeper (Jebb & MAC 2008: 93). In 1959 the mission church was built next to the entrance gates with a sign depicting a Wandjina and the moiety nightjars³³² with a landscape in the background (Fig. 6.3).



Fig. 6.3: A Wandjina and the two nightjars, *Wodoi* and *Djungun*, guard the entrance to Mowanjum (Utemorra et al. 1980: 44).

There was hope that, being 10 kilometres away from Derby³³³, the community could retain their cultural independence but take advantage of employment opportunities, the schools, and the hospital and welfare support (Jebb & MAC 2008: v). The Hartshorns left Mowanjum in 1958 and were replaced by Reverend Collins, with Bruce Godwin working as the Technical Agricultural Assistant (McKenzie 1969: 216).

³³¹ Gwen and Wayne Masters commented that Albert Barunga was 'a real character' and 'diplomat', and Alan Mungulu was 'a thinker' and 'the doer' and 'they worked well together' (Masters et al. 1982: 6–7).

³³² Wadoya (Wodoi) and Jungun (Djungun) nightjar owls are 'manifestations of Wandjina spirits, who created and remain responsible for dividing the society [Ngarinyin and Worrorra people] into Jungun and Wodoya moieties' (Jebb 2006: 702).

³³³ When Reverend Vawser and his wife arrived in Derby to take up the appointment of Superintendent in 1961, Betty Vawser recorded that Derby consisted of 'only a handful of shops, and they all seemed to be streets apart and hard to find' (Vawser in McKenzie 1969: 234).

Interactions between Mowanjum and Derby residents and their institutions

When Superintendent Reverend Nevin Vawser arrived in 1961 he initiated ‘church-member’ training classes, receiving a good response from the older people. Alan Mungulu and David Mowaljarlai were ordained as Elders. Mowanjum was visited by the Moderator General of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, Right Reverend Dr. Alan Watson, who showed interest in the corroboree performed in his honour (McKenzie 1969: 235). Watson was the first of the dignitaries to visit the mission that year; the others included the Premier of Western Australia and the Minister for Native Welfare, Harold Holt, the Federal Treasurer and Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Parliamentary Committee for Voting Rights (McKenzie 1969: 236).

Perhaps the most important ‘visitor’ for the art production of the community was the film sent to Mowanjum from the Western Australian State Education Department – *Namatjira the Painter*.³³⁴ McKenzie (1969) reports that the people of Mowanjum talked about the film for days (McKenzie 1969: 236). This film, which illustrated Namatjira’s realist Western landscape art style, was shown in a number of Aboriginal communities, as well as in commercial cinemas throughout Australia (Poignant 1995).³³⁵

The Agricultural Assistant, Bruce Godwin, attempted to establish a number of crops and industries to provide the mission with an income and employment for the community. A piggery, a dairy herd, and vegetable crops were not successful, and even boab trees and coconut palms died because of the brackish water (McKenzie 1969: 225). Eventually the community adapted to the surrounding environment with the establishment of a salt industry, harvesting 800 tons of marketable salt each year at the end of the 1960s (McKenzie 1969: 230) (Fig. 6.4). Increasing success with the cattle-breeding program over this decade was to result in Godwin being able to sell 100 head of cattle a year, for £2000 in 1967 (McKenzie 1969: 238).

³³⁴ The film *Namatjira the Painter* was directed by Lee Robinson in 1947 for the Australian National Board.

³³⁵ The camera operator was Axel Poignant, who recorded his discussion on the film about the Hermannsburg artist with Arnhem Land Aboriginal guides at White Point Beach and notes that the film made a big impression there as well (Poignant 1995).



Fig. 6.4: The marsh at Derby with salty flats, 1962
3cm x 4cm
colour slide
BA2521/127-140
State Library of Western Australia

The mission ran a truck and later a bus to take the children into Derby, and occasionally adults also, to the pictures. As a result of the lack of transportation, Mowanjum men were finding it difficult to gain employment in Derby. Furthermore, having to use the school bus, which departed and returned to suit school hours, to get to Derby meant work hours were reduced. Once this became apparent, the school bus was used for dual runs in the morning and then on afternoons, with men being taken to work first and then the children to school and vice versa in the afternoons (McKenzie 1969: 240; Masters et al. 1982: 2; Jebb & MAC 2008: 100). With this problem resolved, the Mowanjum men were able to work when the new jetty (Fig. 6.5) was being constructed in 1964–5, and Mowanjum men were able to earn weekly £30–£40 with overtime (McKenzie 1969: 240).³³⁶

³³⁶ By 1975 a cargo ship was arriving every ten days at the wharf and the three gangs of wharfies were required to work with the cargo every day (Clarke 2007: n.p.).



Fig. 6.5: Aerial photograph of the Derby Wharf, 6 September 1965
Courtesy of Aerial Surveys Australia
13cm x 13cm
black & white negative
BA1475/6613-6616
State Library of Western Australia

Godwin was training the men to be employed as road workers, bulldozer drivers, and cattle station hands. As Superintendent Vawser recounted in a newspaper article in 1966:

Another [man] is saving to buy a new car. Trained on the mission to handle vehicles, he stepped from a pick-and-shovel job into a \$108-a-week job as a bulldozer operator for a month when the regular operator was suddenly taken ill. When the regular operator returned, the native [sic] was transferred to a tip-truck and paid \$90 a week. ...

Now the children bank once a month and the adults pay money into their own account every payday. Where employers pay by cheque direct into their bank account the natives [sic] draw only what they need from the banks ... Now they own transistor radios and record players worth \$100, bought with their savings. Some have kerosene refrigerators and may have portable gas stoves. (Vawser in Martin 1966: 2)

At the Derby District High School³³⁷ in 1974 boys undertook projects on vehicle maintenance, driving, farm activities, carpentry, while girls undertook home and parenting activities, receiving visitor classes, shopping, and running the school canteen (Project Education 1974: 25–6). Teenage boys were then trained at the mission to gain station experience (McKenzie 1969: 241). Watts (1980) cites a letter from the Mowanjum community dated 3 November 1974, in which it is stated that: ‘We need our Aboriginal boys to learn as much as they can so when they are able to leave school these [boys] then

³³⁷ In 1971 there were 65 school-aged students living at Mowanjum, with 45 enrolled at the primary school and 20 at the Derby District High School (Rosser 2011).

could be future managers of our Panter Downs' (Watts 1980: 45). This letter also comments on the lack of opportunities:

Even when young people have the urge for further education they are not encouraged by school authorities because these authorities do not think they can handle this education which in turn forces the young people to take lower education which does not enable them to get right jobs ... business people and professional people lose interest towards Aboriginals. They find most doors for apprentice training are closed.

(Watts 1980: 44–5)

Max Clarke (2007), a former head teacher at the Derby District High School, notes that, in 1975, 60 per cent of students were non-Aboriginal, but, by 2004, 80 per cent were Aboriginal students. Clarke recalls that: 'In 1975 there was only one Aboriginal aide. The curriculum ignored the Aboriginal students' needs but it has improved in some ways since then' (Clarke 2007: n.p.). Schooling at the state school was very important, and significant to the development of a Western realistic art genre, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 8. Mowanjum woman Isobel Peters recalls how seriously the community viewed school attendance:

I went to Derby District High School. We never missed out. Jack Bear, Jangari, I call him Baba (grandfather), used to stand at the bus and call out, 'Come on you kids, hurry up'. He had a stick in his hand, but I never felt frightened, like he was going to hit me.

(Peters in Jebb & MAC 2008: 114)

A variety of work opportunities arose in Derby as the town expanded during the 1960s, in the Administrative Centre, the Main Roads Department, and the Derby Hospital. Albert Barunga worked as a gardener at the Derby District School; David Mowaljarlai became to first Aboriginal male orderly at the hospital; and Alan Mungulu was employed to teach the 'tiny tots' class at the Derby school (McKenzie 1969: 213, 240–1). Some adults were employed in the Mowanjum community, for example, working the community gardens (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 99). A number of women were nurses at Numbala Nunga, a hospital for the Aboriginal elderly (Jebb & MAC 2008: 110). During the 1960s, Derby residents employed Mowanjum women as domestic workers, and the United Aboriginal Mission Hostel began to employ these women as domestic help in preference to their own mission people (McKenzie 1969: 241; Jebb & MAC 2008: 100). Sewing had been taught initially at Kunmunya, and now the Agricultural Assistant Godwin's wife Lois and Dot Oliver from Derby gave sewing classes on the sewing machines funded by the women's missionary organisations (McKenzie 1969: 214, 238). Originally mission boxes had been

sent annually to Presbyterian missions all over Australia, often without regard to local suitability, but eventually these were replaced with cash donations, enabling the Mowanjum community to purchase items that included steel cupboards and shelves, basketball uniforms, an adding machine, a typewriter, a refrigerator, a volleyball set, a bath heater, toys, books and bibles, sewing machines, carpet bowls, a pump and piping, projector bulbs, a brick-making machine, the hire of an evangelical Billy Graham film, and assistance for a child to attend a school camp in Perth (McKenzie 1969: 238).

An invitation to establish mission basketball teams for the local competitions resulted in a basketball court being built at Mowanjum and the formation of a number of teams: the Rovers and Giants for senior men; the junior boys teams were the Panthers and Tigers (McKenzie 1969: 231, Jebb & MAC 2008: 100); and the girls team, the Seahawks (Jebb & MAC 2008: 110). These competitions were played in Derby under electric light to enthusiastic audiences (McKenzie 1969: 213). The Girl Guides Pack and Cub Pack, which had started in Kunmunya, continued at Mowanjum, with Daisy Utemorrah the Assistant Cub Mistress. Elkin Umbagai was possibly the first Australian Girl Guide to receive a Translator Badge (McKenzie 1969: 4; McKenzie 1980a: 41). Later a number of boys built go-carts as part of their mechanics training and competed at the local speedway (Jebb & MAC 2008: 118).

Attending the pictures in Derby on Friday or Saturday evening was popular. Open-air cinemas were established in Derby and Broome and on Cockatoo Island, near Wotjulum. This circuit was operated by W.J. Anderson after 1949 with films such as *Klute* or an Elvis movie arriving by air and screened twice a week (Bertrand 2000: 26–7). The Western genre films,³³⁸ shot in landscapes not unlike Australia, confirmed stockmen as ‘cowboys’, and with it ‘bull-riding and Stetsons came into fashion at rodeos (Jorgensen 2013: 4). Elvis Presley records were played by the younger people (Hurley 2008: 84). Gambling was a widespread activity (McKenzie 1969: 211).³³⁹

During the tenure of the Vawsers (1961-1966), the mission staff fostered voluntary help, with the Derby townsfolk encouraged to visit Mowanjum; most importantly, they were

³³⁸ Western genre films included those starring Gene Autry, and other films included musicals such as *The Wizard of Oz* (Mills 2010).

³³⁹ The most famous boab nut artist, Jack Wherra, has immortalised the card game on boab nuts (NMA 2003.0057.0020 c.1963–66) (Fig. 4.8).

welcomed to church services.³⁴⁰ The mission had a magazine called *Encounter*³⁴¹ and the Mowanjum community was encouraged to join local groups, including the basketball association, the Parents and Citizens organisation and the Boab Festival Committee, and to accept invitations to visit townspeople (McKenzie 1969: 258–9). McKenzie (1969), reflecting the views of the time, recounts the story of the:

Derby bank-manger's wife [who] recently invited half a dozen Mowanjum women to afternoon tea. She admits that she felt a trifle apprehensive, a trifle self-conscious, even wondering if they would turn up. She need not have worried. They were Worora. They had given their word and they came. (McKenzie 1969: 6)

Nevertheless, not all such interactions with Derby townspeople were encouraging. On recalling her childhood in the 1950s and 1960s, Heather Umbagai states:

We never went to the swimming pool or library. If we went there, they'd say: 'Why are you here? What are you coming here for?' They wouldn't actually chuck you out, but they'd say, 'Where's your parents?' or 'Who's with you, who's your guardian?' that sort of thing. We didn't go to the town library ... I don't even send my kids there and I don't send my kids to the pool. The pictures were all right. At the picture theatre there were seats for the black people and seats for the white people. I used to live for the pictures; it was the highlight of the week on Friday night. (Umbagai in Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 101)

In 1966 the Vawsers were replaced by Reverend John Watts and his wife, and the community continued to take opportunities to form relationships with the townspeople and focus on education. Other further opportunities arose, with Blundell and Woolagoodja (2005) explaining that:

Mowanjum became known across Australia as a community that reached out to the wider world to share its Aboriginal heritage. Mowanjum developed a group of dancers and songmen who travelled to Perth to perform. Albert Barunga, David Mowaljarlai and Daisy Utemorrah all wrote books that are still widely read.

(Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 100)

The Fairburn Centre was built in the Mowanjum community for preschool children and homework supervision for older students. Elkin Umbagai was employed as a teacher's aide (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 99). Gwen Masters taught the preschool children in a classroom environment and her husband Wayne Masters was the mission mechanic³⁴²

³⁴⁰ The Vawsers claim, perhaps not entirely accurately, it was the 'only integrated church in Western Australia' (McKenzie 1969: 258).

³⁴¹ The NMA Gwen and Wayne Masters Collection No. 2 includes three issues of this magazine.

³⁴² The NMA lists Wayne Masters's employment as general handyman, bore and power work, stock work, plumbing and building, and school bus driver 1966–71 (NMA File 82/52, an edited transcription from a tape

(McKenzie 1969: 284). When Gwen and Wayne Masters worked at Mowanjum they estimated that at the end of the 1960s around 300 people lived there, of whom approximately 70 were school children, and with another 300 people ‘visitors who stay[ed] about six months’ (Masters et al. 1982: 4). The Masters have donated a number of Mowanjum artworks from 1966–71 to the National Museum of Australia and the Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1³⁴³ includes incised boab nuts, which will be discussed later in this chapter, Chapter 7, and the Appendix. By this time the Western Australian Government was providing funding for adult education for Aboriginal people beyond art and craft classes. Women were encouraged to travel to Derby one day a week for adult education classes at the Derby school (McKenzie 1969: 243–4, 284). Adult education was so important to the community that Albert Barunga represented Australia on an adult education study tour in New Zealand in 1967 as previously mentioned (McKenzie 1969: 4; Dix 1993: n.p.).

Interactions between the Mowanjum community and visiting anthropologists and a film-maker

During the 1960s a number of anthropologists with an interest in rock art and/or their links with contemporary Aboriginal art visited Mowanjum. Most importantly, the researchers who have been instrumental to the argument of this thesis on incised and painted boab nuts and traditional art practices were among the visitors: Kim Akerman, Ian Crawford, and John McCaffrey. Crawford was a member of the Western Australian Museum expeditions to record rock art sites for a National Site Recording Program during the mid-1960s, culminating in his influential book *The Art of the Wandjina: Aboriginal cave paintings in the Kimberley*. A number of expeditions were made to the Kimberley as part of the National Site Recording Program; the anthropologists involved included Charles Hamilton, and later Robert Layton with local Yawuru man Peter Yu³⁴⁴ (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 125–6). Other anthropologists at Mowanjum in the 1960s–1970s were Peter Lucich, Valda Blundell from Canada, New Zealander Derek Freeman, and Michael Silverstein

recording made on 11 August 1982 with the Masters, Warwick Dix, Tony Martin and Robert Johnson) (Masters et al. 1982: 1).

³⁴³ This collection consists of 50 objects from Mowanjum 1966–71 and was donated in 1982. Gwen and Wayne Masters No. 2 collection was accessioned in 2009 and contains 18 objects from 1966–71, including two decorated boab nuts (2009.0003.003 & 2009.0003.004). Importantly, this collection includes two paintings in a Western landscape style by Jack Wherra and Basel Rangea.

³⁴⁴ In 2011, Peter Yu became the inaugural chair of the National Museum’s Indigenous Advisory Committee and member of the Museum’s Council (Tunks 2012: n.p.).

from America, as well as the film maker Michael Edols, who filmed *Lalai – Dreamtime* (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 126–132, 147).

Significantly for contemporary art production, Valda Blundell, who worked and lived in Mowanjum during the 1970s, was interested in North-west Kimberley rock art and the significance of rock art as a material image base for contemporary production of art forms in Aboriginal communities. Blundell uses a concept of a ‘material image base’ to explain how contemporary artworks are derived from this image base but notes that they are not ‘attempts to copy a particular site’ (Blundell 2003: 171). She observed that men and women artists were producing images of ‘generalised Wandjina’ in paintings and ‘craft’ objects (Blundell 2003: 168; see also Akerman 1993: 107). She further identifies other depictions to include:

well-known *Wandjina* who travelled across the Kimberley during *Lalai*, portraying them in either their anthropomorphic or their animal forms ... Other paintings *make visible* the cultural landscape created during *Lalai*, by depicting *Wandjina* that are associated with specific locales. In the process, artists *enact* their multiple connections to land, including connections – and identities – based on where they were spiritually conceived or born, as well as connections and identities based on the countries of their parents and other relatives. (Blundell 2003: 172)

Blundell (2003) explains this phenomenon using the example of imagery in Donny Woolagoodja’s paintings, where the depictions of the baler shell Wandjina are from his mother’s country and the Ancestral Beings Yalan from his grandfather’s country (Blundell 2003: 172).

Blundell (2003) cites Clifford Geertz to support her argument that these artworks are: ‘primary documents; not illustrations of conceptions already in force, but conceptions themselves that seek – or for which people seek – a meaningful place in a repertoire of other documents, equally primary’ (Geertz in Blundell 2003: 175). This conceptualisation

enables the use of incised and painted boab nuts as a primary source for historical and contemporary experiences in the landscape³⁴⁵, both geographical and cultural, and this ‘visual textual approach’ is discussed Chapters 4 and 7.

Significantly for decorated boab nut research, Akerman (2015) notes that the American anthropologist, McCaffrey³⁴⁶, recorded: ‘in great detail with little of his own interpretation. One is thus usually reading or “hearing” the Aboriginal voice at the time rather than McCaffrey’s words’ (Akerman 2015: 42). McCaffrey worked:

with people like Wattie Karawarra³⁴⁷ and Alan Mungulu, he showed how Wanjina was expressed in, for example, carved boab nuts, bark and canvas paintings – for which he recorded detailed accompanying Wanjina ethnography. (Akerman 2015: 63)

McCaffrey provided the artists with paper and pigments, and subsequently collected more than 300 boab nuts, coolamons, didgeridoos and paintings from [Wattie] Karuwara, Alan Mungulu, Mickey Bungkuni and Wattie Nyerdu (Newstead 2014: 149), including the 39 incised boab nuts by Jack Wherra in the NMA (Akerman 2003: 70–1). For the investigation of decorated boab nuts McCaffrey’s work was outstandingly important in its record of the artist’s descriptions of their work and accompanying photographs (Figs 6.6a & 6.6b). Jack Wherra’s realistic depictions of cultural contact were said to be framed in a style influenced by the Phantom comics to which he had access in prison (Akerman 2003: 71; Jebb 2006, Jebb 2008, Newstead 2014: 150). Wherra’s artwork has been discussed extensively throughout this thesis.

³⁴⁵ Blundell (2003) argues that, for many people, ‘art reconstitutes the natural world’, whether they are at Mowanjum or in their homelands (Blundell 2003: 176). See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the relationship between art and landscape.

³⁴⁶ Akerman (2015) describes McCaffrey’s background and his research focus on the ‘process of creation of visual art objects’ (Akerman 2015: 41; see Jebb 2008; Newstead 2014: 149–50). See Akerman (2015: 41–59) for a detailed discussion on the Wandjina image on portable objects and paper using McCaffrey’s field notes. The part of the McCaffrey collection bought by the NMA includes 39 incised boab nuts by Jack Wherra with extensive notes and 240 hours of tapes recording the artist’s discussion of each nut (Akerman 2003: 70–1; Jebb 2008; Akerman 2015: 41). The Powerhouse Museum purchased 17 Jack Wherra boab nuts; and a ‘further forty-one nuts are carved by other artists, including Wattie Karuwara, in a more traditional fashion that reflects either the geometric or figurative style’ (Powerhouse Museum 2004).

³⁴⁷ Karawarra has also been spelt as Karuwara, Karrawara and Karuwarra.



Fig. 6.6a: Jack Wherra carving a boab nut with a screwdriver
Mowanjum, WA, 1964
Photographer: Neil Tilden
AIATSIS Ref: MCCAFFREY.J04.BW-N07506_02
The John McCaffrey Collection
(AIATSIS 2015)



Fig. 6.6b: Jack Wherra carving a boab nut with a penknife
Mowanjum, WA, 1964
Photographer: Neil Tilden
AIATSIS Ref: MCCAFFREY.J04.BW-N07504_01
The John McCaffrey Collection
(AIATSIS 2015)

The film maker Michael Edols also produced three films with the Mowanjum community's participation, in particular with David Mowaljarlai, Albert Barunga and Sam Woolagoodja. These were *Lalai Dreamtime* (1973–75), *Floating This Time, Like Wind Blow'em About* (1973–75) and, after Woolagoodja's death, *When the Snake Bites the Sun* (1985–86) (Hurley 2008: 73). In *Lalai Dreamtime*, the opportunity to return to their homelands through a collaboration with Edols was compelling, and in this film Woolagoodja is depicted refreshing³⁴⁸ Wandjina rock art images and performing the *wudu* ritual³⁴⁹ (Hurley 2008: 78–80). Edols, reflecting on the films, recalled:

in order to show their contemporary situation it was important to understand the basis from which their culture originated. The Elders supported the idea of a re-enactment on film of no longer practised traditional lifestyle for the benefit of their young who had failed to learn the tribal laws since they had lost their language. (Edols in Hurley 2008: 80)

In *Floating This Time, Like Wind Blow'em About*, a film about the then current community's lifestyle and initiated and supported by the Elders, Mowaljarlai provides the voice over. As Mowaljarlai narrates: 'What concerns me about our young people ... haven't got this Aborigine wisdom ... we later middle generation, we haven't got enough

³⁴⁸ The Wanang Ngari Association was funded through the Community Employment Programme to teach young Ngarinyin people how to repaint rock art sites in consultation with appropriate custodians and Elders (Mowaljarlai & Peck 1987: 71–8).

³⁴⁹ The importance of repainting the Wandjina has been described earlier. The *wudu* is vital in teaching Wandjina Law to children. Roger Burgu and Albert Barunga comment that it is a ritual of what is not allowed: 'Wudu, don't touch' or Wudu, don't cheat', which is accompanied by smoking the child' (Burgu & Barunga in Jebb & MAC 2008: 11–12).

wisdom to bring these stories to the young people' (Hurley 2008: 84). Just before Woolagoodja's death, he told Edols that 'It is time for you to tell the story. My sons are too drunk. They are too much humbug' (Hurley 2008: 89). This request eventually resulted in the final film, *When the Snake Bites the Sun*.

Art production at Mowanjum: the recollections of mission workers and art teachers

During the 1960s and early 1970s a number of non-Aboriginal people have recorded their observations about working at or working with the Mowanjum community and their development of an art industry. Gwen and Wayne Masters were mission workers between 1966-71, Geoff Buchan and Sister Joan Mansfield were art teachers from outside the community, and Valda Blundell a Canadian anthropologist.

Gwen and Wayne Masters, mission workers

As previously discussed, Gwen and Wayne Masters worked at Mowanjum 1966-71 where Gwen taught pre-school and Wayne was a general mechanic and handyman. In 1982 they donated a collection of Mowanjum-made objects which included decorated boab nuts to the National Museum of Australia. Importantly, the National Museum of Australia interviewed the Masters on receipt of the objects. The best provenanced of the larger collections under consideration in this thesis is the Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1. This Masters Collection contains objects made from 1966 to 1971 and these were 'mostly given to us, apart from the odd things we sort of asked Alan to do especially for us' (Masters et al. 1982: 13). During the interview of Gwen and Wayne Masters by Warwick Dix, Tony Martin (AJM), and Robert Johnson at the time of the donation of their collection to the NMA in 1982, the Masters were asked about Maisie McKenzie's writing of the book, *The Road to Mowanjum* (1969). The Masters, who had met McKenzie while she was collecting information for her book, believed that she was writing this book to continue the Reverend Love's Kunmunya history of early contact into the present time

(Masters et al. 1982: 23). During this period, 1966–71, the Masters observed the increasing tourism to Mowanjum:

Gwen: We were getting busloads of tourists, making it a stopping place.

Wayne: Early on it was just an isolated group. Towards the end of our stay, it was a regular tourist thing.

Gwen: at least two or three buses a week would be coming through.

(Masters et al. 1982: 4–5).

On art production:

AJM: you were saying that Alan [Mungulu] is a real craftsman. Did the other pieces tend to be run up fairly quickly?

Wayne: Some of them, yes.

AJM: Is that something they do to ... Is that a commercial operation?

Wayne: Towards the end it became so. Yes, certainly...

Wayne: A lot of packing case stuff too.

(Masters et al. 1982: 45)

The Masters believed some of the different types of artworks made at Mowanjum were due to the movement between the different language groups and visits to their Country, and that they:

noticed that while we were there, over the time we were there, there was a lot more movement, towards the end, with people coming and going, than when we first got there [1966]. It was pretty staid when we first got there. But by the time we left there was a lot of coming and going ... Especially up north. (Masters et al. 1982: 3)

For example, this accounted for the 'long thin shield' that Martin commented upon:

AJM: With the shields, the different types, the thin one, you were saying Warwick, is typical of the desert region. Why would they be making them there? Is that typical of the people up there also?

... Gwen: And then there were the Ngarinjin which were lower down towards the desert people which is where that probably came from.

... Warwick: Yes that is from the Fitzroy basin. It certainly didn't come from the Worora area.

AJM: Which is where the other shield came from.

(Masters et al. 1982: 2–3)



Fig. 6.7: Shield
 unknown, c. 1963
 L 660mm x W 95mm x D 50mm
 wood & pigment
 Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1
 NMA description: Elliptical wooden shield in one piece with a raised handle; features a painted concentric and dotted design on the posterior surface and incised and painted serpentine designs on the anterior surface.
 NMA 1982.0092.0009

A leader and artist of note, Alan Mungulu, had learnt woodwork and leatherwork at Kunmunya, and after being diagnosed with poliomyelitis in the late 1940s had been a patient at the Derby Hospital, where he learnt to carve pearl shell. Mungulu has a number of objects in the Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1 including the didgeridoo described as a ‘dronepipe’ below (Masters et al. 1982: 12–13), a wooden container (see Plate 1.6, 1982.0092.0006), and a boomerang (see Plate 1.2, 1982.0092.0018). Mungulu was a favourite artist of the Masters, and in 1982 they commissioned one of his incised boab nuts and emu eggs from him.



Fig. 6.8: Dronepipe [Didgeridoo]
 Alan Mungulu, 1970
 L 1240mm x Dia 60mm
 wood & paint
 Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1
 NMA description: Hollow cylindrical and pigmented dronepipe (wood section). The incised and cross-hatched design features reptiles and plants.
 NMA 1982.0092.0039

When discussing the clapsticks (1982.0092.0019 and 1982.0092.0020), the Masters explained the tools that had been in use. They noted that the artists used ‘hand tools,

chisels, pocket knives [but not] ... electrical tools' (Masters et al. 1982: 14). During this interview, Warwick Dix, Deputy Principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, mentions that the desert people use improvised tools, including fencing wire and ground-down file, and that they work these tools towards themselves (Masters et al. 1982: 14). The Masters agree they have also observed this at Mowanjum. Dix elaborates on this in the following terms:

Warwick: The way they do this beautiful parallel line intrigued surface is often nothing more than a little bit of fencing wire, just curled around with the ends flattened and a stick in an a slightly spoon shaped. And they work along, just wriggle, wriggle, wriggle until you've got it ... It is in effect what the Europeans would call a graving tool.

(Masters et al. 1982: 15)

What is not canvassed in the interview is the question of whether or not the women were making objects for tourists during this period. We know that a number of women artists were incising boab nuts and that Jean Wungunyet³⁵⁰ was producing objects, including bark buckets in the 1970s. Gwen Masters's comments on her time at Mowanjum are as follows:

Gwen: That was the only one I saw the whole time we were there [she is referring specifically to the bucket Pl. 1.4] and they made that specially for me because they told me that and I asked if they would make one for me.

AJM: What would they use it for?

Gwen: Carrying honey or water. Generally it was honey out of honey trees.

(Masters et al. 1982: 15, see also Pl. 1.4, 1982.0092.0043)

Geoff Buchan and Sister Joan Mansfield, workshop art teachers

In 1972 the art teacher and artist, Geoff Buchan, was at Mowanjum to run a short workshop teaching batik and lino block printing as a 'suitable method for recording imagery into design on cloth' (Buchan 1976: 1). Buchan returned to Broome in 1976 with funding from the Adult Aboriginal Education and received further funding from the Northwest Regional Office for Technical Education for art classes in Derby. Buchan was able to get out to Mowanjum when a school car was available and he would: 'move around the camp among the people, trying to explain what I want to do – and asking what was okay to do and what wasn't' (Buchan 1976: 2). On Tuesday afternoons Buchan would borrow a vehicle to 'bring Mowanjum women in [to Derby] to do sample silk screen and

³⁵⁰ Jean Wungunyet is also spelt Wungonyet.

lino cuts' (Buchan 1976: 2).³⁵¹ In a letter dated 26 October 1976, he records that these workshops required him to:

take them [Mowanjum women] back out and return the car by a certain time. I have to go and round them up and talk to them and Elders in the morning. We can't do work at Mowanjum because I can't get anyone to bolt the doors and make the windows for the hall kid proof. I have a proposition to use another building at the community that is coming up at the next meeting. I hope to stay there, get the fabric tables built and keep the place open so they can work at any time when we get to know each other better. I spend a large amount of time conferring and talking. (Buchan 1976: 3)

Buchan was also attempting to get art classes organised in schools and in community halls in Broome and Derby, and had been asked to provide classes to inmates at the prison in Broome. Buchan recounted a discussion he'd had on his art as he sat with the older men at Mowanjum. One of the Elders commented: 'you're an artist, we send our kids away from us on the bus into town where they teach art in school' (Buchan n.d.: 4). Buchan reflected on this, thinking about the:

array of their kids' paintings hanging on four walls of a school. The kids' pictures were commonly plopped with bright basic colours. There were the square houses with two curtained grid windows, centred door, triangle roof, chimney, lollypop green tree and a sun straddling the top right corner. (Buchan n.d.: 4)

He realised that the art in which the children participated at school³⁵² in Derby was not the traditional integrative practice that was being imparted at Mowanjum. Buchan contemplated that:

Today, fine art is generally accepted as being separate from activities like economics, science, marketing, politics etc. Further separations are made into categories of painting, drawing, craft, mapping, industrial design etc. By this comparison Aboriginal culture is integrative. (Buchan n.d.: 4)

This teaching of art at school is an important point for the development of Western realistic designs and was discussed previously in Chapter 5, and is elaborated on in Chapter 8.

In 1977 the Mowanjum community had organised to bring in a prefabricated building to be used as a new craft centre and Buchan had offered to 'help David Mowaljarlai consolidate

³⁵¹ Eventually in 1984, TAFE provided silk-screening training for three weeks at Mowanjum and 'it was hoped to reach a standard that would encourage tourists to purchase goods of this nature' (Mansfield 1984: 1).

³⁵² The role of assimilatory pressure of Western schooling in the development of Western realism in artworks was discussed in Chapters 5 and 8.

his arts and crafts directing introduced art forms back towards the traditional' (Buchan 1976: 5). He reports:

David Mowaljarlai wants me to start work there through the 'wet' and in that time I should be able to get things established well enough for them to have the simple skill to carry on with their own little business. I talked with Joe Baker, D.A.A. [Department of Aboriginal Affairs], and he explained that the general idea in Aboriginal Affairs is to make little communities viable with small cottage industries, and craft seems to be the industry for Mowanjum. (Buchan 1976: 6)

Finally, Buchan (1976) notes that:

Tourism has a growing future and is a most important [sic]. It would be great if there were more good standard paintings to be seen around Shinju or Boab Festival time and it is very important for a big collection of material – paintings, photos, slides, films, interviews to be made and shown in other parts of Australia ... I am also very sympathetic to the changes Mowanjum has to go through in the next few years – when the Elders with the knowledge are gradually passing on. I think it is vital that their story is carried on and recorded, particularly vital in the years to come in establishing a direction and identity for a rather lost younger generation. (Buchan 1976: 4)

Following a request from the Mowanjum community, the Aboriginal Access unit of the Technical Education Division of the Western Australian Government (1984) developed a three-week silk-screening course for the community (Mansfield 1984: 2). Sister Joan Mansfield, a Sister of St John of God, delivered the course between 21 May and 8 June 1984. At this time Mowanjum was already supporting a successful art and craft business, with its paintings being collected by major museums and galleries. It was thought that table cloths, tea towels and t-shirts would be attractive to tourists. Sister Joan conducted her classes from the community store and it was expected that people who were interested 'would be able to observe this work' (Mansfield 1984: 3). At the outset, considerable interest was shown by participants and the 'initial drawings were of a high standard' (Mansfield 1984: 6). Mansfield reported that David Mowaljarlai:

spoke of 'our own symbols'; the paintings on the T-shirts showing 'my country'. The story was about the milky way [sic], a kangaroo's tail was cut with a stone knife. The story was named the Stone Knife. When the tail was cut it burst open – they sacrificed it to God. Even today when they cut the tail, they remember. (Mansfield 1984: 7)

As Mansfield noted: 'Orders are pouring in. There is a great potential there with tourists so very interested in authentic Aboriginal art' (Mansfield 1984: 5) and there was with 'a box full of goods for sale for the tourist bus expected late afternoon' (Mansfield 1984: 5). It

was considered that this course was successful, as ‘the community did have a stall at the Boab Festival and many items were on display and sold’ (Mansfield 1984: 6) and:

The Boab Festival should be a good time to see the stall planned by the Mowanjum people. They have plenty of boab nuts ready for sale. It will be interesting to see the display of silk screening. (Mansfield 1984: 5)

The West Australian reported that the Mowanjum community had produced 1500 t-shirts and 500 tea towels featuring ‘native birds, animals, flowers and the famous “Wandjina Man”’ (Mansfield 1984: 7), noting that these items were being sold at Wittenoom in the Pilbara, at the Shinju Festival in Broome, as well as in the Mowanjum shop (Mansfield 1984: 7).

The Boab Festival: a showcase of Mowanjum artwork and *joonba* performances

As mentioned in Chapter 5, the Derby Boab Festival was an opportunity for the Mowanjum community to showcase their culture through their artwork and their public performances. Importantly over time these cultural productions were increasingly controlled by the Mowanjum community, and gained Mowanjum people increasing recognition from locals and visitors to the Kimberley.

The Derby Boab Festival, held every August during this period, features a mixture of racing, rodeo, sports, the sale of artworks, a parade, and a gala ball: it is a festival for all. McKenzie (1969) observing this, reported that:

It lasts for a week, and the crowning of ‘Miss Boab’ takes place at a Gala ball. The week includes a carnival, a parade of decorated floats, a corroboree, a car trial, a native arts and crafts display, and sporting contests. People come from all corners of the Kimberley in every kind of conveyance. The ‘cowboys’ wear their best boots, belts with silver buckle, brightly coloured shirts, new jeans and ten-gallon hats. They look each other over a wager on the winner of the year’s rodeo events. The Mowanjum people look forward to the fun of the festival for they are part of it. They have several teams competing in ‘lightning’ basketball series and they stage two of the corroborees before very large, attentive audiences. They contribute liberally to the display of native work. Wattie Ngerdu and Sam Woolagoodja are in charge of the corroborees and they feel that this is their opportunity to make a contribution to the life of the town. (McKenzie 1969: 268)³⁵³

³⁵³ In 1966 Reverend Vawser reported that the community ‘now treated corroborees as entertainment, with the exception of the initiation corroboree. But even then they arranged for the boys to be circumcised in hospital after having performed the ritual dances’ (Vawser in Martin 1966: 2), thereby concluding they were

In keeping with the use of contemporary tools to make artefacts and artworks including decorated boab nuts (Figs. 6.6a & 6.6b), the Mowanjum performers were using their traditional ceremonial *waninga* forms which were made from contemporary materials.

McKenzie (1969) recorded that:

Sam Woolagoodja is responsible for the symbols used in the various dances [that is, the *joonba*³⁵⁴ performers' 'totems' or string crosses]. These are quite extraordinary, being depicted on long wooden frames, mostly narrow, but up to fifteen feet in length and quite a handful to dance with! Around the frames, which differ in size and shape according to the dance, are wound strands of wool – red, white, green, black and blue, each colour having special significance. In the old days, this was spun from kangaroo fur and dyed. Today, Sam asked the Mission Superintendent to have the wool sent up from Perth. Nearly fifty dollars worth of wool is require to cover the frames. The symbols differ, both in shape and design, and many days of work are involved. (McKenzie 1969: 269)

So successful were the Boab Festival and other local festivals in attracting tourists that, in 1969, a cultural centre, containing an art gallery, library, museum, and tourist information centre, was built in Derby (McKenzie 1969: 264).³⁵⁵ In the same year, Albert Barunga became a member of the Aboriginal Theatre Foundation, which aimed to 'revive traditional dances and crafts' (Dix 1993: n.p.).

The 1981 Boab Festival highlight was the marsh football competition, with a number of teams from Derby and Mowanjum: the Mermaids, Johnson Crocs, Chalkies and Crabs competed on the muddy claypan (Douglas 1981: 6). The festival this year also featured fireworks, parades, sideshows, races, sporting contests and a concert. Events held in the Mowanjum community were reported in the following terms by Douglas (1981) in *The Australian Women's Weekly* over a two page colour spread as being comprised of:

Aboriginal tribespeople who live at nearby Mowanjum had a display day, with spear throwing, fire lighting, human hair spinning, carving of boab nuts and weaving string form boab fibres. (Douglas 1981: 6)

Donny Woolagoodja recalls his father, Sam Woolagoodja, performing a *joonba* of the Rock Cod and Baler Shell (*nyalikan*) narrative at a number of Boab Festivals in the late

seemingly ignoring these performances as the retelling of important Dreaming narratives and historic events of their country.

³⁵⁴ *Balga* performances are called *joonba* by the Worora, Ngarinyin and Wunambal (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 105).

³⁵⁵ In 1975 Derby's population of 4000 people was more than that of Broome (2000) and Kununurra (1500) combined; as Clarke states, 'Derby was thus the centre of the Kimberley' (Clarke 2007: n.p.)

1960s and 1970s. Sam Woolagoodja, with other Elders, oversaw the performers, and the preparation of the painted boards and string dance totems (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 106).³⁵⁶ Donny Woolagoodja explained that the ‘Wanjinas showed us a different way’ (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 108) and this explains the use of Western materials such as yarn, and the use of a landscape style (Fig. 6.9). This *joonba* came to Sam in a dream, as Donny elaborates:

The Wanjinas came to him in a dream, and they gave him all these songs. When he came to Mowanjum, he didn’t always have time to go out to his country, so the Wanjinas followed him here and they told him these songs. He told me that he’d seen all these Wanjinas giving him all these *joonbas*. He was a Wanjina man. That’s why they gave him those *joonbas*.
 (Woolagoodja in Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 106³⁵⁷)



Fig. 6.9: Tulukun corroboree by *Kija* and *Ngarinyin* people with dancing boards (Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre 1996: 24, 25)

***Joonba* and *balga* performances**

Other *joonba* or *balgas*³⁵⁸ include previously unrevealed narratives or contemporary events such as the ‘tribal kidnapping’ of Njibandum and Pompey (McKenzie 1969: 270) or the performance created by Wattie Ngerdu, called *Dudu Marduda* (the circling plane),

³⁵⁶ These boards and totems are prepared in the right colours based on the dancer who carries them, ‘red predominates for the Wadoy and white for the Junkun’ (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 106).

³⁵⁷ Not only Wandjina reveal *joonba*: Blundell and Woolagoodja (2012) record Donny Woolagoodja reporting that in the 1960s ‘Gwion Gwion came to a senior Wunambul man in a dream and showed him how to compose a performance of dances and songs that his people call *joonba* (Woolagoodja in Blundell & Woolagoodja 2012: 477).

³⁵⁸ Treloyn (2014) explains that the term *balga* is used in the East Kimberley to refer to *junba* (*joonba*) the public Kimberley genre, and ‘elsewhere to delineate a subgenre of *junba* that uses string crosses and painted boards (Treloyn 2014: 203).

following the disappearance in 1956 of a Royal Flying Doctor Service plane in the Kimberley (Harris 2014: iv).³⁵⁹ These performances use dancing boards or *palmara* with painted designs carried on dancers' shoulders as illustrated in Fig. 6.9 and these motifs which are associated to the narrative being performed are also depicted on decorated boab nuts. McKenzie (1980) reports these public ceremonies are often humorous³⁶⁰, and she gives an example of: 'One in which "crows" hop around and find a 'dead' man, and pick him and carry him off, always gets a laugh, as does the dingo dance' (McKenzie 1980: 31). Jebb (2008) mentions that, after experiencing difficulties flying through sea mist, Wattie Ngerdu:

dreamed of the sea mists of the coast soon after these experiences, translating them into the new dance-song 'the Twin Otter and Captain John'. The dancer wore an elaborate head dress in the shape of a Twin Otter aircraft. (Jebb & MAC 2008: 150)

Akerman (1993) comments on the very popular *balga* composed by Wattie Ngerdu in the early 1970s, which recounts the narrative of Tumbi,³⁶¹ the owl, and the leader of the Wandjina, named Wodjin (Akerman 1993: 107) (Figs 6.10a & 6.10b), a popularity which is reflected in the number of boab nuts from this decade depicting Wandjina associated with an owl or owls.



Fig. 6.10a: The Wanalirri dancing board, Mowanjum, 1977
 Photograph by Kim Akerman (Akerman 1999: 18).

³⁵⁹ This *balga* was revived after an archival photograph was shown to the community and performed at the Mowanjum Festival in 2013 (Harris 2014: iv).

³⁶⁰ See Basil Sansom (2001: 1–32) for a discussion on humour in these narratives.

³⁶¹ There are a number of spellings for Tumbi including Tunbayi.



Fig. 6.10b: Detail of the Wanalirri *palmara* used in the Wanalirri Palga [balga] ‘Panoramic view of the battle between the Wandjina and humans at Tunpayi. Painting on the base of the Wanalirri palmara, or dancing board. Mowanjum 1977. Photograph by Kim Akerman.’ (Akerman 2015: 39)

The 1977 Wanalirri *palmara* (dancing board) by Wattie Nyerdu³⁶² depicting the fight at Tunbanyi translates the power of the Wandjina into ‘their guise as the elements’ (Akerman 2015: 39) (Figs 6.10a & 6.10b). The lower section of the *palmara* is Western *realistic* rather than figurative in genre (Fig. 6.10b). Using the 1964–5 field notes of the anthropologist John McCaffrey³⁶³, Akerman (2015) describes the link between these, at the time, contemporary, images and the Wandjina narratives (Akerman 2015: 39). During this period McCaffrey was also researching contemporary art and boab nut incising. Akerman argues that:

This expands our understanding of the diversity of media in which Wandjina are expressed; foregrounding the strong Aboriginal ownership and use of this tradition in order both to remain connected to land and story, and to manage change. (Akerman 2015: 41)

Decorated boab nuts at Mowanjum

Art production was of continuing importance for many people as a form of renewing their ancestral connections and obligations, for providing income³⁶⁴, and for sharing their culture with non-Aboriginal people. Individual experiences and ‘gendered locations’ in the community structure will affect the participation in art production. Blundell (2003) argues that, for young people:

art is a catalyst for learning more about the *Wandjina*, and, to the extent that they engage with this art, both intellectually and emotionally, they come to share their elders’ perception of land. (Blundell 2003: 173)

At Mowanjum, Mickey Bungkuni, Wattie Karrawara, Alan Mungulu and others were painting Wandjina using ochres on board, paper or bark (Akerman 2015: 34).

³⁶² Elsewhere written as Ngerdu. This narrative is discussed in Chapter 3.

³⁶³ See Chapter 3 for other information on the American anthropologist John McCaffrey.

³⁶⁴ Taçon et al. (2003: 100) argue that portable wooden objects from south-eastern Australia have ‘spiritual, social and economic rewards’ and this reflects the relationships of figurative imagery to landscape sites.

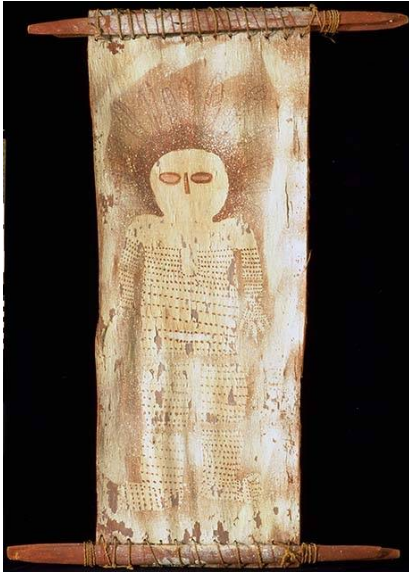


Fig. 6.11: Wandjina figure bark painting
David Mowaljarlai,
Mowanjum, 1979
W 420mm x H 1070mm
bark, pigment, wood, plant fibre
Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2
NMA 1991.0024.3814



Fig. 6.12: Bark painting depicting four Wandjina figures
Charlie Allungoy
Mowanjum, 1970
W 715mm x H 1110mm
bark, pigment
Dr. Helen M. Wurm Collection No. 7
NMA 1985.0173.0007

Other types of objects for sale are shown in Plates 1.1-1.7, at the end of this chapter and are examples from Mowanjum from the NMA collections. Decorated boab nuts from Mowanjum and Derby are detailed and illustrated in Plates 2.1-2.22. Artworks other than paintings on board, canvas and bark, include painting and incising wooden containers, bark buckets or cradles; spears; didgeridoos; clapping sticks; boomerangs and shields; other items include stone axes and points (McKenzie 1969: 271; Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 145). Blundell (2003) argues that through these artworks Mowanjum artists have both ‘subverted the assimilation policies of Australian society’ and ‘accommodated their aesthetic practices to the opportunities engendered by colonisation’ (Blundell 2003: 167–8). These objects have retained their cultural meaning in the ongoing context of close cross-cultural contact, as Akerman (1993) in his essay on Kimberley art and material culture concludes in his discussion of ‘engraved boab nuts’ (Akerman 1993: 106–7).

Akerman (1993) comments upon other forms of art for sale that:

Unlike other small craft or art objects, similarly produced – such as the little poker-worked wood figures of animals and birds produced by the Pitjantjatjara-speaking people of the Western Desert, or mass-produced boomerangs – each carved or decorated boab nut reflects a deeper aspect of the aesthetic nature of its creator. One can see how the varied shapes affect the design layout selected by the artist. (Akerman 1993: 107)

Sculthorpe (1996) disagrees with Akerman, arguing that, in the case of these Pitjantjatjara wood carvings called *punu*, the artists themselves make decisions of what is created publically despite the craft advisors, commercial interests and tourist sales. She concludes the *punu* satisfy the tourist criteria of recognised Aboriginality and portability, without compromising the community's cultural knowledge. Sculthorpe firmly places this art form into the regional narratives within the Dreaming (Sculthorpe 1996).

In relation to the significance of the motifs and themes depicted on decorated boab nuts, Akerman (1993) contends that the:

motifs chosen allow[ing] an insight into cognitive processes employed by the artist in creating not just an object for sale but a vehicle to transmit perceptions of the world from the artist's own cultural perspective. (Akerman 1993: 107)

Blundell's (2003) research investigates the connection between art, identity, the construction of a cultural landscape and the experience of the natural world (Blundell 2003: 155–6). The artworks for sale have retained their cultural meanings, as Blundell and Woolagoodja (2005) explain in the following terms:

Sam [Woolagoodja] was especially adept at making didgeridoos, which he decorated with dots and meandering lines that encoded meanings about his culture. One didgeridoo that he made in 1963 is in the Berndt Museum at the University of Western Australia in Perth. Sam told the anthropologist Peter Lucich, who purchased the artefact from him, that its pattern of zigzagging lines was a map of the Kimberley 'tribes' and that the circular knobs along the lines represented specific 'tribes' [clans] such as the Adbalandi.

(Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 145³⁶⁵)

Wandjina depicted on boab nuts continued to be essential to the community – 'like the gospel' – and the church was painted with three Wandjina images representing the three language groups (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 144–5) (Fig. 6.13).

³⁶⁵ Blundell and Woolagoodja note that this is recorded on Berndt Museum Artefact Card 2468 and the didgeridoo was purchased for £2 (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 276 endnote 150).



Fig. 6.13: Three Wandjina painted in the church at Old Mowanjum in the late 1960s. Photograph: N. Cameron (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 144).

Between 1960 and 1978 the main Mowanjum artists were Jack Wherra, Sam Woolagoodja, Albert Barunga, Wattie Karawarra, Alan Mungulu, Wattie Ngerdu, Charlie Nembelmoore, Paddy Morlumbun, David Mowaljarlai, Daisy Utemorrah, Alec Mingelamarra, Manila Kuttwit and Spider Burgu (Norval 2005: 11). The most prolific boab nut artists were Jack Wherra, Albert Barunga, Alan Mungulu, Sam Umbagai, Wattie Karawarra, Mickey Bungkuni, Wattie Ngerdu, Collier Bangmoro, Elkin Umbagai, Gertie Yabbu, May Langgi and Jean Bangmorra (Akerman 1993: 107; Jebb & MAC 2008: 99; Newstead 2014: 149). Their boab nuts were sold to local people and craft shops, tourists and visiting workers in various local industries, and to anthropologists, at the Boab Festival, and sent to Perth and Sydney, as well as purchased by the Aboriginal Arts Board³⁶⁶ (McKenzie 1969: 265, Jebb & MAC 2008: 99).

In the early 1970s, cruise ships moored at the Derby wharf fortnightly and the tourists on board were driven to Mowanjum for performances by the Mowanjum Dance Group (Jebb & MAC 2008: 150). By the 1970s a number of artists were taking advantage of these early forms of tourism, as well as the increasing interest of museums and collectors in Aboriginal art (Blundell 2003: 167). Akerman (1993), who researched extensively with people from this community in the 1960s notes that: ‘Most middle-aged or older men and women produced carved nuts on a relatively regular basis while some devoted much of their time solely to this activity’ (Akerman 1993: 107). For example, Buruwola Algarra was a tutor in a literacy program and author as well as a boab nut artist (McKenzie 1980c:

³⁶⁶ The NMA Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 collection contains nine boab nuts purchased in 1974 from Mowanjum (1991.0024.4196-1991.0024.4202, 1991.0024.4520 and 1991.0024.4569).

81), while Jean Wungunyet, who was also an author, made hair string belts, bark containers and decorated boab nuts, and she was invited to demonstrate Aboriginal crafts at the Western Australian Museum in Perth in 1977 (McKenzie 1980d: 87). Decorated boab nut production was a core activity amongst some groups of artists adopting this form exclusively, not considering it secondary or marginal.

McKenzie (1980) also mentions that:

old men sit together in twos and threes under their bough shelters, some are carving boab nuts ... visitors start drifting in [as well as] tourists, anthropologists, educationists, sociologists, dieticians, government officials, church representatives.

(McKenzie 1980: 37)

Roger Burgu reflecting on his art, and on the art of the older artists, comments:

Now I'm painting. Painting is good you know. But you gotta think so many things; what you gonna do, what colour you gonna put on it, it's a very hard job. I do Wandjina and sometime Gwion Gwion painting, turtle and snake, sometime I do crocodile. When I'm in good mood I can do all that. When I feel tired, I can't do nothing much. It's very good to draw things you know. Back in Old Mowanjum, old people used to do painting and carving boab nuts, and carving didgeridoo. (Burgu in Jebb & MAC 2008: 245).

Blundell (2005) noted the communal nature of boab-nut carving, observing that, in the 1970s:

collecting and carving these nuts became a family enterprise³⁶⁷ for many in the community, and I often sat and talked with women as they worked at their craft, sitting together in groups under the shade of a bough shed. The craftspeople at Mowanjum were capable of enormous output. By the 1970s Mowanjum was known as the boab capital of the Kimberley (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 145–6).

³⁶⁷ Family involvement in decorated boab nut production was recorded at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts in 1997 when Kevin Kelly, the arts advisor, observed 'one person gets their name on the boab at the end of the day but it could have been the family as a whole. And I know it's the same in some of the outlying communities, everyone helps. Someone marks out the lines, and gives it to someone else who does an image and it could even go through three to four people' (Kelly in Lang 1999: 60–1).

Barbara Bear³⁶⁸ recalls her father's approach to boab nut incising and how the family helped:

Jack Bear used to carve animals, bush tucker, bush fruits. He wasn't like a landscape artist. You get very talented people at Old Mowanjum doing things like boab nut carving and some people painting. At Old Site, men did carving and some women made coolamons from bark and wood ... I [Barbara Bear] used to pick nuts for Dad from a boab tree at the side of the house in Knowsley Street in Derby. Dad used to have a big hook and he used to make us stand under the tree to catch them as he knocked them down: 'Quick now, get under it'. We used to run and catch the nuts. Dad used an Old Timer pocket knife.

(Bear in Jebb & MAC 2008: 203)

Like Jack Bear, many artists have their favourite boab tree from which to collect nuts: the shape, size or colour to suit their particular style. Akerman (1993) notes that at Mowanjum the artists 'take note of any tree bearing well-shaped nuts and make visits, often in taxis, to collect the nuts as they ripen (Akerman 1993: 106) (Fig. 6.14).

Akerman (1993) speculates that in the 1970s the family production of decorated boab nuts by Gertie Yabbu, May Langgi, Jean Wungunyet and Collier Bangmoro at Mowanjum was probably the highest in the Kimberley (Akerman 1993: 107).



Fig. 6.14: A cab from Derby Taxis beside twin boab trees in Derby, October 1961
Rhoda Scott collection of images
35mm format
colour slide
BA1391/244
State Library of Western Australia

³⁶⁸ Barbara Bear herself is a very experienced boab nut carver who was the 2006 winner of the Boab Nut Carving competition. She states: 'I chose this red nut because when you're carving it stands out. The shape doesn't matter to me, so long as it is red and the carving stands out. I learned boab nut carving through my father. My father was a boab nut carver. It was something like a hobby to me' (Bear in Jebb & MAC 2008: 202). The colour of the boab nut is very tree specific so choices in boab colour or shape would be site specific (Lang 1999: 55).

Western-style landscapes depicted on boab nuts at Mowanjum – the emergence of a new style

The creator and leading exponent of Western-style landscapes on incised boab nuts was Jack Wherra (c. 1920-1978). Twice imprisoned in Broome Regional Prison for traditional killings, he was eventually pardoned in 1964 and returned to his family, who by that time were at Mowanjum. Jebb (2008) describes his carving of boab nuts during his 18 year incarceration, explaining that Wherra developed:

his own style of carving his people's history. He created his own illustrated books consisting of pages of framed pictures. Some of his boab nuts have as many as twelve miniature images that create vivid action stories set in the elaborate three dimensional scenery. Wherra was a master of his craft who became famous in the 1960s and was likened to Albert Namatjira for his extraordinary artistic ability.

(Jebb & MAC 2008: 98–9³⁶⁹)

Akerman (2003) reports that McCaffrey's field notes include transcriptions of Wherra's discussion of eight of the boab nuts, with another 11 or so on the audiotapes, as well as descriptions of incising practice and tools (Akerman 2003: 70). A further 41 nuts recorded in McCaffrey's field notes are incised by other artists 'in a more traditional fashion that reflects either the geometric or figurative style' (Akerman 2003: 70). Jebb (2006), after analysing some of the McCaffrey's recordings, observes that:

The story contained in the frames is not always read across tiers or down columns.³⁷⁰ Sometimes it relates to a series of two or three or more nuts to tell a much larger story of Kimberley history. Sometimes one frame is an isolated image that was drawn because of the shape or texture of the nut. For example, a blemish may inspire Wherra to use it was a waterhole, a fire or a bark blemish on a tree. After finishing that frame he may move onto another that is not related to the immediate narrative. (Jebb 2006: 705)

Most importantly in these recordings, Akerman (2003) highlights the connection between historic events and the landscape, that is, Country. He explains:

Depending on what he [Wherra] 'saw' and subsequently carved, the space could contain images of people and events or views of the Kimberley landscape – the 'environment' in which the action of the narrative occurs. (Akerman 2003: 71)

³⁶⁹ See also Akerman (2003) and Jebb (2006, 2008).

³⁷⁰ Nicholls notes that the North East Arnhem Land paintings are likewise partitioned in a non-linear narrative form (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 20 June 2016).

Akerman (2003) notes that Wherra elaborates on the narrative of the segmented panels³⁷¹ during the audio-recordings, explaining that:

one finds a vast body of information about a wide range of aspects of Indigenous experience. It is as if each of his images has acted as a mnemonic trigger that permits Jack to transmit orally a body of knowledge *not apparent in the imagery itself*.

(Akerman 2003: 71, my emphasis)

The issue of cross-cultural visual understandings, an artist's choice of what is or is not included in the imagery and the possible implications for decorated boab nuts unconnected to their oral narrative held in collections is discussed in Chapter 4. Further discussion of Wherra's artworks within the museum environment is included in Chapter 7 and the Appendix.

The beginnings of an 'art industry' at Mowanjum

Recalling art production at Mowanjum, McKenzie remembered David Mowaljarlai as a leader in advancing the art and craft industry there and elsewhere in the Kimberley; she recounts that:

In a small corrugated-iron shed at Mowanjum there are boxes of Aboriginal artefacts. There are caved boab nuts, pictures of Wandjina scratched on pieces of slate, clapping sticks, digging sticks, spears, spear-throwers, bark buckets and carrying dishes, sometimes even some of the beautiful spear-heads once crafted by every man in the tribe. Moving busily among these expressions of his culture is David Mowaljarlai, for he is manager of the arts and crafts industry. He also buys artefacts from Aboriginal groups all over the Kimberley, and sells them to stores in the capital cities.

(McKenzie 1980e: 97)

Mowaljarlai continued to promote Aboriginal artwork by becoming a member of the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council (1978), the Western Australian Museum Sacred Sites Board (later the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee of the Western Australian Museum), and the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

³⁷¹ The telling of the narrative was not necessarily in the sequential order of the segmented boab nut panels (Akerman 2003: 71).

The effect of commercialisation on Indigenous art was discussed in Chapter 4 (for example, Graburn 1976; Stanton 1986; Ryan & Akerman 1993; Phillips & Steiner 1999). In general these views adopt positions that range from negative aspects – the decline of quality and the diminution or loss of traditional aesthetics – to the positive role of art for sale to provide sustainable income, to pass on traditional knowledge to a new generation, and the pursuit of political ends.

Into the future – towards the New Site Mowanjum in 1979

In 1970 the United States based Ecumenical Institute (EI)³⁷² assumed responsibility for the administration of Mowanjum from the Presbyterian Board of Missions. Men's and women's 'guilds' were established to allocate various responsibilities, for example, a Fishing Guild, a Garden Guild, and a Laundry Guild³⁷³ (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 104). The EI administered the community for only one year as a result of complaints by government officials in Derby. However, EI continued to offer some support to the community; for example, with the funding of Grace Umbagai's³⁷⁴ visit to the United States in the mid-1970s (Masters et al. 1982: 10; Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 104).

The Mowanjum community was becoming self-determining and self-sufficient, McKenzie (1980) records that:

Three men are in training as a community administration, a camp manager and a hygiene officer. Thirty-two men and four women are on the Mowanjum payroll, some working on the housing project at the new site, some on the cattle enterprise, some with the management and sale of craftwork. A few young people are apprenticed, a few are employed in town, and a few are training in craftwork. (McKenzie 1980: 30–1)

³⁷² For the background to how a United States not-for-profit organisation established to help poor inner-city populations became involved in remote Australian Aboriginal community, see Blundell and Woolagoodja (2005: 103–4).

³⁷³ Blundell and Woolagoodja note that this guild had a contract with the Derby meatworks for laundering aprons (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 104).

³⁷⁴ The Masters note that they thought Grace had gone to Canada, and recall that she was the first Aboriginal woman through school and nursing, and was followed by her sisters and Albert Barunga's girls (Masters et al. 1982: 11).



Fig. 6.15: The building at Mowanjum served as the community's arts and crafts shop in the 1980s before it burned down in the early 1990s (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 202).

Blundell (2003) recalls that the production of art and artefacts for tourists was a significant way for the community to participate in local tourism, and for some artists to impart their culture by travelling and exhibiting interstate and overseas. As the tourism sector grew, the paintings and engravings of the rock art sites became contested loci between the original custodians and the non-Aboriginal pastoralists, and between the Aboriginal peoples themselves (Blundell 2003: 170).

In 1972 Albert Barunga was in Canberra to make a statement at a national seminar held in response to 'a UNESCO recommendation that all state agencies should be made aware of the problems involved in the preservation of monuments, antiquities and sites' (Edwards 1975: 1). Barunga made very clear the importance of being back on Country and ownership of Country and the preservation of sacred sites, stating that:

When we talk about our land, that's my land, *it's myself*. It's not just an area like 'tribal land', it's *my* land. Other Aborigines used to come to our land, then we'd go to their land. They'd always say 'We'll meet in a certain place'. So, that is how used to live, these people never roamed our land as they liked, but these days it's different ... as when a white man suddenly turns up at a sacred place and to go mining around my land. He says 'Walk!' because he's got a paper from the government. He says as long as he's got that paper he can go dig inside my yard or around my paddock ... Strangers dig around his land without his knowing. Nobody even bothers to tell him. People just walk in and spoil everything.

(Barunga 1975: 76)

This was part of a determination to maintain their culture and connections to Country and become self-determining despite some members of the community being affected by alcohol issues in the 1970s. In 1972 Mowanjum mission became an incorporated body with an elected governing committee. The Whitlam Government assisted the purchase of the Pantijan Cattle Station, a pastoral lease of 2650 square kilometres (Young 1984: 29), with Wattie Ngerdu as the manager of 10 men and overseeing 10,000 head of cattle (McKenzie 1980: 27; Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 204). In the same year, the Whitlam Government assisted the people to acquire the cattle station Panter Downs, of 265,000 hectares, just north-west of the old Munja settlement. Outstations were established with Larinyuwar-Yaloon (Cone Bay), Djiliya (Oobagooma Station), Kandiwal and Winyadywa, amongst others (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 205; Jebb & MAC 2008: iv).

The Mowanjum community moved again in 1979 to a new site a few kilometres away, along the Gibb River Road, which had access to potable water. New Site Mowanjum opened in December 1980 (McKenzie 1969: 3; Jebb & MAC 2008: 139). Eventually 'houses, offices, a hall, shop, church, pre-school, a women's centre, employment centre, garages and mechanics shops, sewage ponds, powerhouse, an initiation ground and a new art and culture centre' (Jebb & MAC 2008: iv, see also McKenzie 1969: 3) were completed. As Elkin Umbagai observes, the community was able to adapt to this change of site:

because the best of our traditional ways were maintained throughout those years that we had the strength to stand up to all the moves and become welded into one community.

(Umbagai in McKenzie 1980b: 73)

In the face of resettlements and other assimilatory processes in the Kimberley, it was the strength of the Mowanjum community's cultural connection to Country maintained through the public performances, ceremony and artwork, which made continued access to their outstations so important. As Blundell and Woolagoodja (2005) note:

Homeland communities are ideal places for creating paintings and traditional artefacts that can then be taken to settlements such as Mowanjum or to other commercial outlets to be sold.

(Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 205)

Donny Woolagoodja and other artists were producing paintings of Wandjina for sale, ‘drawn from their dream experiences and from relationships to the paintings in their countries’ (Jebb & MAC 2005: 8; see also Blundell 2003: 173). The artwork being produced at outstations has been inspired by being in Country as Blundell (2003) reports:

Donny Woolagoodja has publicly reported a series of compelling and powerful dreams, many of which occur ‘on country’ at his family’s outstation in *Yalun*. As he told me when I was at his outstation a few years ago: ‘Every time I stay here I get a vision of all these Wandjina’.

(Blundell 2003: 173)

The importance of the connection between artwork’s ‘visual text’ and a geo-cultural location – the connection with Country – has been produced as evidence in native title claims and is well argued in the research and public policy literature on Aboriginal wellbeing (for example, Ganesharajah 2009; Grieves 2009; Griffiths & Kinnane 2011).³⁷⁵ It is the contemporary use of the Wandjina and associated images on portable artworks that engages with non-Aboriginal Australian culture and land rights, and associated wellbeing. Blundell (2003) has argued this point, and summarises this more eloquently:

Like the rock art sites/sights in their homeland, contemporary works on paper and canvas are legitimate cultural texts that enter into contemporary processes of Aboriginal cultural and identity politics by promoting a distinct way of apprehending the natural world.

(Blundell 2003: 174)

Concluding comments

For the families of the Mowanjum community established in 1956 it had been only 50 years since the initial sustained contact with colonial institutions in the early twentieth century. By 1970 at Mowanjum the upholding of Ngarinyin, Worora and Wunambal traditions and the close association with the Derby township, institutions and people, and later tourism, have maintained – and circulated – the Wandjina imagery outside the Kimberley and into Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia through performance and visual art. The ongoing relevance and importance of the Wandjina to this community was by the late 1970s being transferred to the younger people. Aside from the Wandjina and associated figures, the visual learning environment of school and participation in the lifestyle of the dominant culture over the twentieth century facilitated the emergence of a Western realistic genre and Western-style landscapes from the figurative genre. That said,

³⁷⁵ See Chapter 5 for Lommel’s (1950) belief in the connection between conception, the ‘spirit child’, and the decline in population due to psychological trauma (Lommel 1950: 71).

despite these Western influences the traditional culture is still pervasive, as Jebb and the Mowanjum Aboriginal Community (2008) make clear in their discussion about:

other expressions of Wunan and Wandjina Laws [which] are camouflaged by changing languages, and musical styles, motor cars and supermarkets. But they are there. People at Mowanjum continue to pass particular items along the Wunan channels, they whisper and lay low when Rambarr is near, and they speak of each other using their language names, automatically calling their countries and their Unggud spirits as they do so.

(Jebb & MAC 2008: vi)

Blundell (2003) also explains that the production³⁷⁶ of Wandjina images played ‘a significant role in sustaining people’s sense of their Aboriginal identities’ (Blundell 2003: 169) and this was replicated in practices that included ‘placing their swags according to the relative position of the countries in the *wunan*’ (Blundell 2003: 169), and even:

the rows of houses where *Wodoj* men lived with their families were considered to be part of *Monadba*, while the homes of *Djungun* men and their families were said to form part of *Mamaladba*.

(Blundell 2003: 167³⁷⁷)

Gibson Barunga, in recounting his life and boab nut carving at Old Site Mowanjum, also comments that:

In the future Mowanjum will still be going because of all the kids coming up behind. There are a lot of kids who know how to paint, and how to carve. My kids are here at Mowanjum [New Site], they can learn how to dance and paint and carve.

Today I carve boab nuts. I had some go to Tasmania and to Berlin. I carve landscapes, kangaroos, Wandjinas, barramundis, goannas and turtles. I started carving when I was young, only about nine years old. I use a pocket knife. I will keep carving, when the next nuts get ripe from the sun.

(Barunga in Jebb & MAC 2008: 154)

³⁷⁶ Blundell (2003) notes by 2002, that over 24 artists were producing paintings and some were using pearl shell for jewellery, and ‘Hundreds of paintings are being produced each year, to be sold at Mowanjum itself, as well as at exhibitions in the cities of Melbourne, Sydney and Perth’ (Blundell 2003: 171).

³⁷⁷ See also Blundell and Layton (1978: 231).

Donny Woolagoodja, a leader in his community, and Valda Blundell, who conducted her field work at Mowanjum during the 1960s-1970s, summarises the importance of making art in the community as a means to achieve cultural and physical wellbeing, as well as acting a means for the ongoing transmission of ceremony:

Aboriginal people at Mowanjum seized upon the making of art forms as a way to achieve their own cultural goals. For Sam [Woolagoodja] and others, producing decorated artefacts and paintings of the Wanjinias *for external consumption was compatible with their ceremonial obligations* and with the rhythms of their daily lives. Donny [Woolagoodja] understands his father's works of art from this time as vehicles for the transmission of tradition. 'Paintings were his way of telling the stories of Lalai,' he remarks. By producing art and fine craft forms in full view of the other members of their community, Mowanjum's elders were able to pass on cultural knowledge to a younger generation.

(Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 151 my emphasis)³⁷⁸

In the following chapter, the incised and painted boab nuts held in the National Museum of Australia collections are discussed in the context of the NMA infrastructure, the collector and their attributes. This is one means of integrating all of the elements that comprise the cumulative argument made in this thesis. The depictions of landscape on these NMA boab nuts will also be examined in relation to this broader context.

³⁷⁸ One of the Wunambal artists at Kalumburu, Louis Karedada, 'stated that the artists at Kalumburu got the ideas for their paintings from visits to local rock art sites, while the idea to paint for outsiders came from Mowanjum' (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005: 203).

Plates 1.1 – 1.7 Examples of Artworks other than Decorated Boab Nuts for Sale in Mowanjum 1960s–1970s held in the National Museum of Australia collections

Many different types of artwork/artefacts were produced at Mowanjum for sale during the 1960s-1970s in response to increasing tourist numbers, as described earlier in Chapter 6, and these objects provide visual data supporting the beginning of an ‘art industry’ at the time.

The National Museum of Australia holds three important collections of artwork and artefacts from Mowanjum in the 1960s–1970s. These are the Mr and Mrs Masters Collection No.1, which includes 50 objects accessioned in 1982; the Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2, containing hundreds of objects purchased Australia-wide including 9 boab nuts accessioned in 1991; and a further collection, not discussed in detail in this thesis but collected by the Masters at the same time – the Gwen and Wayne Masters Collection No. 2,³⁷⁹ of 18 objects, including two boab nuts,³⁸⁰ accessioned in 2009.



Pl. 1.1: Elliptical concave wooden container

Alan Mungulu

Mowanjum, c. 1966

L 820mm x W 270mm x D 9mm

wood & paint

Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1

NMA description: The posterior surface is incised and painted with concentric geometric designs.

NMA 1982.0092.0006

³⁷⁹ The Gwen and Wayne Masters Collection No. 2 was accessioned in 2009 and is outside the parameters of this thesis, as stated in Chapter 2; however, some of the objects have been mentioned in instances where they illustrate a point further to the Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1.

³⁸⁰ These are 2009.0003.0003 (two panels of a frontal landscape of emus and trees and a pair of turtles) and 2009.0003.0004 (four panels depicting an Aboriginal family, a corroboree, a river flowing through a gorge, and a man hiding behind a tree about to spear a kangaroo).



Pl. 1.2: Boomerang

Alan Mungulu

Mowanjum, c. 1963–73

L 675mm x W 160mm x D 15mm

wood & paint,

Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1

NMA description: Wooden boomerang with tapered and pointed asymmetrical ends. The surface is smoothed and burnished.

NMA 1982.0092.0018



Pl. 1.3: Fire drill set

David Mowaljarlai

Mowanjum, 1971

L 940mm x W 50mm x D 40mm

wood, bark, hair & pigment

Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1

NMA description: A fire drill set consisting of two long pigmented cylindrical sticks held together with fibre bark, tightly bound with two-ply human hair string. In one of the sticks two holes are drilled at one end.

NMA 1982.0092.0041



Pl. 1.4: Bark container

Mrs Bunjack³⁸¹

Mowanjum, c. 1966–67

L 220mm x W 2010mm x D 270mm

bark, pigment, adhesive & plant fibre

Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1

NMA description: Bark container, which is oversewn at its narrow edges to form a cylinder. The cylinder is joined to a circular base with lacing and features a two-ply fibre string handle. It is pigmented with black red and white on a red ground and covered with film of (adhesive?).

NMA 1982.0092.0043



Pl. 1.5: Stone with incised Wandjina figures

unknown

Mowanjum, 1979

L 225mm x W 284mm x D 10mm

stone

Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2

NMA description: A carved stone board made from an irregularly-shaped slab of stone with incised Wandjina figures and two snake/lizard figures on either side of two hills. There are two birds above the hills with vegetation surrounding them. The board has incisions on a brown background. The location is Mowanjum, near Derby, Kimberley region, Western Australia.

NMA 1991.0024.4242

³⁸¹ This is Christine Bunjack, who attended the TAFE silk-screening course (Western Australia Technical Education Division, Aboriginal Access: 5).



Pl. 1.6: Boat-shaped wooden container, painted glossy tan colour

Unknown

Mowanjum, c. 1966–71

L 595mm x W 110mm x D 160mm

wood & paint

Gwen and Wayne Masters Collection No. 2

NMA description: A boab-shaped wooden container on a wooden stand, painted a glossy tan colour. Three 'haloed' heads are engraved in one side, and two similar heads and a bird are engraved in the other side. A horizontal ladder pattern is above a white, black and red band around the rim. It has a blue ink (?) stain on the elongated chisel marks inside it. The rectangular wooden stand is splashed with yellow dots, and "P. SAGGIN/SYDNEY" is printed in pink on the underside.

NMA 2009.0003.0008



Pl. 1.7: Spear with green-tinged clear glass 'Kimberley Point'

Unknown

Mowanjum, c. 1966–71

L 835mm x W 45mm x D 20mm

wood, glass & pigment

Gwen and Wayne Masters Collection No. 2

NMA description: A spear with green-tinged clear glass 'Kimberley Point' blade and brown painted shaft. The spear has thin white-broad black-thin white bands near the tail end of the shaft, at the mid-point, and with binding behind the head; four bands of fine white flecks on the back half of the shaft; four thin evenly-spaced rings with black dotted infill either side of them on the front half of the shaft; two thin white longitudinal stripes on opposite sides of the shaft, from the mid-point to the blade; resin attaching the blade to the shaft painted yellow with black dots resembling leopard skin. The resin is severely cracked.

NMA 2009.0003.0005

Plates 2.1 – 2.22 Decorated boab nuts from Mowanjum and Derby in the National Museum of Australia collections 1960s–1970s by year

Of the 77 decorated boab nuts held in the National Museum of Australia's collection, 22 boab nuts (28.57%) have been identified in the catalogue as being purchased or produced at Mowanjum and Derby during the 1960s-1970s at the time when Mowanjum was being described as the 'boab nut-producing centre of the Kimberley' (Akerman 1993: 107).

The following boab nuts are designated in the National Museum of Australia's catalogue as being produced at Mowanjum.



Pl. 2.1: NMA 1982.0092.0001

Mowanjum, c. 1966–71

L 175mm x W 110mm x D 105mm

NMA description: Boab nut incised in zigzag linear style featuring naturalistic representations of various hunting tools & weapons. Pigmented. FRAGILE. Broken

Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1



Pl. 2.2: NMA 1982.0092.0002

Jack Wherra

Mowanjum, c. 1966–71

L 145mm x [W 130mm]

NMA description: Boab nut surface incised using a zigzag linear style featuring naturalistic figures of birds & animals and an Ancestor figure together with a realistically depicted hunting scene. Carved onto the top of the nut are the words; 'JACK WHERRA'.

Mr and Mrs Masters Collection No. 1



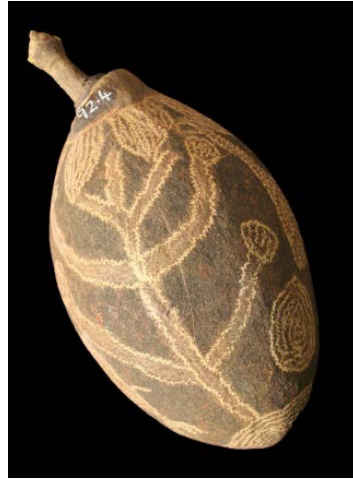
Pl. 2.3: NMA 1982.0092.0003

Mowanjum, c. 1966–71

L 230mm x W 80mm x D 70mm

NMA description: Boab nut surface incised with plant & animal motifs in a zigzag linear style.

Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1



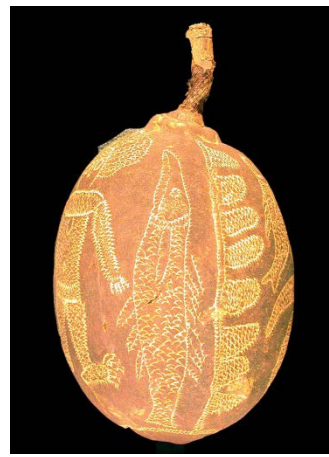
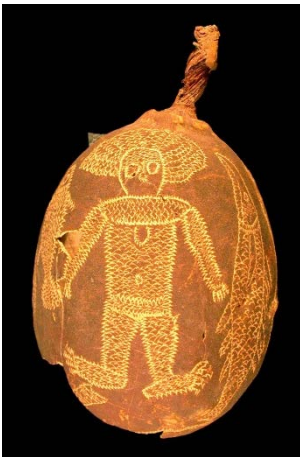
Pl. 2.4: NMA 1982.0092.0004

Mowanjum, c. 1966–71

L 185mm x W 100mm x D 90mm

NMA description: Boab nut surface incised with plant & animal motifs in a zigzag linear style.

Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1



Pl. 2.5: NMA 1982.0092.0005

Mowanjum, c. 1966–71

L 250mm x W 150mm x D 135mm

NMA description: Large boab nut, surface incised with images of an Ancestor figure, animals and plants in a naturalistic zigzag linear style. Broken & Fragile!!!! [Note: colour is due to correction of tungsten lights in NMA Gallery, see Chapter 2 for details]

Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1

Images of 1982.0092.0005 courtesy of David Kaus, NMA



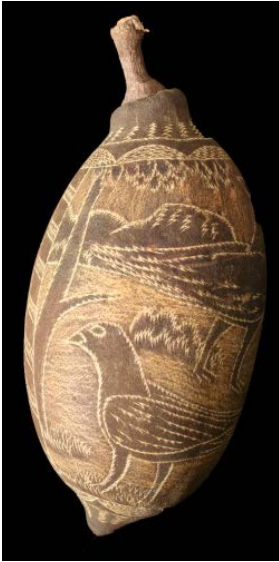
Pl. 2.6: NMA 2002.0018.0063
Mowanjum, 1971
L 240mm x Dia 90mm

NMA description: Carved presentation, friendship Boab nut, Mowanjum 1971. Decorated with incised scenes of wildlife.
Adrian Luck No. 2 Collection



Pl. 2.7: NMA 1991.0024.4196
Mowanjum, 1974
L 180mm x W 115mm

NMA description: Balloon-shaped boab nut incised with a design of a large reptile amongst trees, grasses & shrubs, images divided in two sections. Location: Mowanjum, WA. Date: 1974.
Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection



Pl. 2.8: NMA 1991.0024.4197
Mowanjum, 1974

L 190mm x W 120mm x D 100mm

NMA description: Oval-shaped boab nut incised with realistic designs separated into two scenes. One scene depicts two birds, a tree with mountain in the background, while the other scene depicts a large reptile amidst shrubs. Location: Mowanjum, WA. Date: 1974.

Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection



Pl. 2.9: NMA 1991.0024.4198
Mowanjum, 1974

L 185mm x Dia 83mm

NMA description: Oval-shaped boab nut, stalk attached. Outer surface decorated with a finely-incised pattern of weapons arranged vertically on a background of horizontal parallel bands. At top is a ring of triangular design, at bottom is a ring of linear design. Large seed inside, rattles when shaken. Location: Mowanjum, WA. Date: 1974.

Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection



Pl. 2.10: NMA 1991.0024.4199
Mowanjum, 1974
L 170mm x Dia 70mm

NMA description: Oval-shaped boab nut, stalk still attached. Outer surface decorated with a finely-incised design of two reptiles, separated by two vertical bands of zigzag linear design flanked by triple arcs. Double bands at top and bottom of nut. Large seed inside rattles when the nut is shaken. Location: Mowanjum, WA. Date: 1974.
Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection



Pl. 2.11: NMA 1991.0024.4200
Mowanjum, 1974
L 145mm x Dia 105mm

NMA description: Round boab nut, stalk still attached. Outer surface decorated with a finely-incised design of two birds with long necks and legs, near two trees, a goanna and a large reptile. Birds and reptiles separated by two vertical bands decorated with wavy lines. Large seed inside that rattles when nut is shaken. Location: Mowanjum, WA. Date: 1974
Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection



Pl. 2.12: NMA 1991.0024.4201

Mowanjum, 1974

L 220mm x Dia 135mm

NMA description: Boab nut incised with design of two panels, each further divided into two sections producing a total of four scenes. Each scene depicts trees & other vegetation. There is a circle incised around the base & around the stem.

Small vertical strip acting as a border between the two sections. Location: Mowanjum, WA.

Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection



Pl. 2.13: NMA 1991.0024.4202

Mowanjum, 1974

L 150mm x Dia 90mm

NMA description: Boab nut incised with two realistic landscape scenes separated by two vertical borders consisting of short diagonal stripes. One scene has three emus with two trees within a hilly background and grass at their feet. The other scene has an emu standing under tree with mountains and hills in the background. A circular border incised at the stem & the base. Date: 1974.

Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection



Pl. 2.14: NMA 1991.0024.4520

Mowanjum, 1974

L 180mm x W 100mm x D 105mm

NMA description: Boab nut incised with naturalistic avian and reptile imagery. Large piece broken and missing from one side. Mowanjum, near Derby. Kimberley region. WA.

Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection



Pl. 2.15: NMA 1991.0024.4569

Mowanjum, 1974

L 170mm x Dia 88mm

NMA description: Boab nut, stalk still attached and outer surface decorated with a finely-incised zigzag line of naturalistic motifs depicting animals in the landscape. Location: Mowanjum, WA. Date: 1974.

Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection

Boab nuts designated as produced at Derby in the National Museum of Australia's catalogue by year.



Pl. 2.16: NMA 1985.0073.0047

Derby, c1927

L 130mm x W 85mm x D 75mm

NMA description: Boab nut incised with the patterning of ancestor figures and animals contained within the landscape

Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection

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due to copyright
restrictions

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available
due to copyright
restrictions

Pl. 2.17: NMA 1993.0047.0217

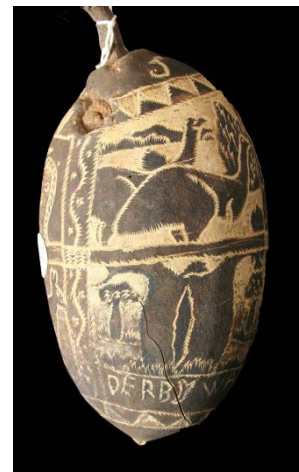
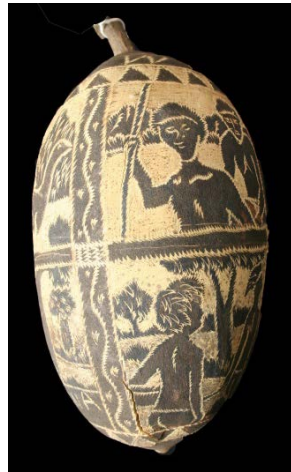
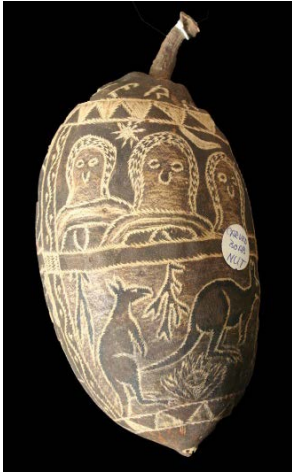
Derby, [c. 1950s-1970s]

L 194mm x W 97mm x D 94mm

NMA description: Small carved boab nut incised with naturalistic motifs of animals & plants in the zig zag linear style.

"Derby W.A. 1977" is written in black ink on one side of the nut.

Professor Henry Krips MBE and Mrs Luise Krips Collection



Pl. 2.18: NMA 1987.0050.0315

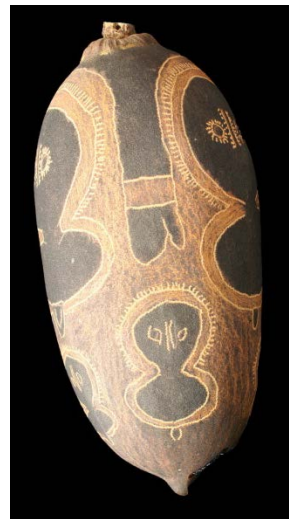
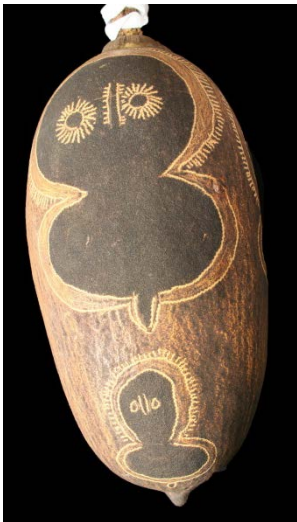
Jack Wherra

Derby, unknown (but likely 1960–1970s)

L 205mm x W 100mm x D 100mm

NMA description: Boab nut incised with naturalistic motifs depicting a particular hunting scene, together with an Ancestor figure and a range of animals moving through the landscape. The words: "DERBY W.A." are inscribed on the lower bottom edge of the nut.

Enid Bowden Collection



Pl. 2.19: NMA 1985.0005.0001

Derby, 1969–70

L 310mm x Dia 140mm

NMA description: Boab nut incised with Ancestor/Wandjina figures.

Mrs. Mary Fox Collection



Pl. 2.20: NMA 1985.0005.0002
Derby, 1969-70
L 310mm x Dia 140mm
NMA description: Boab nut incised with Ancestor/Wandjina figures.
Mrs. Mary Fox Collection



Pl. 2.21: NMA 1987.0044.0047
Derby, [unknown]
L 180mm x W 150mm x D 150mm
NMA description: Boab nut incised in the zigzag linear style with realistic motifs of flora, fauna & human figures in the landscape.
Mr. Herbert Keys Collection

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due to copyright
restrictions

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available
due to copyright
restrictions

Pl. 2.22: NMA IR2971.0126

Derby, 1977

[L 90mm x W 45mm] [typically these bird designs are very small]

NMA: Small carved boab nut incised with naturalistic motifs of animals & plants in the zigzag linear style. "Derby W.A. 1977" is written in black ink on one side of the nut.

R.G. Kimber Collection

CHAPTER 7: COLLECTING, COLLECTORS, AND THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA CONTEXT FOR THE DECORATED BOAB NUT COLLECTIONS

This chapter discusses museum practice, specifically how it relates to objects, collector typology, the acquisition of collections and the practices of the National Museum of Australia. This is followed by an examination of the incised and painted boab nuts held in the NMA collection that include some depiction of ‘landscape’.³⁸² Additional research material relating to all 77 of the decorated boab nuts accessioned or received in or prior to 2002 held by the NMA is contained in the Appendix.

Jones (1996) makes an important point for Australian ethnographic museum collections generally when commenting on the South Australian Museum (SAM) ethnographic collections:

Notwithstanding examples of innovation in Aboriginal art (bark painting, acrylic paintings, toas), religion (millenarian cults in Arnhem Land or the Kimberley), or language (the emergence of nineteenth-century pidgin English for example), resistance to the notion of mutual acculturation has been strong in almost every field of Aboriginal studies, from archaeology, linguistics and religion to material culture analyses. (P. Jones 1996: 2)

As noted throughout this thesis, towards the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, the gradual changes in cross-cultural scholarship have revealed histories of ‘two-way’ transactions perhaps most visibly illustrated through the artworks themselves (for example, Thomas 1991; Poirier 2010), thereby opening up the foundational categories of art, craft and artefact (for example, Morphy & Banks 1997, Phillips & Steiner 1999; Myers 2004). This has allowed the reinterpretation and re-analysis of cross-cultural objects in museums. In relation to artwork and objects from the Kimberley, the examination by anthropologists and others of the adjustive and innovative practices adopted by Aboriginal artists in response to changes in their environment (for example, Poirier 1992, Sansom 2001;³⁸³ Treloyn & Emberly 2013; Glaskin 2005 & 2010) have been essential to this re-evaluation.

³⁸² For a discussion of ‘landscapes’ relationship to Country see Chapter 4.

³⁸³ Sansom (2001) demonstrates ‘how Dreamings irrupt into contemporary histories and act in ways that have political significance, contesting whitefella paradigms and reasserting the world view of the original Australians’ (Sansom 2001: 1).

Cross-cultural art objects and the museum

Graburn (1999), on revisiting his influential work from 1976 on the cross-cultural categories of art, observes that:

We now realise that practically all the objects in our ethnographic collections were acquired in politically complex, multicultural colonial situations. Furthermore, we can state that in our analyses that unless we include the socio-political context of production and exchange in our analyses we will have failed in our interpretation and understanding.

(Graburn 1999: 345)

Until the late twentieth century many of these objects, including decorated boab nuts, and artworks were ‘marginalised, considered less meaningful, unimportant or too heavily influenced by outsiders’ (Taçon et al. 2003: 100). In the Kimberley the change in traditional art practice, from the ceremonial sites and journeys to the inclusion of portable objects with figurative imagery, is also reflected in the bark paintings in the north and wooden implements of the south-east. In relation to wooden objects from south-east Australia, Taçon et al. (2003) argue that part of the reason for these additional or modified art forms may be that they offered the best means by which Aboriginal people could ‘express their Aboriginality in a way acceptable to Europeans’ (Taçon et al. 2003: 100). Aboriginal people were often dispossessed from their Country, and were frequently discouraged from practising ceremony and language. Depiction of important Dreaming Beings, places and experiences could be reproduced on boab nuts and other small objects, and European settlers and visitors were often supportive of the production of such objects as souvenirs.³⁸⁴ These portable artworks also realised an income for the artists and satisfied their obligations to Country, as considered in Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Appadurai (1986) and others demonstrate that, for cross-cultural artwork and objects, the creation of value in Western society is not simply the process of supply and demand but is, in part, the judgement made by the non-producers, based on authenticity and the category in which the object is placed (for example, Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986; Spooner 1986; Thomas 1991; Myers 2002). Graburn (1999) and others more locally (for example, Sculthorpe 2001) argue that ethnographic

³⁸⁴ Over time, it has often seemed easier for Aboriginal people to gain popular/populist recognition for such objects regarded as ‘trinkets’. See Fisher 2014 for a discussion of ‘Aboriginal mass culture’ post-World War Two.

collections in museums are symptomatic of past complex socio-political forces, and that these irrupt at the point of production and collection, in the transfer of the object into the museum system and the negotiation of the museum space through display or storage.³⁸⁵

For Belk (1994) and Pearce (1995) everyday objects are invested with value by the ‘legitimising effects’ of the collection (Belk 1995: 102; Berry 2005: 27).³⁸⁶ Further, Belk argues for the notion of the addictive quality of collecting as an activity, which ‘is a special type of consuming’ (Belk 1995: 5),³⁸⁷ as demonstrated by the ‘proliferation of collector specific texts and exemplified by [the] large number of websites that encourage online trading’ (Berry 2005: 31). These objects have accumulated biographies,³⁸⁸ and they have also: ‘gathered meanings through associations with people they encountered on their way to the collection, thus linking the history of museums to broader science and civic cultures’ (Alberti 2005: 559).

By recognising these connections and associations museum objects can be researched to arrive at an understanding of the environments and world views of their producers, their collectors, and the secondary traders³⁸⁹, as well as the representatives of museum curatorial and administrative processes.³⁹⁰ As Phillips (2005) claims: ‘Historical objects are witnesses, things that were *there, then*’ (Phillips 2005: 108).

Within the museum, traditional taxonomies and museological methodologies (P. Jones 1996: 4) reproduce the long-held structures of Western thought, as discussed in Chapter 4. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries museums upheld the status quo and reified colonial thought on the material culture of a people becoming extinct. Griffiths (1996), in discussing ‘settler Australians’ and their formation of histories of experience,

³⁸⁵ See Byrne et al. (2011) for a discussion of these complex cultural practices and how museum collections ‘have been and are still active in forming social relations between varied persons and groups, including creator communities, collectors, anthropologists, curators, auctioneers and museum administrators, all of whom have also been shaped through interactions with each other and with the material objects’ (Byrne et al. 2011: 4).

³⁸⁶ Philp (2007) also observes that ‘Aboriginal art was not generally considered by the art world to be equal to the achievements of western art – it needed the context of the western art museum to give it aesthetic legitimacy’ (Philp 2007: 51).

³⁸⁷ Belk (1995) defines collecting as ‘the process of actively, selectively and passionately acquiring and possessing things removed from ordinary use’ (Belk 1995:67) and therefore not everyday consumption.

³⁸⁸ Pearce (1992) discusses how this theory of the cultural biography of objects from the 1980s has impacted upon museum studies.

³⁸⁹ This thesis will not be discussing the associated motivations of dealers and auction houses. A recent book by Adrian Newstead (2014) gives some insight into the business of Aboriginal art from a non-Indigenous insider’s point of view.

³⁹⁰ Byrne et al. (2011) discuss the role of museum staff and how they may play a more significant role than the collector (Byrne et al. 2011: 17).

notes that they sought to: ‘hold the land emotionally and spiritually, and they could not help but deny, displace and sometimes accommodate Aboriginal perceptions of place’ (Griffiths 1996: 5). Clifford (1997) encapsulates late twentieth-century scholarship on museums in addressing the interaction between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous contact zone or frontier, when he argues: ‘When museums are seen as contact zones, their organizing structure as a *collection* becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral *relationship* – a power-charged set of exchanges of push and pull’. (Clifford 1997: 192)

By the mid-twentieth century a number of the state art galleries were beginning to collect and exhibit Aboriginal art. Philp (2007) concludes that these exhibitions indicated a history³⁹¹ other than ‘the Eurocentric art tradition derived from the colonial past’ (Philp 2007: 51). Towards the end of the twentieth century Aboriginal concepts of image making or mark making (Butler 2008: 2; Fisher 2014: 244) were being used to renegotiate the Western binary of art/craft and their loci in the museum or gallery. Often slow to respond to contemporary theory, many such institutions still allow these long-held Western belief structures to ‘continue to influence the present through the[ir] classificatory and interpretive behaviour’ (Berry 2005: 7).

Dudley (2012), in his examination of material culture and its relation to museum studies, points out that much of the more recent museological scholarship argues that museums are about people and collections, and that:

Nevertheless, for most institutions and most observers it is objects, and the collection, preservation, storage, documentation, research and display thereof, that most easily characterise museums in contrast to other sorts of publically oriented organisations which may also have the goals of keeping and expanding knowledge, and educating and entertaining people. (Dudley 2012: 1)

³⁹¹ Sculthorpe (2001) suggests it is ‘too easy to be led by our existing ethnographic collections to present “Indigenous cultures” rather than “Indigenous histories”’ (Sculthorpe 2001: 80).

Phillips (2005) makes a sound argument for the importance of research into objects held in museums, stating that:

As a site of empirical practice, the museum operates as an object archive or repository, which makes available to researchers unique collections that can lead to the development of data not retrievable from other sources. Such research requires specialized skills of description, technical and stylistic analysis, documentation, and attribution.

(Phillips 2005: 88)³⁹²

The incised and painted boab nuts held in the National Museum of Australia offer an opportunity to research visual, written and oral records, and physical data using an inclusive complementary methodology to provide new insights into the engagement between culturally diverse groups through Aboriginal art practices in the Kimberley. This thesis argues that objects labelled as tourist art or as souvenirs are a valuable source of data relating to the ‘tangible’ aspects of the production of material culture³⁹³. They encompass both the embedded traditional techniques and long-term structures of cultural production, and the ongoing process of renegotiation of arts practice within the cross-cultural encounter.

An overview of the history of colonial collection and the ethnographic museum in Australia

A number of the National Museum of Australia collections were the result of transfer of objects from the Australian Institute of Anatomy (AIA), established in October 1931, and other Commonwealth bodies established in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The earlier boab nut collections previously held in these organisations reflect colonial influences on collecting practices. A brief overview of these practices follows.³⁹⁴

Museums blossomed in the late nineteenth century throughout the Western world as a result of the ‘enthusiasm for collecting, classification and encyclopaedic knowledge’ (Griffiths 1996: 18) of a growing middle class with more leisure, education and wealth

³⁹² Hodder (2003), discussing the interpretation of documents and material culture, argues that between written texts and objects ‘the problem is one of situating material culture within varying contexts while at the same time entering into a dialectic relationship between those contexts and the context of the analyst’ (Hodder 2003: 158).

³⁹³ Lilje (2013), analysing Papuan grass skirts, ‘demonstrates that a modest artefact type, long ignored and hidden away in museum collections, can be reframed as a valuable source of data’ (Lilje 2013: 254) which reveals the experience of a group and/or can be used to demonstrate a relationship to a broader context.

³⁹⁴ For most of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries standard museological practice remained premised on the ‘Cabinet of Curiosities’ (for example, Griffiths 1996; P. Jones 1996).

than ever before (Lang 1999: 67).³⁹⁵ As discussed with regards to authenticity in Chapter 4, the ethnography of the British museum system developed as an extension of natural history, underpinned by an evolutionist model. In the nineteenth century this coincided with colonial expansion in Australia, and ‘dictated the role to be filled by ethnographic objects from other societies as social markers along a path of human development’ (P. Jones 1996: 3). A ‘fascination with categorisation’ (Stanton 2011: 2) has been at the forefront of collecting since the Enlightenment. In the Australian context Aboriginal people were initially considered/categorised as part of the natural faunal history (Philp 2007: 61) and their removal from the ‘human sphere’ allowed their dispossession from their ownership/custodianship of their land (Weir 2012: 4).³⁹⁶

At this time, Western collectors were preoccupied with progressive sequences to demonstrate the ‘evolutionary nature of culture’ (Morphy 1998: 25; see also Griffiths 1996) rather than displaying interest in cultural contexts (Graburn 1976: 2). The mid-nineteenth century collections of the Australian Museum, National Museum of Victoria³⁹⁷ and the South Australian Museum’s predecessor, the South Australian Institute, all classified their specimens according to these evolutionary taxonomic models. For Aboriginal material culture, the only real interest was in the weaponry (Anderson & Reeves 1994: 83, 88) (Fig. 7.1). Jones (1988) describes as representative an 1888 collection of Aboriginal artefacts in the South Australian Museum containing:

133 spears, no spear throwers, 14 boomerangs, 5 carved shields, 6 clubs, 2 model canoes, 7 string bags, 1 large basket, 5 bark belts, 2 necklaces, 1 large mat, 1 fishing net, 3 string bags for *pituri* narcotic. (P. Jones 1988: 93–4)

Notable omissions in early collections nationally are women’s items (P. Jones 1988: 95; Kaus 1991), with the exception of food-collecting items (Fig. 7.2). Collections were circumscribed by the gender and ‘selectivity and motive of its collector’ (Cooper 1979: 17) and their knowledge base. As Anderson and Reeves (1994) point out:

The absence of women³⁹⁸ from the departments of ethnography has had long-term implications for the gender balance of Aboriginal collections. A recent survey [early

³⁹⁵ Peterson et al. (2008) estimate that possibly 250,000 Australian Aboriginal objects are held in museums globally and in private collections (Peterson et al. 2008: 2).

³⁹⁶ There is considerable scholarship around the dispossession of Indigenous peoples in Australia and the later development of the Native Title discourse (for example, Ganesharajah 2009; Lane & Waitt 2001; Weir 2012), and although extremely important this is outside the scope of this thesis.

³⁹⁷ At this point in history these two museums, the Australian Museum and the National Museum of Victoria, were the precursors of true national museums, which were proposed to be built in Canberra in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

³⁹⁸ This is also reflected in a bias in the literature, owing in part, to the small numbers of female anthropologists, as discussed in Chapter 6 with regards to Mowanjum.

1990s] of the Aboriginal collections of the major state and federal museums revealed that between 75% and 80% of all objects relate to the material-culture of men rather than women. (Anderson & Reeves 1994: 108)

Even the term ‘art’ to describe these objects was rejected by art historians, curators and critics prior to the 1960s, as there was a belief that ‘Aboriginal people did not have a tradition of art, only a decorative tradition’ (Philp 2007: 50).

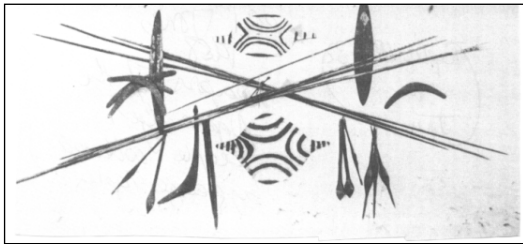


Fig. 7.1: An example of colonial presentation of Aboriginal material culture Weapons of the *Ngarrindjeri* people collected by George Taplin 1879 South Australian Museum (P. Jones 1988: 32, Plate 22)



Fig. 7.2: Display at the Australian Institute of Anatomy on gathering and preparing food using some of Basedow's photographs Photographer: Marg Alexander, about 1984 (Kaus 2008a)

These objects, artworks, artefacts, and specimens were initially ‘assigned new meanings derived from evolutionist, scientific, historical and aesthetic paradigms of Western knowledge’ (Phillips 2005: 86) in museums, and disengaged from their producer’s environment. For example, Baldwin Spencer³⁹⁹ who was appointed as the honorary director of the National Museum of Victoria in 1899, stated that:

The time in which it will be possible to investigate the Australian native tribes is rapidly drawing to a close, and though we may know more of them than we do of the lost Tasmanians, yet our knowledge is very incomplete, and unless some special effort be made, many tribes will practically die out without our gaining any knowledge of the details of their organization, or of their sacred customs and beliefs.

(Spencer in Gruber 1970: 1295)

Professor A.P. Elkin, Sydney University anthropologist in late 1930s, likewise rejected the notion of changing social contexts for Aboriginal cultural production, and argued that there was a sense of urgency to collect ‘traditional’ Aboriginal material culture and physical

³⁹⁹ Baldwin Spencer who was a biologist and foundation chair at the University of Melbourne, president of the Royal Society of Victoria, the National Museum of Victoria director, participated in the 1894 Horne Expedition in central Australia and worked in anthropological partnership with F.J. Gillen, resulting in the 1899 book *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (Mulvaney 1990).

anthropological data⁴⁰⁰ before it disappeared.⁴⁰¹ This belief in the static nature of Aboriginal culture negated a sense of historical change; of history as an explanatory tool of cultural change (Griffiths 1996: 80). In discussing the museum, Lilje (2013) makes the important point that the objects in museum collections have been made within social contexts which may have changed over time; for example, customary use and exchange, trade for non-indigenous goods, sale to tourists etc. (Lilje 2013: 30), but museums are ‘institutions in which the forces of historical inertia are profoundly, perhaps inescapably, implicated’ (Stocking in Lilje 2013: 31).

The exclusion of the artist’s or maker’s names in ethnographic collecting until the latter part of the twentieth century was underpinned by the notion that ‘Indigenous societies could not be studied historically’ (Langton & Sloggett 2014: 5). This was a consequence of nineteenth-century Western beliefs of the hierarchy of cultures and the static nature of some cultures as discussed in Chapter 4; and also because in early natural history museums, where this Aboriginal material resided, biologists and geologists were quite often the directors (Philp 2007: 61). In Aboriginal culture, where oral and performative aspects of artefact/artworks were intangible ‘records’ for collectors, the view of ‘peoples without history’ was reinforced; that is, without written records (Thomas in Langton & Sloggett 2014: 5). Not taken into consideration were the extensive oral narratives that accompany such artwork and it was not until after the mid-twentieth century that scholarship on oral history and memory became a focus for researchers, along with an interest in material studies and what objects can tell us of a culture, of cross-cultural interaction and historical events.⁴⁰²

In the later twentieth century the interest in ethnographic collections changed from having a technological focus with evolutionary and ‘salvage’⁴⁰³ underpinnings to research on material culture, whereby objects have a biography and agency through their producers *and* collectors (Appadurai 1986; Clifford 1988; Thomas 1991). There had been a gradual

⁴⁰⁰ In the late 1930s the National Museum of Victoria received ‘cases of skulls’ from amateur collector Murray Black, who collected human remains and stone artefacts in huge numbers over a 30-year period along the Murray River under the patronage of Sir Colin MacKenzie (Griffiths 1996: 80). MacKenzie established the Museum of Australian Zoology, which became the Australian Institute of Anatomy, which held ‘The Murray Black Collection’ of over 1600 skeletons (Griffiths 1996: 81). The AIA’s relationship to the NMA is discussed later in this chapter.

⁴⁰¹ Elkin was ‘a meticulous observer and recorder, with a particular interest in ritual and kinship; in terms of theory, he was a functionalist, a diffusionist, a Darwinist’ (Wise 1996).

⁴⁰² See Chapter 4 for discussion on these concepts.

⁴⁰³ The salvage approach is based upon concern to collect the details and examples of material culture before it disappears through either the extinction of an Aboriginal group or as a result of too much of the colonising influences on the object.

replacement of the salvage approach to anthropology, paralleling the social and political contexts, of the documentation of Aboriginal peoples' relationships with the dominant society through the firstly the focus paradigm of 'continuity and change' in the 1970s and later through the model of 'accommodation and resistance' (Hinkson & Smith 2005: 159). Understanding these relationships requires a research process that includes and describes the activities of explorers, missionaries, government, industry and infrastructure, collectors and institutions, and the producer artists and their cultures.⁴⁰⁴

Accepting donations, collecting objects during field trips and, to a lesser extent, purchasing items underpinned museum activity until the mid-twentieth century. However, over recent decades resources have been used to research previously acquired items; for example, the National Museum of Australia's 1991 budget for documentation of part of the ethnographic collection was \$200,000, but the museum was unable to fund the purchase of any major acquisitions that year (Taylor 1990: 32; see also Reynolds 1979: 9; Lang 1999: 68). Synchronously, changes in museum practices and altered public and institutional expectations have occurred since the latter part of the twentieth century and continue, meaning that there is increasing Indigenous engagement with the curating and researching of collections, which has changed the way objects have been displayed or repatriated.

The following conversation in 1982, between Gwen and Wayne Masters, non-Aboriginal mission workers who had lived at Mowanjum in 1966–71, and Tony Martin from the National Museum of Australia, demonstrates evidence of at least some changing attitudes within the museum in the 1980s. Upon their donation of boab nuts, artworks and artefacts to the museum, the Masters were interviewed at their home in Canberra. Tony Martin questioned the Masters' lived experience with respect to the changes to the Mowanjum community's art practices due to 'white influences'. The following exchange, which is an extract from the NMA transcript (82/15), also indicates the museum's embrace of changed collection criteria:

AJM: [Tony Martin] Well you'll know then that some of these are just plain shields. The interesting thing is to look at the way people have developed their crafts, especially when the influence of white people is present. The Worora have had contact since about 1912 when the first missionaries went through there and actually established themselves: not actually where they are now, at Mowanjum with the present people.

Wayne: Point George?

⁴⁰⁴ See Chapters 5 and 6 for further explanation.

Gwen: Point George.

AJM: So you get development that is very interesting from our point of view. A lot of those collections are collections which are, I suppose, more related to people as they were. *Now the policies of the Museum are to be not only the Anthropology side, the historic stuff but the contact side as well, for want of a better name.* That was the sort of comment Warwick is making about the collection. They were very important in the sense that we do need this stuff. It's the next step. *In many cases it is all we have got.*

Wayne: Certainly. The modern material and techniques and the old traditional ways.

AJM: How they adapt.

Wayne: Like the copper wire.

Gwen: Vegemite jars. (Masters et al. 1982: 21–2; my emphasis)

This interview transcript illustrates one way by which the collections provide evidence of the innovation inherent in material culture and how practices change, mirroring the artists' lived experiences and changes to materials and techniques – and, importantly, the museum's recognition of these matters.

Categories of collectors and collecting

The 'biography' of objects has been previously discussed in Chapter 4, and changes in the objects 'status' through the various interactions in changing use, form and environment between the producer, collector and the museum are part of Appadurai's 'social relationship' over the life of the object (Appadurai 1986). Peterson, Allen and Hamby (2008) make an interesting point about the 'quality' of the experiences around relationships between collectors and producers, and comment that:

As each year passes these items are increasingly taking on the status of sacred heirlooms, rather than being seen as part of the everyday impedimenta of the past, raising questions about how a handful of artefacts, sometimes gathered in an encounter measured only in minutes, relate to the total suite of material culture to choices made by collectors about what to collect, to the decisions made by Aboriginal people about what to relinquish, and to their lived experiences at the time. (Peterson et al. 2008: 2)

The nature of the relationships between what is collected and the collector has prompted Pearce (1992) to define three broad types of collecting categories: as systematic assemblages; as fetishes; and as souvenirs (Pearce 1992: 69–88). Systematic collecting is based on the selection of objects, with the intention of their representing all others of their kind. A relationship manipulated by such seriality is 'intended to convince or to impose, to create a second and revealing context, and to encourage a case of mind' (Pearce 1992: 202; see also Pearce 1992: 201–3; Stewart 1993; Berry 2005) that is, to prove the point or

confirm the argument the collector wishes to make. Pearce's fetishistic collecting is typified by the accumulation of as many examples of a type of object as possible (Pearce 1992: 196–201) and these collections are organised to display the objects according to the private interest of the collector and often 'with a lack of intellectual rationale by which the material and its acquisition was informed' (Pearce 1992: 197). The souvenir has been discussed in Chapter 4 vis-à-vis its relationship to the authenticity of decorated boab nuts. For Pearce (1992) the souvenir collection is wholly personal and addresses memory and nostalgia (Pearce 1992: 195–6; Stewart 1993: 150). For Ben-Amos (1977), Pearce (1992), and Stewart (1984) the souvenir collection is therefore unable, or does so inadequately, to convey cultural insight (Lang 1999: 41). This thesis clearly argues that this is *not* the case for decorated boab nuts and similar Aboriginal art and artefacts.

The professional collector

This thesis uses Kaus's (2007) typology for collector categories – 'professionals' and 'amateurs' – which has been applied to what was the National Ethnographic Collection (NEC) in the National Museum of Australia, albeit with some overlapping between the first two categories, as occasionally amateur collectors 'metamorphose' into professional collectors (Christine Nicholls pers. comm., 8 February 2008). A further additional category of 'unintentional collector' likewise may move into another collector category over time. Kaus (2008) observes for the earlier NMA collections that:

some flexibility is required when considering what constituted a professional in historical times. The nature of anthropology changed dramatically over the twentieth century, with few academically trained anthropologists in the early decades, until the establishment of anthropology as an academic discipline in 1925. (Kaus 2008: 287)

The professional collector⁴⁰⁵ has a scientific or professional interest in collecting, for example, anthropologists or scientists. Kaus (2007) defines this as:

of belonging to, or connected with a profession', with 'profession' being 'a vocation or calling especially one that involves some branch of advanced learning or science', in this case ethnography and anthropology. The 'belonging to' or 'connected with' part of the definition is important because the nature of anthropology changed over time with increasing professionalism of the discipline. (Kaus 2007: n.p.)

A member of this category often acquires their object/s via fieldwork; therefore, the items are collected in situ, with increasing professional/accurate recording over historical time,

⁴⁰⁵ See David Kaus's article 'Professional and amateurs: different histories of collecting in the National Ethnographic collection' paper presented by David Kaus, Senior Curator, NMA, Collecting for a Nation symposium, NMA, 21 March 2006.

although there is some potential for philosophical/psychology ‘fiddling with the facts’ to suit institutional politics/economics. Kaus (2007) notes that in general these professional collectors ‘collected in restricted geographical areas’ (Kaus 2007: n.p.), which would correspond with their having undertaken fieldwork. These collectors collect multiple types of objects, often systematically (Pearce 1992), for their ongoing research and publish papers and books about the materials and culture. In most cases these are primary collections, whereby the object comes directly from the producer or site and is documented by the collector. If little information on the objects’ provenance is available, then the collection should be part of a large-scale corpus of work including research notes and publications. Kaus (2007) uses as an example, the University of Sydney anthropologists:

who undertook fieldwork at the University of Sydney in the 1920s and 1930s were represented in the National Ethnographic collection and, while most were not particularly interested in material culture, they were expected to make material culture collections. They were issued with written fieldwork instructions, including advice on making and documenting material culture. (Kaus 2007: n.p.)

The Dr. Herbert Basedow Collection in the National Museum of Australia includes five incised boab nuts recorded as collected from Broome in 1916⁴⁰⁶ and is a good example of this category. Basedow visited the Resident Magistrate, Major Woods, and Bishop Trower in Broome before arriving in Derby on 23 March 1916. Basedow (1881–1933) was possibly Australia’s first professionally trained anthropologist, as well as a doctor and geologist. He had completed a BSc in 1902, presented scientific papers at the Royal Society of South Australia, and in 1910 was awarded a PhD in geology and two postgraduate qualifications in medicine. In 1911 he worked as the South Australian Assistant Government Geologist, Medical Inspector and Chief Protector of Aborigines in the North Territory, and later the Special Aborigines’ Commissioner for the federal and state governments (Kaus 2008a: n.p.). Jones (1996) notes that he ‘worked at the fringe of museum ethnology as this new profession was becoming entrenched by Australia’s museums directors’ (P. Jones 1996: 149). In relation to his collection in the NMA, Basedow had performed geological surveys in northern Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory. The National Archives of Australia has a copy of the correspondence dealing with the Basedow Collection, which was acquired by the Commonwealth in 1934 for £500. The collection was disbursed to a number of museums

⁴⁰⁶ These are 1985.0060.0803, 1985.0060.0804, 1985.0060.0805, 1985.0060.0806 and 1985.0060.0807. Interestingly, 1985.0060.0807 depicts images of a cow and possibly a donkey and a chicken (Fig. 5.13b).

around Australia, including the NMA, the South Australian Museum and the Australian Museum.

Of the 14 boab nuts collected by Basedow in 1916, five are in the NMA. Basedow reports during a week's stay in Derby (28 May – 3 June 1916) that:

The baobab nuts were sufficiently hardened by this time that they permitted of being carved upon by the natives. Some of the men were very clever at artfully decorating their surfaces with designs of the kangaroo, emu, fish and other objects. The nuts are eagerly sought after by the local residents who send them as curios to their friends living south or in the mother country. The carving is done with the point of a knife or of a flint chip.

(Basedow 2009: 115)

Jones (1996) reports that Basedow was 'the first anthropologist to obtain Aboriginal names for component parts of artefacts' (P. Jones 1996: 77). The collection is not as well documented as it could have been: when Norman Tindale from the SAM arrived to document the collection, the artefacts and labels had been separated (see Appendix). Basedow, who was clearly a collector in this 'professional' category, published a number of books on Aboriginal culture, which include descriptions of material culture and practice. Most importantly for research into decorated boab nuts, his book *The Australian Aboriginal* (1925) includes observations from his 1916 expedition to North-west Kimberley, from Forrest River along the coast to the Derby region.

The amateur collector

By contrast, Kaus (2007) defines the amateur collector as:

one who practices [sic] a thing especially an art or game, only as a pastime. ... While some may have written about Indigenous cultures, their collecting and other related activities were undertaken in addition to their employment; that is, as a hobby. (Kaus 2007: n.p.)

The amateur collector collects for private reasons (Pearce 1992) and often obsessively (Belk 1995: 5).⁴⁰⁷ Theirs are often opportunistic acquisitions and are acquired through their resources other than fieldwork; for example, from dealers or people with whom the collectors correspond. These collectors may have little or no say in what was collected at the site of collection by someone else. Many amateur collections contain objects from widely spread geographic regions. The objects in these collections often therefore possess a 'travelled' history, with the potential for a loss of provenance through what was known at the time as 'Chinese whispers', fraud, or memory/meaning issues.

⁴⁰⁷ Wishart recounts how he and a friend collected 1700 stone implements in one day at a sheep property near Willaura, Victoria, in 1932; he described it as 'like having all our birthdays at once' (Wishart in Sayers 1961: 17).

As an example, the Dr. Robert Wishart Collection in the NMA consists of over '20,000 items and is divided into two sections, one consisting of wooden implements and hafted stone implements, and the other of stone implements ... mainly from Aboriginal camp sites throughout Victoria' (Wurm 1963: 1). Helen Wurm (1963), the anthropologist accessing the Wishart collection for the NMA, comments on the wooden collection:

[it contains] many beautiful and rare items, [and] consists of Aboriginal weapons, tools and implements, ceremonial objects, ornaments, carvings, etc. These are all genuine relics and not copies made for the tourist trade as is most of the material available today. Also included are some items from New Zealand, New Guinea and the Pacific Islands.

(Wurm 1963: 1)

Sayers (1961) records that 'the wooden and other implements and weapons ... range from spears and efficient-looking nulla-nulla waddies to food bowls, [and] a Maori flax skirt' (Sayers 1961: 17). Dr. Robert Wishart was a surgeon who lived in Melbourne from 1920 (Kaus 2014: 377). Carroll (1961) notes Wishart's interest in natural history and on:

weekends and holidays spared from a busy practice, Dr. Wishart travelled the country districts of Victoria, looking for old camp sites or kitchen middens which marked the seasonal movements of parties of aborigines [sic] around their hunting grounds.

(Carroll 1961: 2)

In the following quote taken from a newspaper article, Wishart reflects on how his collection began:

About 1922 I began wandering about Victoria, looking for stone implements on former aboriginal [sic] camp sites ... I also started collecting wooden items, buying them from secondhand shops, or sending donations to missions in the outback and hinting tactfully that I would be grateful for any weapons or such that they might care to let me have ... My waiting room was decorated with wooden and stone implements and weapons, both aboriginal [sic] and from the Pacific Islands. Many choice specimens were given to me by patients and friends once they became aware of my hobby.

(Wishart in Sayers 1961: 17) (Fig. 7.3)

While Wishart states that he catalogued his finds in duplicate and sent one of the cards to the NMA (Sayers 1961: 17), it is unfortunate that those cards are not available for the boab nuts he collected.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁸ Kaus notes that Wishart's Kimberley objects have little provenance except for one boab nut which was sent to him by a Mr Brown in 1944 (1985.0102.0424) with no further details. Kaus was unable to find evidence that Wishart had travelled to the Kimberley himself (David Kaus, pers. comm., 1 November 2006).



Fig. 7.3: Dr. Wishart with part of the display of aboriginal [sic] and Pacific Islands weapons and implements on the walls of his flat. Photographer: R. Lovitt (Sayers 1961: 17)

The Dr. Robert Wishart Collection consists of three boab nuts, one dated as 1944 and the other two acquired between the late 1930s and 1940s. This collection was purchased by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in 1964 and eventually entered the NMA collections (Kaus 2014: 377). Two of the boab nuts have geometric designs (1985.0102.0423 (Fig. 1.4) and 1985.0102.0424 dated 1944) and one has figurative motifs, possibly yams (1985.0102.0425).

The unintentional and other collectors

The unintentional collector is defined in this thesis as a person who usually has a very small number of objects, sometimes only one or two objects, and these objects usually fall within the category of souvenir from the collector's point of view (Pearce 1994: 195–6; Stewart 1993: 150). There may be little provenance attached, except for recollections of the collecting circumstances and these are often not recorded; however, they are 'primary collections' (Kaus 2008). These casual or unintentional collectors are always opportunistic and usually do not have a pre-existing knowledge base, specific research or hobby interest.

An example of this category of collector is Miss Mary Fox, who provided details of the purchase of the two incised boab nuts (1985.0005.0001 1969 and 1985.0005.0002 1975). Fox lived in Derby from 1968 to 1977 and worked for the Young Women's Christian Association (YMCA), training Aboriginal girls and young women throughout the Kimberley.⁴⁰⁹ The YMCA opened an artefact shop in Derby in 1973. Fox recalled that boab nut 1985.0005.0001 was purchased from the Derby Boab Festival from a stall

⁴⁰⁹ It must be noted that all these categories can potentially overlap, for example, Mary Fox had what could be described as a 'professional relationship' with Aboriginal people and therefore possibly her purchasing of boab nuts were not an entirely 'unintentional' in this regard.

believed to be exhibiting incised boab nuts by patients from the Derby Leprosarium, while boab nut 1985.0005.0002 was purchased from a young man visiting the YMCA shop who had exhibited the nut in the Derby Boab Festival in 1975 or 1976.

There are a number of boab nuts in the NMA collection whose origin lies outside these definitions, for example, where the boab nut has been inherited or gifted from elsewhere, for instance, from an unintentional collector with a connection to the Kimberley, for example, surveyors or mission visitors. These boab nuts often have no provenance and the donor may be well removed from the collector, who then cannot be identified.⁴¹⁰ Decorated boab nuts donated under these circumstances may be peripheral to the discussion of the development of a realistic genre unless stylistic similarities can be recognised. These donations are out of sequence and lacking a date and location, and donated some time after initial collection. The museum does not have the provenance or research capacity to locate them in their correct chronology etc.

Finally, it has been noted that National Ethnographical Collection, which was absorbed into the National Historical Collection (NHC)⁴¹¹ in the NMA under which the decorated boab nuts being discussed sit, has two significant general collection biases: firstly, most of the ethnographic collections have been acquired from northern and central Australia. Kaus (2007) explains that it was the:

notions of Aboriginality that were in force when our earlier collectors were active. It ties in with the relative lateness of the collections in the National Ethnographic collection when compared to many of the state collections. The earliest collections were not started until the late nineteenth century, and the majority after this. So by the time most of the early collectors were active, the prevailing perception seems to have been that 'real' Aboriginal people were those of unmixed descent whose lifestyle was more or less unaffected, or little affected, by white culture. (Kaus 2007: n.p.)

Secondly, there is a bias towards 'men's weapons and tools, ceremonial objects and paintings' (Kaus 2007: n.p.).

⁴¹⁰ See for example, incised boab nut Presbyterian Church IR3095.0002.

⁴¹¹ The National Historical Collection and the National Ethnographic Collection will be discussed later in this chapter.

The National Museum of Australia and collections

The Australian Institute of Anatomy

In the lead-up to the opening of a new national capital in 1927, the establishment of a number of national institutions was proposed, including in 1928 a National Museum of Ethnology⁴¹² and in 1929 an Australian National Museum (Anderson & Reeves 1994: 93). Colin MacKenzie, a Melbourne surgeon, interested in Australian fauna, had earlier established the National Museum of Australian Zoology in Melbourne, and in 1931 its name was changed to the Australian Institute of Anatomy (AIA) by an Act of Parliament, when the museum was moved to Canberra (Fig. 7.4).⁴¹³ Hansen (2006) notes that MacKenzie:

accepted a number of significant ethnographic collections accumulated both by professional and amateur collectors. At first glance his acquisition of these collections sits awkwardly with his interest in comparative anatomy. For MacKenzie, however, there was a close link between the fate of Australian fauna and Aboriginal people.⁴¹⁴ MacKenzie saw a parallel between the impact of settlement on wildlife and declining numbers of Indigenous people. (Hansen 2006: n.p.)

When MacKenzie retired from the directorship in 1937 collections were still being acquired (Kaus 2007: n.p.). By this time, the AIA held the National Ethnographic Collection, which totalled over 20,000 items (Hansen 2006: n.p.) in the basement (Kaus 2007: n.p.).⁴¹⁵ The original sources for the NEC were the AIA collections of McKenzie, the Commonwealth Government, and those objects the AIA acquired between 1920s and 1930s. Later the AIA held the Australian National University collections transferred from the 1950s and returned to the University in the 1990s (Kaus 2007: n.p.); the University of Sydney's permanent loans in 1956;⁴¹⁶ and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies collections (Kaus 2007: n.p.; Kaus 2008: 285).

⁴¹² Professor A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, foundation professor of anthropology at the University of Sydney, strongly supported this proposal (Anderson & Reeves 1994: 96).

⁴¹³ MacKenzie offered his collection of over 2000 specimens and anatomical drawings to the AIA (Hansen 2006: n.p.).

⁴¹⁴ One of the first collections in the AIA was that of George Horne from Central Australia in the 1920s with 76 per cent being objects used by men (Hansen 2006: n.p.). Horne 'saw culture in evolutionary terms, placing artefacts in a hierarchy of ... most primitive to most advanced' (Hansen 2006: n.p.).

⁴¹⁵ David Kaus was working at the AIA in 1979 (Kaus 2007: n.p.).

⁴¹⁶ See correspondence: Report of the Inspection of the Ethnographic Collection in the Department of Anthropology, Sydney University, 5 September 1956 from E. Nadel, Assistant Curator, File 50/2/6



Fig. 7.4: Australian Institute of Anatomy, date and photographer unknown, National Museum of Australia (Kaus 2008: n.p.)

Kaus (2007) describes the storage and display of the Aboriginal ethnographic collection in the AIA in the following terms:

In the two or three years prior to its closing during the time I worked at the Institute of Anatomy, we changed parts of the case dealing with ceremonial matters to remove inappropriate photographs and we changed one of the three cases dealing with bark paintings to one on rock art. The exhibitions were on the ground level. The basements below them were used for storage. The collections were mostly stored on movable trolleys made on site, apart from the stone implements which were in two rooms on their own, largely stored on metal shelving or in the packing crates or cardboard boxes in which they arrived. Early in the 1980s, I moved the Pacific collections from their room in the basement where the Aboriginal collections were stored to the opposite basement and created a locked room for secret and sacred objects, which until then had been stored in bundles in plastic bags along with other objects. (Kaus 2007: n.p.)

Kaus acknowledges the problems with this set-up and comments about the AIA and University of Sydney collections held within the AIA, that:

A result of sometimes poor curation at the Institute of Anatomy is that disassociation of documentation with objects resulted in several thousand now not having any collector information at all. I have been able to place many back into their collections. For example, the Basedow collection went from just over 100 items in the early 1980s to 1100 or so in 1985. In some cases I removed objects incorrectly placed in various collections. This is a factor that always has to be taken into account when studying the relevant collections, not to mention the collections management problems this has created. (Kaus 2007: n.p.)

A number of the collections related to the incised and painted boab nuts examined in this thesis had been deposited in the AIA. The E. Milne Collection of Aboriginal artefacts from 1870s to 1910 had been bequeathed to 'the first Federal Museum opened in the Federal

Capital’ (Hansen 2005: n.p.). Edmund Milne was an assistant commissioner in the New South Wales Railways⁴¹⁷ and much of his collection is from that state. A discussion of his collection is in the Appendix. Between 1903 and 1928 Herbert Basedow, one of the first anthropologists in Australia, collected over 1600 artefacts and 3000 photographs during expeditions in central and northern Australia (Hansen 2005: n.p.), and this collection was purchased by the Commonwealth in 1934. One of only two professional collectors of the boab nuts held in the NMA, Basedow, as noted earlier, was trained as a medical doctor, a geologist and an anthropologist. Further discussion of the Basedow Collection is in the Appendix. Other important ethnographic collections were also held in the AIA, including fieldwork collections from the 1930s made by anthropologists from the University of Sydney, objects from the 1948 American–Australian Expedition to Arnhem Land, and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies collections assembled after 1961 (Hansen 2006: n.p.).

Although the AIA in particular was storing the NEC ‘in a poor, cramped and un-air-conditioned space’ (Philp 2007: 62), the 1975 *Pigott Report*, resulting from the Australian Government’s inquiry into museums and national collections concluded that, due to a crisis of deterioration in these Australian collections, ‘a Museum of Australia be established in Canberra’ (Hansen 2005: n.p.; Philp 2007: 62). The recommendation was made to transfer collections to the Institute of Anatomy building temporarily so as to:

‘implement promptly the proposed national museum though on a very small scale’, and that it could be used as a temporary headquarters up to six or seven years – fairly permanent temporary – during the planning and design phases for a first stage of a museum of national history. (Philp 2007: 62)

The National Museum of Australia

The *National Museum of Australia Act 1980* was passed and the National Historical Collection⁴¹⁸ was established, encompassing collections from government departments and the AIA collections; it also ‘acquired material in its own right. This included donations from the general public, purchases at auction and targeted collecting projects’ (Hansen 2005: n.p.). The AIA closed in 1983 and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collections became the responsibility of the NMA and were transferred to the new Mitchell

⁴¹⁷ Milne is considered an amateur collector, according to the collector categories devised by David Kaus (2007), however there is potential overlap of these collector categories.

⁴¹⁸ The National Historical Collection contains over 200,000 items, ranging from buggies and cars, specimens of fauna and flora and maritime artefacts, to ethnographic collections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander material culture (Hansen 2005: n.p.).

Repository (Kaus 2014: 367). The National Historical Collection now contained the NEC and other collections transferred from Commonwealth bodies under the *National Museum of Australia Act 1980*, and these were as diverse as the Australian Broadcasting Commission and the Bureau of Mineral Resources (Hansen 2005: n.p.).

The National Museum of Australia opened in 2001 and holds collections of approximately 15,000 NEC artefacts, around 80,000 mainly surface-collected stone tools and some 1600 bark paintings, as well as other portable artworks (Kaus 2007: n.p.; Philp 2007: 49). Although a major shift in the museological practices relating to Australian Indigenous art, history and material culture has occurred in the twenty-first century, unfortunately many items collected and undocumented in previous decades are not well researched and often not exhibited and difficulties remain with the lack of documentation. Of the decorated boab nuts held in the NMA, a small number are exhibited; the documentation of the boab collections are discussed in this chapter and in the Appendix.

National Museum of Australia catalogues and museum practices

Despite Tilley's (1999) view that 'the artefact through its "silent" speech and "written" presence, speaks what cannot be spoken, writes what can be said in words in a material form' (Tilley 1999: 260), the lack of documentation and the inconsistencies over time and practices make investigation of the provenance of decorated boab nuts difficult but not entirely impossible, through the complementary approaches discussed in Chapter 2. Summarising the importance of ethnographical collections as visual texts and historical documents, Philp (2007) states that:

In the National Museum the art functions variously as historical statement, record of country, land claim and symbol of the continuing cultures that refuse to be erased. The art is integral to the anthropological and historical record. (Philp 2007: 63)

The changing scholarship on the role of art and its relationships culturally has been discussed in this chapter and Chapter 4. Museological changes in the way artworks have been exhibited and documented in Australian museums and art galleries have been and are continuously changing in light of these reinterpretations. Philp (2007) has observed the Pigott Committee noted that:

curiously, Aboriginal art had long been displayed impersonally in natural science museums in Australia but [it was] only when Aboriginal art was 'discovered' by art galleries did the artists become known as people rather than as nameless ciphers. (Philp 2007: 60–1)

Stanton (2011), himself a previous Director (1978-2013) of the Berndt Museum at the University of Western Australia, argues that museums are about both the object and its producers, who are usually accessed through the documentation attached to the object. He states:

Deeply grained documentation remains a key achievement for ethnographically-based museums, as this documentation ensures a continued relevance in research, teaching, and in the minds of members of the communities of origin. (Stanton 2011: 2)

When museums accession objects, certain types of documentation are required, including how and when it was acquired, who acquired it and under what circumstances; a physical description of the object; and how it was acquired by the museum and from whom. Objects are allocated individual numbers in a register and any additional background information recorded. Institutions vary in the detail of information required and even within a single museum this level of detail may vary according to the period it was accessioned and who accessioned it. Poor provenance or loss of provenance may occur at either the collecting point or anywhere along the line until the object is accessioned, or even afterwards, perhaps during its relocation.

Two examples that illuminate changes to provenance are, for example, Herbert Basedow's collection, which was purchased by the Commonwealth in 1934 after Norman Tindale from the South Australian Museum had listed the items. These had been offered for purchase after Basedow's death by his wife Nell.⁴¹⁹ On Tindale's return 'to document the collection the artefacts were in one pile and labels in another' (Kaus 2003: 15) and most of the labels eventually disappeared. The other example relates to the establishment of the National Museum of Australia, to which, at that time, a number of collections from other institutions had been relocated. While the Australian Institute of Anatomy cards are available for consultation at the NMA (David Kaus, pers. comm., 1 November 2006), the original field notes for some items in the NEC are still held at the University of Sydney (Lilje 2013: 106). Difficulties with the management of collections arise when documentation has been separated from the relevant objects; Kaus (2007) recounts how he had to 'remove objects incorrectly placed in various collections' (Kaus 2007: n.p.).

⁴¹⁹ Nell Basedow to Colin MacKenzie, 22 July 1933, National Archives of Australia, A2645, 50/2/1 (Kaus 2008: n.p. Introduction note 1).

Kaus⁴²⁰ (2004) has established four categories for describing the condition of the documentation attached to museum objects:

- Poor – refers to objects with little or no information;
- Basic – implies limited data, usually collector's name, collection location and date;
- Good – includes the preceding with some additional data provided by the collector, perhaps the local name of the uses of the artefact(s);
- Detailed – includes extensive information in addition to the former. One would expect the names of makers to be a basic part of the documentation but this is rarely the case in older collections; it is generally only in recent times that this kind of information has consistently been recorded. (Kaus 2004: 5)

For most of the 18⁴²¹ collections of decorated boab nut under examination the documentation is basic. The NMA's OPAL System database records the Object Number, Object Name, the Internal Record Number (IRN), Collection Name, Registration Measurements (quite often incomplete), Collection Type, Status, Physical Description and Image. Some of Internal Records Numbers (IRN) have paper files attached and these may include newspaper articles or object lists of the collection, for example, the Dr. Robert Wishart Collection. The Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1 documentation is more detailed and includes a transcript of an interview made on the NMA's receipt of the donation of their first collection, in 1982 (File 82/52), sections of which have been quoted in this chapter and Chapter 6. As mentioned in Chapter 2, a number of photocopies attached to the boab nuts were made available for this research by the NMA. The National Archives of Australia provided images of the original correspondence with the Commonwealth Government or the NMA regarding the major collections, for example, the Basedow and Milne collections.⁴²² Some additional information may be found on the Internet for newspaper articles etc., or through references in books and publications.

⁴²⁰ David Kaus is the Manager of the Repatriation Unit, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program at NMA, and as previously mentioned worked with Indigenous collections at the Australian Institute of Anatomy before the collections were transferred to the National Museum of Australia.

⁴²¹ These collections are listed at the beginning of the Appendix. As mentioned in Chapter 2, IR2324.0001 and IR 2342.0002 are boab nuts collected in Broome in 1999 and are part of the Educational Collection rather than the main NMA collection and are not included in this thesis. These boab nuts are used as exhibits during school visits, and they were unable to be located by museum staff in 2006. IR2324.0001 is described in the NMA catalogue as made by Bunny Sampi 1999 in Broome and it is 'incised with two realistic landscape scenes, one incorporating a large bird and the other a large reptile'. IR2324.0002 is an incised and pigmented realistic landscape, which was collected in Broome in 1999, and is described in the NMA catalogue as 'incised with the realistic image of a large macropod in the landscape'.

⁴²² For example, the NAA images of correspondence held includes in relation to the E. Milne Collection: a report on the Milne Anthropological Collection; a list of objects (including the three boab nuts); and a newspaper article entitled 'Milne Collection of Aboriginal Stone Weapons, Priceless Gift to Nation in Institute of Anatomy' (The Canberra Times, 22 January 1931). More recently newspaper articles have become available via Trove, which was used to find and record the page number missing on the original newspaper article in the NAA file.

Issues of provenance with older collections often arise, as does the need to be mindful of the statistics produced from the catalogue entries. For example, what appears on the record itself – what was detailed by various people and considered necessary over different periods and which of these details are used to analyse the collections. Other issues are associated with statistics generally, for example, where, who and how was the data produced; are correlations in the data causally related; and has the data been ‘cherry picked’ to reinforce the argument (Petch 2006: 153). In terms of validating the information attached to the boab nuts used in the research for this thesis, as discussed in Chapter 2, I have attempted to mitigate some of these general issues by using the inclusive complementary approach of research into the available literature on incised and painted boab nuts; investigation of pre-contact design precursors; and examination of the Kimberley history of cross-cultural contact and artistic practices.

The National Museum of Australia Boab Nut Collections – a chronological analysis

From the analysis of the NMA collections⁴²³ by decade (Table 2), prior to the 1950s there were only two boab nuts depicting either non-Western-style or Western-style landscapes prior to the 1950s. These are 1985.0073.0044 and 1985.0073.0047 and were collected by A.P. Elkin in 1927-8. One boab nut is possibly a realistic depiction of the Sunday Island Mission (Elkin 1929: 8-10) (Figs 5.22a & 5.22b) in conjunction with motifs of men, a butterfly/moth and birds (Plate 4.1). The other boab nut depicts in flattened perspective two Wandjina in a background of escarpments and animals in the landscape (Plate 3.1). These chronological outliers may be explained by the specific locational cross-cultural encounters as discussed previously, and/or by collection practices and opportunity. On Elkin’s visit to the Kimberley, Gray (1996) states that:

Elkin left Perth for Broome at the beginning of November 1927. The government, he recorded, through the Chief Protector and the Department of Aborigines ‘did all in its power to assist me.’ He also received ‘hospitality and help’ at various missions and pastoral stations. He spent nearly six months ‘between La Grange, eighty five miles south of Broome and Sunday Island, on hundred and sixty miles north of that town; two months in the Forrest River District, about 3 months in the Walcott Inlet and Port George IV District, and a month travelling overland from Wyndham by way of east Kimberley and the Fitzroy and Barker Rivers to Walcott Inlet’.

(Gray 1996: 109-10)

⁴²³ See Appendix for individual boab nut and collection data and research.

As discussed in Chapter 5, a number of missions had been in operation since before 1900. Mr J.A.R. Ormerod in charge of the Sunday Island Mission in 1900 wrote that there were:

about a dozen young men under tuition, besides eight little girls, and when they are all here, 10 little boys. The latter can read a little now ... They only get about an hour's school a day ... (Ormerod in *The West Australian* 1900: 3)

During the time that Elkin was visiting Sunday Island, Mrs T. Street, who was to spend 5 years in missionary work there, reported that:

Industrial work and Gospel teaching are combined in the harmonious life of the Island. The Mission runs a school for the children ... At the school they received instruction in writing, reading, arithmetic, and sewing, the girls making their own dresses. The natives are sometimes appointed as assistants. (Street in *The Mercury* 1933: 12)

She went on to comment that the adults are mainly involved in the trocus shell industry and that:

Others work as carpenters, and there is a baker and a butcher. The women after leaving school are taught embroidery and crochet ... The men are adept at carving, on shells, which, with their patternings of lizards, fish and snakes make interesting curios. (Street in *The Mercury* 1933: 12)

It is not unreasonable to argue that for boab nut 1985.0073.0044 the introduction of Western concepts over the three decades before Elkin arrived, in conjunction with the shell carving skills of the Aboriginal men, would have contributed to the development of incised boab nuts using elements of Western perspective with this boab nut being an extant early example of the influence of such schooling.

Incised boab nut 1985.0073.0047 depicting two Wandjina, was likely collected by Elkin from a mission within the 'Wandjina belt' (Map 6.2). This is the region traditionally owned by the Worora, Wunambul, and Ngarinyin peoples in the North-west Kimberley where numerous Wandjina depictions on rock walls and boab trees have been recorded, as previously discussed in Chapters 3 and 5. In the 1920s, Wandjina representation is located outside of the Broome, Derby, Forrest River and the eastern Kimberley areas visited by Elkin. Collected in the 1927-8 and therefore preceding the movement of people south from Port George IV and Kunmunya missions, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, it is most likely this boab nut was collected on the north-west coast. Although it is unusual for 'landscape' depiction on early decorated boabs, this type of representation is connected to a long term missionary presence and sustained cross-cultural interaction in the Kimberley. For example, Port George IV Mission⁴²⁴ was established in 1912 on Walcott Inlet by the

⁴²⁴ Port George IV Mission moved to Kunmunya in 1920 and was renamed Kunmunya Mission.

Presbyterian Church some 25 years before this boab nut was collected and may be a consideration for determining where this decorated boab nut was produced. As previously discussed, in 1927 Reverend George Homes, the Industrial Assistant at the Kunmunya Mission, gave pearl shell carving lessons to some of the young men there. The significance of the introduced Western educative practices has been discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, and is elaborated on in Chapter 8.

The development of a realistic style in the mid-twentieth century is demonstrated in the 1950s by five of the painted non-Western-style landscapes of the Bruce Coaldrake Collection from Forrest River Mission (Plates 3.4-3.8). These boab nuts have realistic depictions, for example, men and trees, within landscapes using flattened perspective, planar and frontal/profile views, and changing scale (1985.0066.0053, 1985.0066.0055, 1985.0066.0056, 1985.0066.0057, 1985.0066.0063). Forrest River Mission had been difficult to develop and by the time Reverend Ernest Gribble⁴²⁵ left the mission in 1928 the population totalled ‘about 50 local Aborigines’ (Halse 1996: 226).⁴²⁶ During Gribbles’s time at Forrest River (1913-1928), the regime was strict with:

Any attempts by Aborigines in the mission compound or in the camps adjacent to the mission to challenge missionary authority were effectively quashed, if necessary with the assistance of the Wyndham police. (Loos 2007:66)⁴²⁷

Like Kunmunya mission and others, the Forrest River Mission was part of:

a pervasive system of education of children and adults [which] was necessary not only to continue the process of religious indoctrination but also to produce the skills necessary for the first and subsequent missionary generations. There were adult education classes, classes for married women, and practical training in child care, homecraft, and simple industrial skills. (Loos 2007: 60)

After the Second World War, the standard of schooling at Forrest River Mission was criticised and in 1953 a government teacher was appointed, and by the late 1950s school trips to Wyndham were offered and a two-classroom government school completed (N. Green 2011: 134-7).

⁴²⁵ Halse (1996) reports Gribble had more success elsewhere when he introduced into the Yarrabah mission, Queensland, the trappings of ‘civilization’ and ‘mission residents produced a newspaper entitled *Aboriginal News ...*’ (Halse 1996: 224). Elkin notes on meeting Gribble in 1928 that he was a ‘conceited, uncouth tyrant’ (Halse 1996a). See Neville Green (2011) for further discussion.

⁴²⁶ Loos (2007) states ‘in 1928, there were only 111 ‘inmates’... [and many of them were] sent there from distant places by the government’ (Loos 2007: 66-7). This mix of language groups may have, as in the prisons, contributed to innovation.

⁴²⁷ The mission was part of the extensive Marndoc Aboriginal Reserve created in 1911 and Aboriginal people living outside of the mission were able to preserve much of their traditional lifestyles (Loos 2007: 66).

The unsourced handwritten notes provided by the NMA in the Bruce Coaldrake Collection file states that:

The uncoloured ones are done by bush natives; the rest by mission dwellers ... Pocketknife or flattened wire are mainly used by the village boy ...

(NMA 86/136.; see also Sculthorpe 1990: 43)⁴²⁸

The close connection with people living in the surrounding Marndoc Aboriginal Reserve would have contributed to the preservation of Dreaming narratives and the choice of designs, hunting and ceremonial, painted on these boab nuts.

In the Kimberley generally, by the 1950s there had been sustained cross-cultural relationships, in most cases including schooling in missions, government settlements and on cattle stations throughout the region, as discussed in Chapter 5. Western schooling for both children and adults has been a significant foundational factor in the development of a realistic genre and subsequently a Western-style landscape category.

For the 1960s the NMA provides an example each of non-Western-style and Western-style landscapes (1993.0047.0215, 1982.0092.0002) (Plates 3.2 & 4.4). The Jack Wherra boab nut (1982.0092.0002) in the Mr & Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1 is part of a corpus of work produced by Wherra who created the 'comic book' style of realistic narrative landscapes incised and painted on boab nuts as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. The anthropological interest in Wherra's work by John McCaffrey and his payment for Wherra's work may have been key to the quick acceptance of this style by other artists for telling their stories in visual forms that were cross-culturally legible. There is a possibility that a further two boab nuts of the four listed as having unknown chronology may have been collected in the 1950s-1970s (1987.0044.0047, 1987.0044.0048) as indicated in the Appendix.

The 1970s saw the beginnings of a sustainable Kimberley art industry and an increasing number of art centres under Federal Government promotion, in response to a strengthening tourist industry.⁴²⁹ This is illustrated by a large increase in examples of both non-Western-style and Western-style decorated boab nuts. Two large collections were put together at this time, the institutional Aboriginal Arts Board⁴³⁰ No. 2 Collection of nine boab nuts and the Enid Bowden Collection of 10 boab nuts. The Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection

⁴²⁸ This document (p 7 only) may have been a copy of part of the 'Letter to Curator, National Museum, dated 10 April 1954' mentioned by Sculthorpe (1990: 46).

⁴²⁹ See discussion in Chapters 5 and 6.

⁴³⁰ See discussion on the Aboriginal Arts Board in Chapter 5.

contains three non-Western-style landscapes (1991.0024.4197, 1991.0024.4520, 1991.0024.4569) (Plates 3.17-3.19) and three Western-style landscapes (1991.0024.4196, 1991.0024.4201, 1991.0024.4202) (Plates 4.7-4.9). The Enid Bowden Collections contains four non-Western-style landscapes (1987.0050.0312, 1987.0050.0317, 1987.0050.0318, 1987.0050.0320) (Plates 3.13-3.16) and three Western-style landscapes (1987.0050.0313, 1987.0050.0315 by Jack Wherra, 1987.0050.0319) (Plates 4.10-4.12). A further three non-Western-style painted boab nuts from this decade are held in the Y. Pettinato Collection (1985.0003.0082, 1985.0003.0083, 1985.0003.0084) (Plates 3.10-3.12) and another two in the R.G. Kimber Collection (IR2971.0074, IR2971.0076) (Plates 3.20-3.21). Two dated Western-style boab nuts are also from the 1970s – 1985.0005.0002 (Plate 4.5) in the Mary Fox Collection purchased in 1975 and 2002.0018.0063 (Plate 4.6) in the Adrian Luck No. 2 Collection dated 1971.

Table 1 (which follows) shows decorated boab nuts with elements of landscape by collection and Table 2 indicates the decorated boab nuts with elements of landscape depiction by decade.⁴³¹ In conjunction with their historical context, which has been elaborated upon in Chapters 5 and 6, the NMA decorated boab nuts highlight the growth of the realistic genre as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, and also the development of non-Western-style landscape and Western-style landscape after the 1950s as indicated in Chapter 5 and 6. This data provides evidence for the development of a Western-style landscape category. The observation of stylistic change in these decorated boab nuts both informs and conforms to the expectations created via the cumulative argument presented throughout this thesis, demonstrating that the socio-visual environment of the Kimberley was a site for the accommodation of two-way cultural encounters.

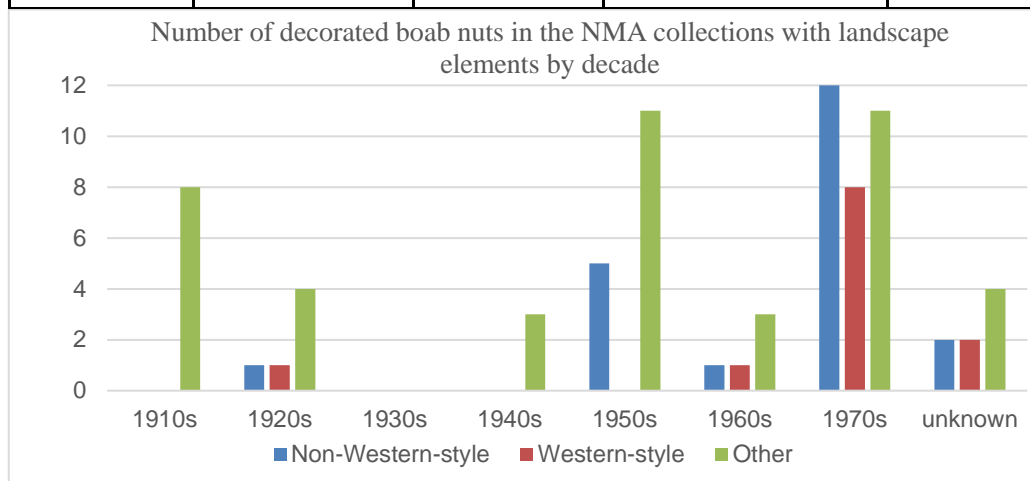
⁴³¹ My research which underpins collections with unspecified dating by the NMA is provided in the Appendix.

Table 1: Typology of decorated boab nuts in the NMA collections with landscape elements by collection. Original research conducted in relation to this thesis; © Michele Lang 2016

Collection	Non-Western	Western	Other	Total
Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1 (5)	1	1	3	5
Y. Pettinato Collection (3)	3			3
Mrs Mary Fox Collection (2)		1	1	2
E. Milne Collection (3)			3	3
Dr Herbert Basedow Collection (5)			5	5
Bruce Coaldrake Collection (15)	5		10	15
Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection (6)	1	1	4	6
Dr Robert Wishart Collection (3)			3	3
Mrs H. Wood Collection (2)			2	2
A.R. Eadie Collection (1)			1	1
Gabriella Roy Collection (1)			1	1
Mr Herbert Keys Collection (2)	1	1		2
Edith Bowden Collection (10)	4	3	3	10
Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2 (9)	3	3	3	9
Professor Henry Krips and Mrs Luis Krips Collection (4)	1	1	3	4
Adrian Luck No. 2 Collection (1)		1		1
R.G. Kimber Collection (4)	2		2	4
Presbyterian Church Collection (1)			1	1

Table 2: Typology and number of decorated boab nuts in the NMA collections with landscape elements by decade. Original research conducted in relations to this thesis; © Michele Lang 2016

	Non-Western-style	Western-style	Other Figurative/Geometric genres	Total
1910s			8	8
1920s	1	1	4	6
1930s				
1940s			3	3
1950s	5		11	16
1960s	1	1	3	5
1970s	12	8	11	31
unknown	2	2	4	8



Concluding comments

This chapter has necessarily been brief on the subject of collection, and museum history, philosophy and practice; because it is a large research area attached to scholarship from a number of disciplines. The topic of collection – and collectors – potentially constitutes a thesis in its own right and therefore it has only been touched upon here in order to

contextualise the specific boab nut collections under examination. This would be part of a fascinating future area of research in relation to collectors of decorated boab nut, including for example, other objects that were collected by the same individuals and how these collections have been dealt with by museums, and possibly art galleries (Philp 2007), and when and how they have displayed.

The next chapter discusses the impact of Western realism on Aboriginal art and the decorated boab nuts with landscape designs, both non-Western style and Western-style. This penultimate chapter reinforces and extends the principal argument of the thesis that while it is inarguable that stylistic change has occurred, the deep structural content of incised and painted boab nuts remains unchanged.

CHAPTER 8: WESTERN REALISM, DECORATED BOAB NUTS AND LANDSCAPE DESIGNS

The impact of Western realism on Aboriginal art practices

As discussed throughout this thesis in the Kimberley region after colonisation, there was significant ongoing exposure to a different imposed socio-visual colonised environment including the Bible and other books; mission supplies such as printed rice and flour bags and tins. Later with wider sustained settlement and development, this environment included supermarkets with advertising on food products and items, for example match boxes and hair oil; workplaces such as the local council, government services, hospitals, mining depots and air services; access to newspapers; entertainment such as films and record albums, and, subsequently, television and the Internet. In the mid-twentieth century, a few Kimberley artists were travelling interstate and overseas, for example, Albert Barunga to New Zealand (1967) and Canberra (1972), and Jean Wungunyet to Perth (1977) to demonstrate crafts and run school workshops (Aboriginal Biographical Index n.d.). The older artists were producing their figurative and geometric art, although some were developing a realistic style.⁴³² These artists were teaching their younger people about their cultural heritage; at the same time these young artists were being introduced, if not immersed, into Western realism, in particular through their schooling. The mid-twentieth century school texts and the school art class were to embed Western realism into the next generation of artists. These younger artists often chose to use Western realism in their artworks, especially on the decorated boab nuts and other smaller artworks for sale. Some artists used this realist style to produce Western-style landscape boab nuts and paintings and this style will be examined in this chapter.⁴³³

⁴³² See Chapters 4 and 5 for how such innovative change develops out of 'dreamed' or exchanged knowledge.

⁴³³ See Chapter 4 for a discussion on realist space and the realistic genre, and the Western-style landscape on boab nuts as a visual text.

Western realism, that is, a way of portraying three dimensions on a flat two-dimensional surface by suggesting depth, was examined in Chapter 4.⁴³⁴ For landscapes this linear perspective is based on geometric principles, which use a vanishing point on a horizon line, with objects diminishing as they recede from the foreground; and by using juxtaposition, changes in hue over distance, and shading produces a three dimensionality.⁴³⁵ Alternative ‘ways of seeing’ have been discussed in Chapter 4, with planar, frontal/profile elevation, and flattened types illustrated. The landscapes depicted on decorated boab nuts are not just replication.

One response to being subjected to images of Western realism and actively taught principles in Kimberley classrooms can be examined through examples of children’s drawings. The establishment in 1973 of the Aboriginal Arts Board (AAB) and its rationale for acquiring art for its own collection has been discussed. The AAB’s collection of children’s drawings from different language groups was gifted to the National Museum of Australia in 1991, and it was observed that this collection ‘offered exceptional research potential with the identification of new trends in Aboriginal art and material culture’ (Michaelis 2008: 2). The NMA has an Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection which includes childrens’ drawings as well as nine incised boab nuts from Mowanjum, purchased in 1974.⁴³⁶

The Aboriginal Arts Board arranged for almost 4,000 school children’s drawings to be collected in the 1970s from Aboriginal communities nationally (Fig. 8.1a; see also NMA 8.1b). These drawings were obtained as a resource for *The Aboriginal Children’s History of Australia: Written and illustrated by Australia’s Aboriginal children*, published in 1977 (Michaelis 2008: 2).⁴³⁷ It is clear that a number of these drawings use some elements of Western perspective, although many do not.

⁴³⁴ As previously noted, boab nuts are themselves three-dimensional however the section of a boab nut surface viewed in focus at any one time functions more like a two-dimensional plane as the edges are at an angle to the observer (Rajpoot 2015). While incising and painting are the dominant visual contribution to the three-dimensionality of the Western-style landscapes depicted, the actual boab nut itself as well as the depth of the incising of the boab nuts are also factors.

⁴³⁵ It is important to recognise that in many cases only some elements of this Western-style are used in landscapes depicted on boab nuts, they are not *exact replications* of Western landscape painting style as discussed in Chapter 4.

⁴³⁶ The nine boab nuts are NMA 1991.0024.4196 to 1991.0024.4202, 1991.0024.4520 and 1991.0024.4569.

⁴³⁷ *The Aboriginal Children’s History of Australia: Written and illustrated by Australia’s Aboriginal children* was published by Rigby, Adelaide. Robert Edwards was Director of AAB at the time and recalls ‘he had for some time been thinking about ways and means of linking Indigenous children into the Aboriginal Arts Board’s art programs’ (Michaelis 2008: 2).

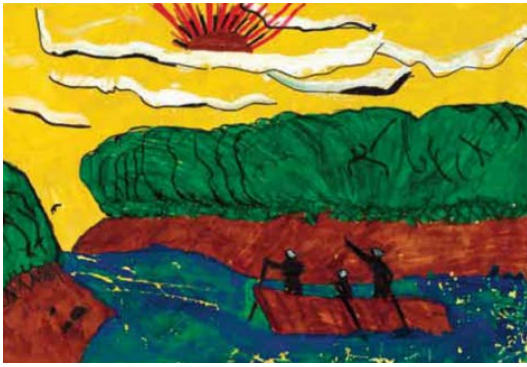


Fig. 8.1a: *My Country*
Michael Munkara
Nguiu Bathurst Island, NT, 1975–76
W 560mm x H 380mm
felt pen, paint on paper
National Museum of Australia (Michaelis 2008: 1)

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Fig. 8.1b: Child's drawing
Joseph Jungarrayi Dickson
Yuendumu, NT, 1970
W 384mm x H 284mm
ink, paper
Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2
NMA 1991.0024.2821

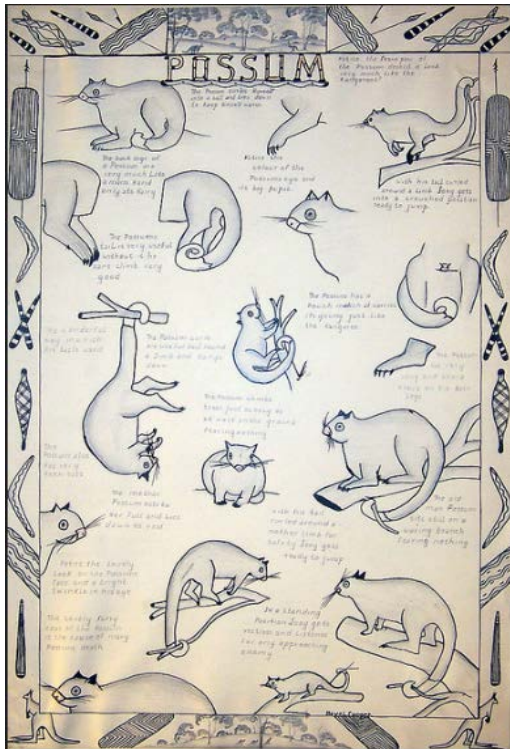


Fig. 8.1c: *Possum*
Revel Cooper (1938-1983)
Carrolup Native Settlement W.A., c. 1950-53
Artist aged in early to mid-teens
H 562mm x W 380mm
graphite, ink, crayon
Picker Art Gallery, Colgate University (Wexler 2009: 146 Fig. 3)

Much of the research into changes in children's drawings⁴³⁸ has taken place in the Warlpiri communities (for example, Cox 1998; Nicholls 2012), while children and adult groups in South Australia and the Northern Territory have also been researched (for example, Lendon 1974; Stanton 2009⁴³⁹). In Western Australia at the Carrolup Native Settlement in the 1940s a number of boys produced 113 pastel drawings, some with images on both sides, (Wexler 2009: 137) and a few of these children grew up to be well regarded artists, for example, Revel Cooper (Fig. 8.1c). Wexler (2009) notes that anthropologist Howard Morphy suggests 'that the quality of the work lies in the fact that a group of children learned these skills associated with hand/eye coordination and a great familiarity with that landscape that enabled them to get a head start in reproducing it' (Wexler 2009: 138). Nicholls states that in Aboriginal communities 'the observation skills are key [in this process] and [children] are actively taught about the environment in situ, that is, through situational learning' (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 26 April 2016).

Drawings using Western realism principles are influenced⁴⁴⁰ by attending school, having the opportunity to see pictures and practise drawing, and the community's cultural material image base (Martlew & Connolly 1996: 2744). Further, the use of human or human-like images in the image base may well influence the use of representational forms; for example, in the Kimberley the earlier depictions of human-like figures such as *ulu* were connected to sorcery, as discussed in Chapter 3. From the evidence it appears that, for many school children, the pictorial materials in school influence their own drawings to include elements of Western realism (Martlew & Connolly 1996: 2746; Cox 1998: 75).⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁸ Drawing was a well-used research tool by a number of anthropologists, including Tindale in 1933, Ronald and Catherine Berndt in 1941, Nancy Munn in 1965, and interestingly by the artist Rex Battarbee in the 1930s at the Hermannsburg Mission Station (Eickelkamp 2010: 150).

⁴³⁹ This research involved a collection of 600 crayon drawings on brown paper by Aboriginal men living in Birrindudu, Northern Territory, collected by R.M. Berndt in 1944–45 and, after analysis, Stanton observes they 'were a new way of telling a story, a new form of transmitting knowledge, as well as reflecting on new experiences, from ceremonies introduced from, for example, the West Kimberley to the artifacts [sic] of the world of the pastoralists. The introduction of new elements to an artist's repertoire mirrors their own experience of exposure to and discussion of alien items' (Stanton 2009: para 18) – essentially they can be used as 'visual' texts.

⁴⁴⁰ Nicholls argues this is more than influence as teachers working with the every young are in a position to impose their view without it being considered 'imposition' (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 26 April 2016).

⁴⁴¹ Martlew and Connolly's research was on the drawings of children living in remote villages in Papua New Guinea; and the school-aged children who participated either attended school, did not attend a school but lived in a village with a school, or had no access to a school or other children attending school (Martlew & Connolly 1996).

White (2005) in discussing classroom practices in adult-led art education notes that in the 1940s this illustrated:

ways in which material culture was used to proselytise the role of an ordered and technically equipped environment in the ‘guidance’ of the ‘normalised’ child towards the role of a culture-reproducer filled with dominant cultural values. (White 2005: 177)

In Chapter 6, the community of Mowanjum and the connections with the geographically close township of Derby are examined, as is the exposure of community members to Western realism from the end of the Second World War to the mid-twentieth century and their responses.

Elsewhere, in Central Australia, two large studies of children’s drawings have been undertaken. In 1940, drawings by Ernabella Pitjantjatjara school-aged children were analysed by C.P. Mountford and in 1972 a similar cohort of children’s drawings were examined (Lendon 1974). In 1940 the concept of ‘drawing’ would be familiar through body painting, sand drawing and rock art. It was the media that was new – brown paper and crayons. Lendon (1974) notes, about Mountford’s collection of 380 drawings, that:

the subject matter was mainly a diversity of animals, vegetation and topography, with the addition of some recent European innovations, such as sheep and watermelons. Few human figures were drawn. The perspective was also traditional; hills and water holes were drawn in plan view, as were small animals like goannas, whereas upright objects, such as emus and trees were drawn in elevation. In many pictures the objects were spread all over the paper in apparently unrelated ways, like the rock drawings. (Lendon 1974: 45)

Results of the 1972 study indicate few differences from non-Aboriginal students in their drawings, and Lendon observes that all the school children had:

almost daily access to pencils, paper, books, films and other European school materials. Many of them have been to towns like Alice Springs and the older ones speak English as well as Pitjantjatjara ... Their drawings in 1972 strongly resemble ones made by European children in Alice Springs in terms of realism and perspective. The subject matter drawn by the five to nine year olds shows a variety of scenes involving birds, animals, people (stick figures), windmills, hills, clouds and rain. Children older than that (aged nine to fifteen) drew less varied pictures: all the boys drew landscapes with distant hills and sometimes a waterhole, a bore, some trees, or a road disappearing into the hills.

(Lendon 1974: 46–7)

The differences observed was in the use of a frontal/profile view which is unlike the dominant planar view of Pitjantjatjara art based on body and sand drawings, and the

orientation of figures in the drawings to a picture plane that coincides with drawing on paper or in a book using a single point of view. Lendon concludes:

There are two important differences between all the drawings done in 1940 and those done by children older than six in 1972. The first is in the organization of the whole picture – the objects are drawn in a definite relationship to one another in 1972 rather than being spread all over the paper. The second is in the orientation of the picture, especially the hills. We now see the country from the side, Namatjira-style, rather than from above. The first, the most obvious one, is that the children's frequent contact with European drawings has caused them to imitate the white man's way of drawing in school situations. A second is that a drawing in *elevation is a style highly suited to a drawing viewed from one side* as most European drawings are, whilst sand drawings were looked at by people sitting in a circle on the ground when a plan drawing gives every observer a similar viewpoint. Thirdly, a bird's eye view is ideal for illustrating the positions of people and places in relation to each other, which is very important in traditional but not in school drawings.

(Lendon 1974: 48; my emphasis)

A very significant conclusion that is encompassed in the film *Namatjira The Painter* as noted earlier and to discussions on changes to 'ways of seeing' in Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Recently, Nicholls (2012) in discussing Warlpiri⁴⁴² school children's illustrations for a series of Dreaming narrative books observes that, although: 'not one of the Aboriginal children involved in the Dreaming Narratives project attempted to deploy linear perspective in their artwork, apparently resisting this despite their exposure to mainstream primary school education' (Nicholls 2012: 44), there is evidence: 'that the children are moving away from the adults' "ways of seeing" or forms of locational analysis⁴⁴³ and moving towards a method that is founded more obviously on "western" ways of seeing' (Nicholls 2012: 44) (Fig. 8.2). Nicholls (2012) argues this is because:

unlike their immediate forebears, [the children] lead an increasingly sedentary lifestyle, have for the most part been raised in houses, and now experience the dominant culture influence of visual media including television and video, and more recently, computer technology, on a daily basis.

(Nicholls 2012: 44)

⁴⁴² Historically the art of Warlpiri people like that of the Pitjantjatjara people are predominantly non-figurative, and viewed from above.

⁴⁴³ Nicholls further notes the ability to form visual images of Country 'as seen from above' has diminished because of not 'foot-walking' the entirety of that country any longer (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 26 April 2016).

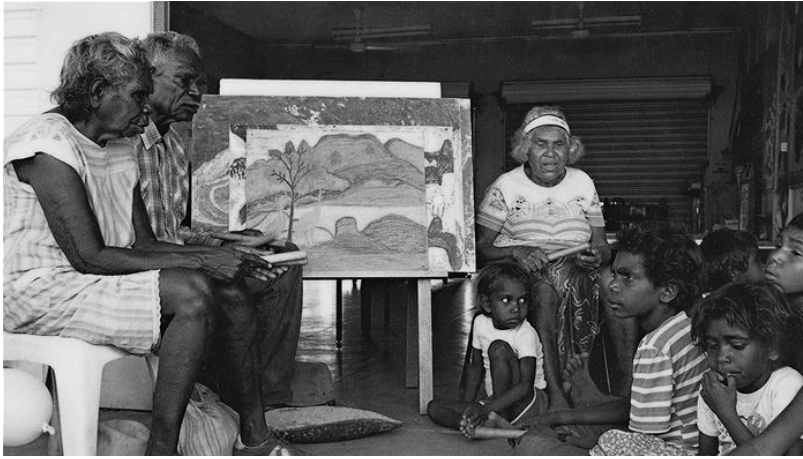


Fig. 8.2: Two-way learning at Warmun School 1979 (Collins, Mills & Smale 2014: n.p.).⁴⁴⁴

Decorated boab nuts with landscape designs

The physical Kimberley landscapes (Figs 8.3a, 8.3b, 8.3c, 8.3d, 3.23a & 3.23b) of hills and escarpments, rocks, termite mounds, grass ranges, boab trees and other trees depicted on boab nuts (for example, Plate 3.1 1985.0073.0047 & Plate 4.10 1987.0050.0313) form the basis of the realistic landscape style.



Fig. 8.3a: Boab tree, Argyle Diamond Mine 1991
Australian News and Information Bureau, Canberra
NAA: A6135 K29/7/91/241
National Archives of Australia



Fig. 8.3b: China Wall near Halls Creek 2010
Annette Del Bianco collection of photographs
SLWA BA2573/24
State Library of Western Australia



Fig. 8.3c: Rocky outcrop in North-west Kimberley
(Gwion Gwion 2000: 189)



Fig. 8.3d: Buccaneer Archipelago Horizontal Falls
tidal seawater near Derby
(Australia's NorthWest 2015)

⁴⁴⁴ For a discussion of two-way learning and art, see Massola (2011).

An examination of the incised and painted boab nuts reveals that they depict four types of landscape elements: non-Western-style - planar, frontal/profile elevation with/without lateral elements and/or changes in scale, flattened perspective; and Western-style realistic landscapes. These landscape styles occur concurrently; they can coexist on individual nuts; and all four formats are being produced today, albeit in different number proportions, with the incidence of Western realism increasing over time, as younger artists began to produce more incised and painted boab nuts. The figurative and realistic genres⁴⁴⁵ of decorated boab nuts were examined in Chapter 3, and the relationship of the motifs to the Kimberley environment – physical, cultural and cross-cultural – was discussed in Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6. As argued in Chapter 4, the representation of Dreaming narratives and Western realism is not mutually exclusive. The land is Country; Western realistic depiction of the land *is still* Country.

Non-Western-style landscapes on decorated boab nuts

Crawford (1972) commenting on rock art – although this observation is equally appropriate for decorated boab nuts – states that: ‘Before one can discuss Aboriginal interpretations of art, it is necessary to realize that the information recorded reflects the attitudes [sic] of the Europeans who collected the interpretations’ (Crawford 1972: 301). A number of representational forms of landscape on decorated boab nuts do not conform to the Western conventions of linear perspective, as defined in Chapter 4 (see Plates 3.1-3.21). The illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface through linear geometry was developed in Western Europe and at the time of the colonisation of Australia this type of representation was a significant means for depicting the ‘natural’ world.

As explained earlier, perspective is a Western term for depiction using linear geometry and became the foundation of realism in Western European visual arts. It is a way of portraying three dimensions on a flat surface by suggesting depth or distance through, for example, smaller objects in the distance on a horizon line from the observer’s point of view, juxtaposition, changes in hue for distant objects etc. Alternatives to linear perspectives include planar (sometimes called plan, aerial or bird’s eye) view, frontal/profile elevation

⁴⁴⁵ The figurative genre is defined as a style closely associated with local rock art and includes animals, plants and Ancestor Beings and other human-like figures. These figures can be in planar or frontal/profile view. The realistic genre is based on Western realism and the artist uses linear perspective and other ways, for example shading, of portraying three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface, which is made further complex by the boab nut itself having its own three-dimensional shape. However, while the boab nut is three dimensional itself the section being viewed resembles a two dimensional plane. See previous footnotes and Glossary.

with laterally oriented motifs and/or changes in scale, and flattened perspective which does not show depth or distance from what appears in the front plane. All or some of these forms of representational styles can exist on an individual boab nut.

Planar or aerial view in landscape

Planar perspective, used almost exclusively in the Central and Western Deserts regions of Western Australia, Northern Territory and South Australia (Nicholls 2011), has links to the south-eastern areas of the Kimberley through *wunan* circulation and intermarriage between neighbouring language groups.⁴⁴⁶ These traditional Western Desert artworks do not use depth perspective by means of a foreground, middle ground and background (Nicholls 2011).⁴⁴⁷ While earlier boab nuts have motifs that represent sites or events, for example, the circle and line motif, as discussed in Chapter 3 under the geometric genre (Figs 3.27a, 3.27b, 3.22a & 3.22b), this style has become less common on boab nuts in the late twentieth century. A few boab nuts in the collections may include geometric site motifs, but determining what motifs are geometric or figurative can be difficult without the appropriate Aboriginal knowledge.⁴⁴⁸ In examining East Kimberley painting, Carr (2010) discusses Rover Thomas's art and observes 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' (Carr 2010: 4).

In the North-west Kimberley, where most of the boab nuts have been produced or collected from in the latter part of the twentieth century, much of the art is figurative. Many of the faunal motifs, especially on the earlier boab nuts, are in planar figurative view (for example, Figs 3.36b & 8.5), while human and quasi-human figures as well as in general, birds, are depicted in profile (Figs 3.43a, 3.45d & 8.5). A mixture of planar and frontal/profile view is common for incised and painted boab nuts. This dual-way style is similar to that used conventionally in rock art sites, where some figures are painted from an aerial view, while others are depicted from the front.⁴⁴⁹ Painted boab nut 1985.0066.0055 is an example of this dual representation: the crocodile is depicted in profile, but the waterway⁴⁵⁰ and cliff edges are in plan view (Fig. 8.4). The scale is different and, as noted

⁴⁴⁶ See Chapter 5 for a discussion of circulation of objects through the *wunan*.

⁴⁴⁷ For a brief discussion of the development of linear perspective in Western Europe see Nicholls (2011).

⁴⁴⁸ See, for example, 1985.0066.0061 and 1985.0066.0062.

⁴⁴⁹ The conventions traditionally used in depicting Kimberley fauna whether in plan or elevated view occurs elsewhere differently, for example, in Arnhem Land.

⁴⁵⁰ In the NMA collections only the painted boab nuts from the Bruce Coaldrake Collection from Forrest River Mission depict waterways (1985.0066.0055, 1985.0066.0056, possible waterways on 1985.0066.0058).

in Chapter 4, most likely reflects the importance of the figure in the narrative (Nicholls 2012: 45) (Fig. 4.7d) and possibly the conventions of visual representation in Kimberley rock art.

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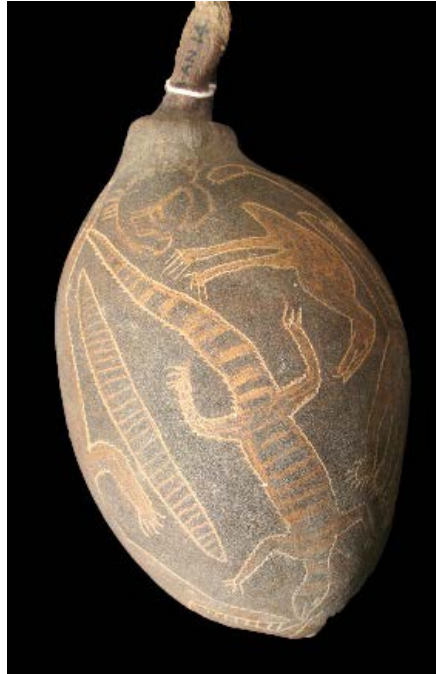


Fig. 8.4: Profile view of crocodile and planar view of cliff edge
Forrest River Mission, 1953–54
L 200mm x W 85mm x D 85mm
Bruce Coaldrake Collection
NMA 1985.0066.0055

Fig. 8.5: Planar view of lizard and profile view of bird
unknown, c. 1927
L 200mm x W 95mm x D 95mm
Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection
NMA 1985.0073.0042

Frontal or profile elevation with/without laterally oriented motifs and/or changes in scale in landscape

As shown in Chapter 3 in the discussion of the figurative genre and Chapter 6 on the Mowanjum's community art production, the frontal/profile elevated motif is a common view in the figurative and Western realistic genres for all NMA boab nuts that depict a section of landscape in the later twentieth century. Incised boab nut 1987.0050.0320 is an example of the use of frontal or profile figures within a landscape with motifs of different of scale in flattened perspective (Fig. 8.6). As previously noted, many of these different views can be used concurrently, or co-exist on the same boab nut but in different segments or panels. Apart from differences in scale (Fig. 8.7), the use of outcrops or hills and escarpments in a lateral orientation to the main motifs is prevalent in the non-Western-style landscapes in the NMA collections (Fig. 8.8). In general these laterally oriented motifs are

features of the geographic environment (Fig. 8.9), for example, hills or escarpments (1985.0003.0082), cliffs and/or waterways (1985.0066.0056) or rocks (IR 2917.0074).



Fig. 8.6: NMA 1987.0050.0320
unknown, [c. 1970s]
L 270mm x W 100mm x D 90mm
Enid Bowden Collection

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due to copyright
restrictions

Fig. 8.7: NMA 1985.0066.0063
Forrest River Mission, 1953–54
L 160mm x W 80mm x D 80mm
Bruce Coaldrake Collection



Fig. 8.8: NMA 1987.0050.0312
unknown, [c. 1970s]
L 225mm x W 105mm x D 105mm
Enid Bowden Collection

Image not
available
due to copyright
restrictions

Fig. 8.9: NMA 1985.0066.0056
Forrest River Mission, 1953–54
L 179mm x W 110mm x D 110mm
Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Flattened perspective in landscape

Flattened perspective uses elevating 'sections' or 'bands' of motifs to attempt to show depth. Objects, whether close or distant, appear to be elevated vertically instead of extending back to the horizon. For example, in boab nut 1982.0092.0003, the curved motifs indicate some type of landscape 'behind' the human-like⁴⁵¹ figure in front of the tree (Fig. 8.10). The tree and the two birds appear in the same foreground and these curved motifs, possibly hills, move up the picture plane rather than back towards the horizon. Likewise, 1985.0073.0047 has bands of figures and landscape escarpments 'moving up' the boab nut (Fig. 8.11). It is important to note that not all landscape or scenic boab nuts are incised and painted with their orientation in an upright manner, with the proximal end at the top; in fact, this is a Western convention and does not necessarily apply to the making or the viewing of boab nuts.⁴⁵²



Fig. 8.10: NMA 1982.0092.0003
Mowanjum, 1966–71
L 230mm x W 80mm x D 70mm
Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1



Fig. 8.11: 1985.0073.0047
unknown, c. 1927
L 130mm x W 85mm x D 75mm
Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection

Importantly, as noted previously, the frontal/profile elevation view with differences in attributes such as scale, laterality and flattened perspective can occur in any combination. In the context of the increasing incidence of Western-style realistic landscapes in the second half of the twentieth century, this realistic approach was developing concurrently

⁴⁵¹ This is possibly a Wandjina as the lower panels depict nightjar owls closely associated in depictions with Wandjina (Fig. 6.10a).

⁴⁵² For an example of this, see 1985.0066.0053 (Pl. 3.3).

with other ‘ways of seeing’ being depicted by the artist and the importance of Dreaming narratives (Fig. 8.12).⁴⁵³



Fig. 8.12: NMA 1991.0024.4197
Mowanjum, 1974
L 190mm x W 120mm x D 100mm
Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection

Western-style realistic landscapes on decorated boab nuts

As discussed in Chapter 4, the Western realistic representation of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface comprises a geometric space with a fixed point of view and distance points. Although the boab nut itself is a three dimensional objects, the segment of the shell that can be viewed at any one time resembles a two dimensional plane. The increasing prevalence of Western realism on decorated boab nuts since the mid-twentieth century is partly a response to increased tourism and the demand for legibility, along with artists’ exposure to this style through schooling and lived experience in the dominant culture; this was discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 (see Plates 4.1-4.12). As argued throughout this thesis and especially in Chapter 4, these realistic landscapes are still considered to be depiction of Country.

Western-style realistic landscapes in general depict foreground, middle ground and background, for example, the way trees in the foreground are larger and more detailed than

⁴⁵³ See the discussion on the relationship of Western realism, landscape and Country in Chapter 4. Nicholls calls these concurrent developments a ‘kind of stylistic melding’ (Christine Nicholls, pers. comm., 26 April 2016).

those in the distance, while their colours lose contrast and focus as they become more distant. In decorated boab nuts there is generally some type of hill or escarpment on the horizon (Figs 8.13 & 8.14). While some boab nut landscapes are depicted in entirely Western-style other contain only some elements of the Western-style realistic landscapes. The perception of depth is also created through individual motifs in the landscape. A number of elements create a sense of three-dimensionality in the picture and they include contours, whereby pigmentation on a surface varies from one area of a surface to an adjoining area; and shadowing where ‘the illumination on a surface varies because an opaque object intervenes between part of surface and the source of illumination on the surface’ (Kennedy 1974: 108) (Fig. 8.15). The juxtaposition of individual motifs so that only parts of objects in the landscape can be seen from the perspective point of view - occluding, rather than ‘seeing’ through solid objects (Figs. 8.13, 8.14, 8.15 & 8.16) give a sense of depth. The ‘variation in the inclination of a surface – [where] some facets of a surface may face the direction of illumination more directly than others and so receive stronger illumination, varying surface texture’ (Kennedy 1974: 109) (Figs. 8.15 & 8.16) likewise indicates three dimensionality.

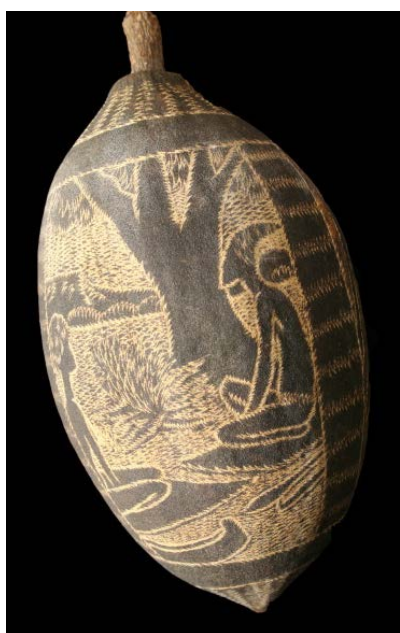


Fig. 8.13: NMA 1987.0050.0313
unknown, [c. 1970s]
L 195mm x W 95mm x D 90mm
Enid Bowden Collection



Fig. 8.14: NMA 1982.0092.0002
Jack Wherra
Mowanjum, 1966–71
L 145mm x [W 130mm]
Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1

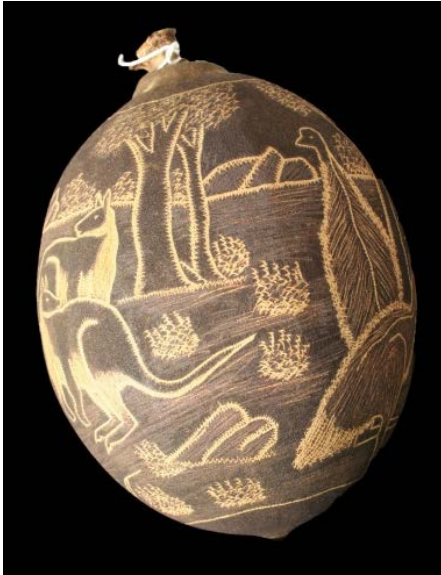


Fig. 8.15: NMA 1987.0044.0047
Derby, [unknown]
L 181mm x W 150mm x D 150mm
Mr Herbert Keys Collection



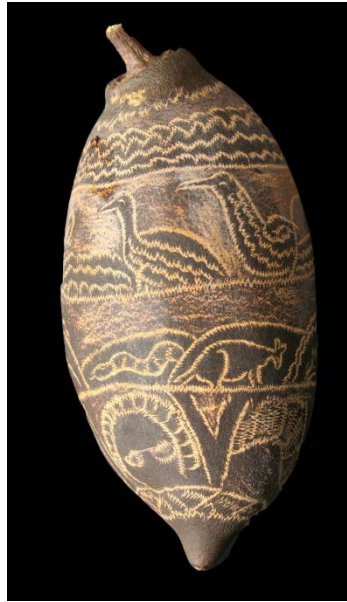
Fig. 8.16: NMA 1987.0050.0319
unknown, [c. 1970s]
L 160mm x W 100mm x D 100mm
Enid Bowden Collection

Concluding comments

This chapter provides evidence that while stylistic change has occurred, the deep structural content of incised and painted boab nuts remains unchanged and thus supporting the argument for the decorated boab nuts being embedded in the continuity of image making in the Kimberley. Changing use in the latter half of the twentieth century partly in response to Western pictorial influences concerning the orientation in space and the insistence of 'upright' elevation of figures are addressed within the long enduring art practices of the Kimberley through the capacity for ongoing innovation by the artists as discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

The legibility of Western-style landscapes boab nuts cross-culturally enables the artists to retain the core elements - Country and specific features/fauna/flora of Country. At the same time this legibility, appealing to tourists and others, creates an economy that works for the artists providing income without moving away from their core belief system.

Plates 3.1 – 3.21 Decorated boab nuts with non-Western-style landscape panels/sections in the National Museum of Australia collections accessioned or received in or before 2002 by year



Pl. 3.1: NMA 1985.0073.0047
unknown, c. 1927
L 130mm x W 85mm x D 75mm
Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection

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restrictions

Pl. 3.2: NMA 1993.0047.0215
unknown, [c. 1950s-1970s]
L 210mm x W 90mm x D 90mm
Professor Henry Krips MBE and Mrs Luise Krips Collection

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Pl. 3.3: NMA 1985.0066.0053
Forrest River Mission, 1953–54
L 175mm x W 75mm x D 79mm
Bruce Coaldrake Collection

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Pl. 3.4: NMA 1985.0066.0055
Forrest River Mission, 1953–54
L 200mm x W 85mm x D 85mm
Bruce Coaldrake Collection

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due to copyright
restrictions

Pl. 3.5: NMA 1985.0066.0056
Forrest River Mission, 1953–54
L 179mm x W 110mm x D 110mm
Bruce Coaldrake Collection

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Pl. 3.6: NMA 1985.0066.0057
Forrest River Mission, 1953–54
L 135mm x Dia 70mm
Bruce Coaldrake Collection

<http://collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/object/15468>

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Pl. 3.7: NMA 1985.0066.0063
Forrest River Mission, 1953–54
L 160mm x W 80mm x D 80mm
Bruce Coaldrake Collection

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Pl. 3.8: NMA 1987.0044.0048
Broome, [unknown]
L 200mm x W 115mm x D 105mm
Mr Herbert Keys Collection

<http://collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/object/35515>



Pl. 3.9: NMA 1982.0092.0003
Mowanjum, 1966–71
L 230mm x W 80mm x D 70mm
Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1

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Pl. 3.10: NMA 1985.0003.0082
unknown, [c. 1970s]
L 223mm x W 100mm x D 90mm
Y. Pettinato Collection

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restrictions

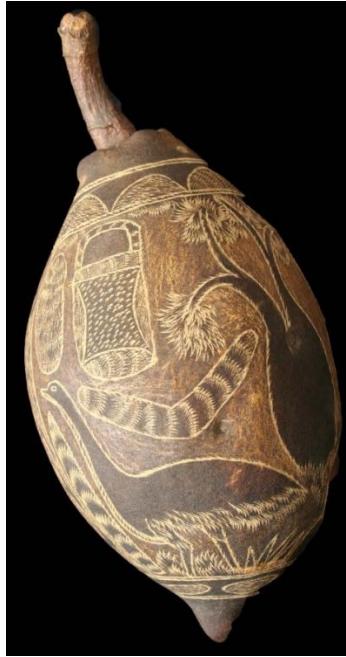
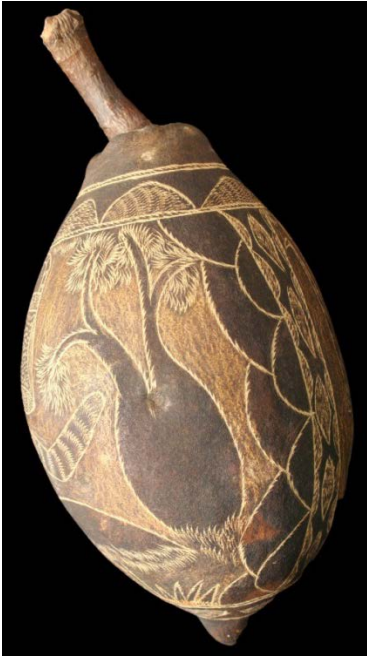
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Pl. 3.11: NMA 1985.0003.0083
unknown, [c. 1970s]
L 240mm x W 115mm x D 105mm
Y. Pettinato Collection

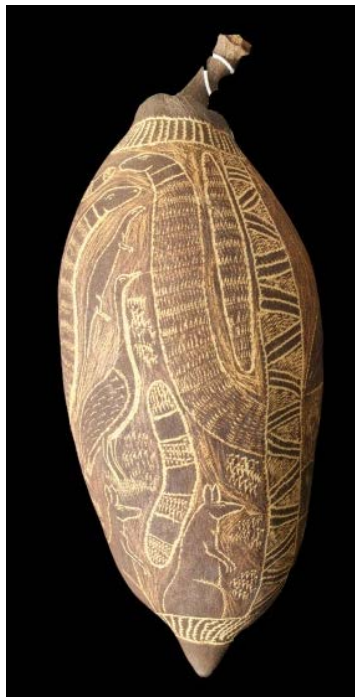
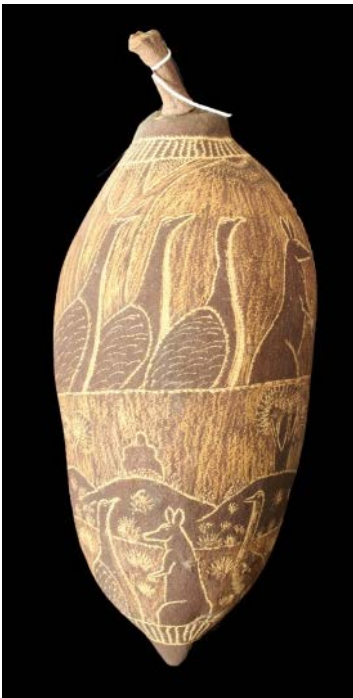
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Pl. 3.12: NMA 1985.0003.0084
unknown, [c. 1970s]
L 170mm x W 115mm x D 110mm
Y. Pettinato Collection
<http://collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/object/7074>



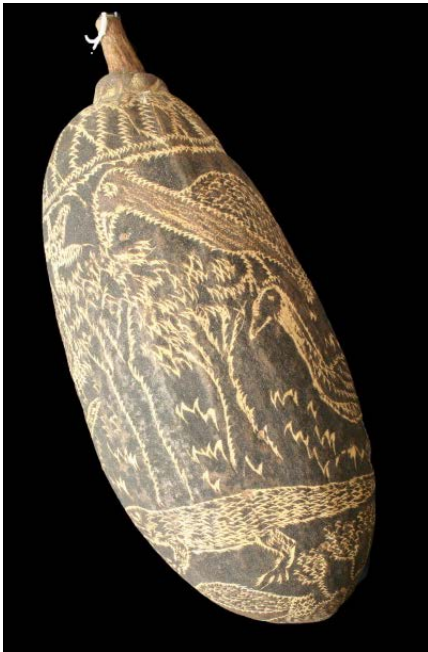
Pl. 3.13: NMA 1987.0050.0312
Kimberley, [c. 1970s]
L 225mm x W 105mm x D 105mm
Enid Bowden Collection



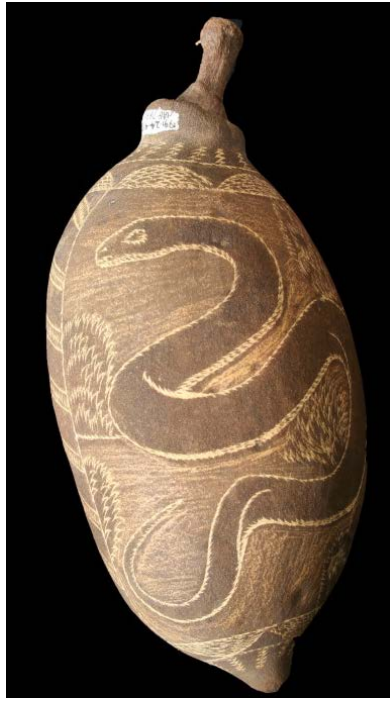
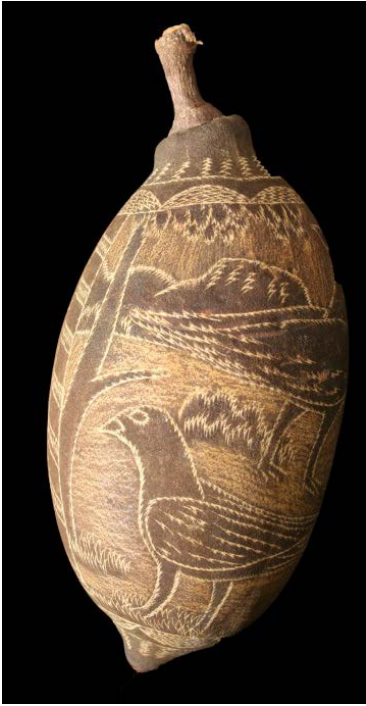
Pl. 3.14: NMA 1987.0050.0317
Kimberley, [c. 1970s]
L 230mm x W 100mm x D 95mm
Enid Bowden Collection



Pl. 3.15: NMA 1987.0050.0318
Kimberley, [c. 1970]
L 175mm x W 100mm x D 95mm
Enid Bowden Collection



Pl. 3.16: NMA 1987.0050.0320
Kimberley, [c. 1970s]
L 270mm x W 100mm x D 90mm
Enid Bowden Collection



Pl. 3.17: NMA 1991.0024.4197
Mowanjum, 1974
L 190mm x W 120mm x D 100mm
Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection



Pl. 3.18: NMA 1991.0024.4520
Mowanjum, 1974
L 180mm x W 100mm x D 105mm
Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection



Pl. 3.19: NMA 1991.0024.4569
Mowanjum, 1974
L 170mm x Dia 88mm
Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection

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Pl. 3.20: NMA IR 2917.0074
La Grange, 1974
[L 155mm x W 140mm]
R.G. Kimber Collection

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due to copyright
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Pl. 3.21 NMA IR 2971.76
La Grange, 1974
[L 131mm x W 108mm]
R.G. Kimber Collection

**Plates 4.1 – 4.12 Decorated boab nuts with elements of Western Style
landscape panels/sections in the National Museum of Australia
collections accession or received in or before 2002 by year**

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restrictions

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restrictions

Pl. 4.1: NMA 1985.0073.0044
unknown [Sunday Island], c. 1927
L 160mm x W 95mm x D 95mm
Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection
<http://collectionsearch.nma.gov.au/object/15936>

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Pl. 4.2: NMA 1993.0047.0217
unknown, [c. 1950s–1970s]
L 194mm x W 97mm x D 94mm
Professor Henry Krips MBE and Mrs Luise Krips Collection



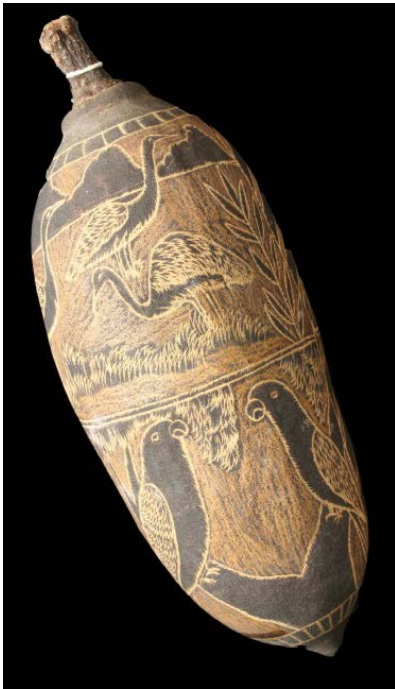
Pl. 4.3: NMA 1987.0044.0047
Derby, [unknown]
L 181mm x W 150mm x D 150mm
Mr Herbert Keys Collection



Pl. 4.4: NMA 1982.0092.0002
Jack Wherra,
Mownajum, 1966-71
L 145mm x [W 130mm]
Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1



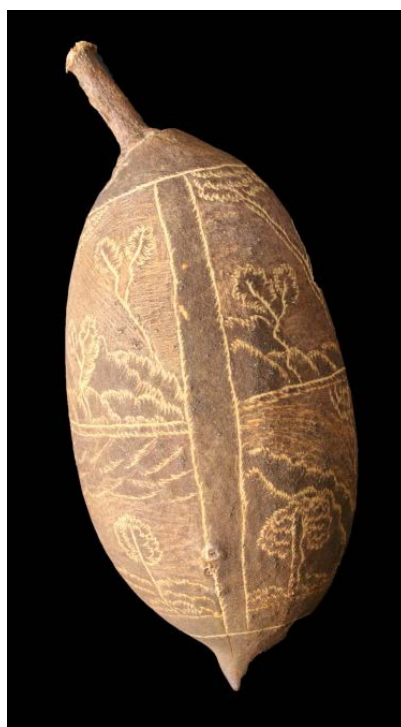
Pl. 4.5: NMA 1985.0005.0002
Derby, c. 1969
L 240mm x W 110mm x D 95mm
Mrs Mary Fox Collection



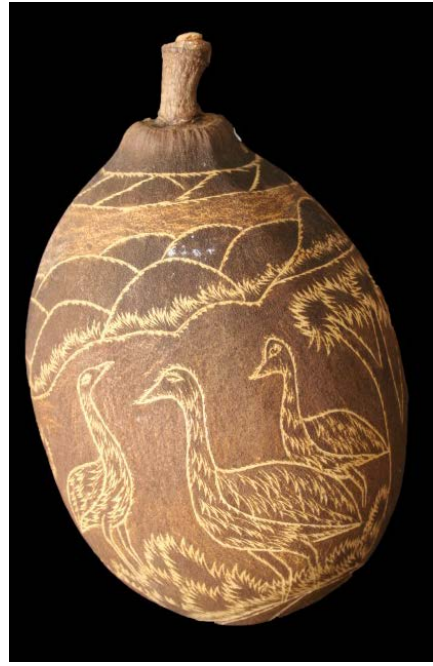
Pl. 4.6: NMA 2002.0018.0063
Mowanjum, 1971
L 240mm x Dia 90mm
Adrian Luck No. 2 Collection



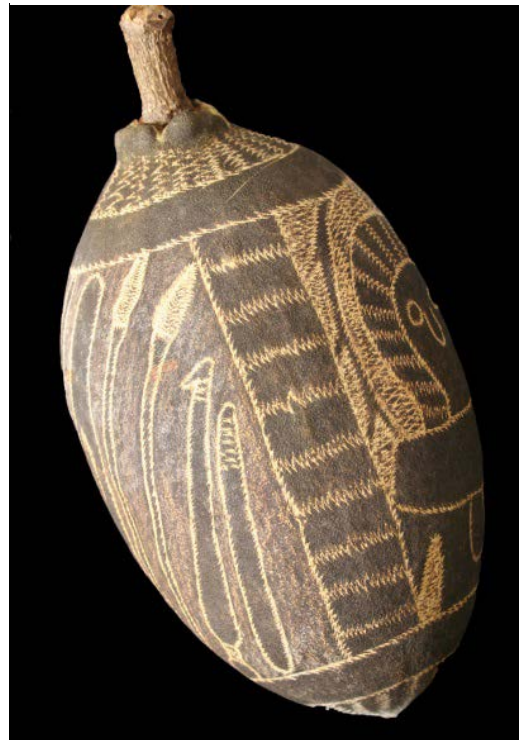
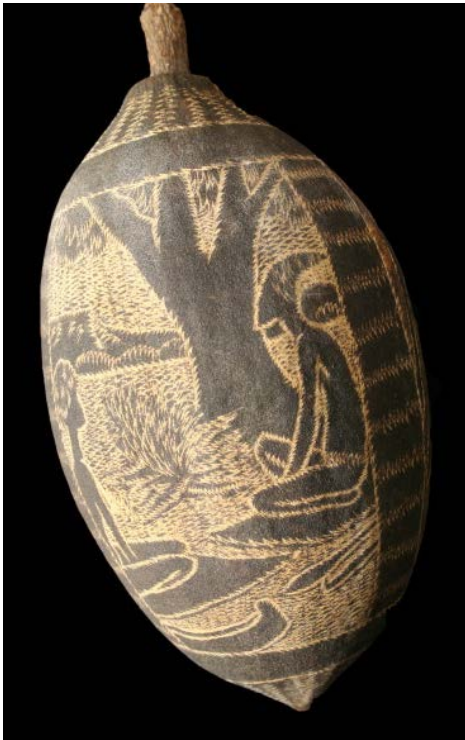
Pl. 4.7: NMA 1991.0024.4196
Mowanjum, 1974
L 180mm x Dia 115mm
Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection



Pl. 4.8: NMA 1991.0024.4201
Mowanjum, 1974
L 220mm x Dia 135mm
Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection



Pl. 4.9: NMA 1991.0024.4202
Mowanjum, 1974
L 150mm x Dia 90mm
Aboriginal Arts Board No. 2 Collection



Pl. 4.10: NMA 1987.0050.0313
Kimberley, [c. 1970s]
L 195mm x W 95mm x D 90mm
Enid Bowden Collection



Pl. 4.11: NMA 1987.0050.0315
Jack Wherra
Derby, [c. 1970s]
L 205mm x W 100mm x D 100mm
Enid Bowden Collection



Pl. 4.12: NMA 1987.0050.0319
Kimberley, [c. 1970s]
L 160mm x W 100mm x D 100mm
Enid Bowden Collection

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to explore whether or not the incised and painted boab nuts with Western-style landscape imagery represent continuity with or discontinuity/departure from 'traditional' Kimberley image making. This question has been explored using historical perspectives, key concepts and, integral to the argument, pictures of Kimberley imagery. Evidence has been provided to demonstrate successfully, by means of the cumulative argument mounted in this thesis, that in their pictorial depictions decorated boab nuts have continued to integrate profound narratives of the Dreaming, the life histories of Indigenous people and contemporary events, and are thus 'authentic' visual texts. This, it has been argued, despite overt changes in subject matter, in keeping with the changing times, demonstrates, at the epistemological level, continuity and persistence in terms of image making, rather than rupture with tradition.

The lived visual experience and living environment of Kimberley Aboriginal boab nut artists, together with the increasing numbers of Aboriginal children exposed to mainstream schooling, have encouraged the trend towards Western realism. The need to sell these artworks has led to concomitant need for the visual legibility of the realistic genre and Western-style realistic landscapes in order for tourists to purchase them. Thus such purchases could be described as a win-win for both the makers and consumers – on the part of the makers accommodating and resonating with the long-run structures of their art making and practices, without selling out what they hold dear, and from the consumers' perspective, accommodating their need for the 'otherness' of a souvenir together with the comfort of the known.

Throughout this thesis, the examination of the incised and painted boab nuts that has been conducted has demonstrated their significance as core activity, as art form, and as cross-cultural practice. For the Aboriginal artists of the Kimberley the connection to Country is the bond between the long-run structures of artistic production and the contemporary production of incised and painted boab nuts. It has been argued that, within the repertoire of Kimberley artistic practices, a Western realistic genre and associated Western-style landscapes have become inherent parts of the continuity of practice. This has been illustrated through a close examination of incised and painted boab nuts held in the National Museum of Australia.

The intense but uneven pressures experienced by Indigenous people in the Kimberley include the implementation of paternalistic and assimilatory policies; missionary involvement and control; and the often adverse effects of the pastoral and pearling industries. These people were also profoundly affected by various political factors, including law and order through policing and incarceration, while later experiencing the more subtle pressures occasioned by their engagement with tourism.

The history of the development of two-way adjustive relationships, of lived and shared experiences – positive and negative – can be reconstructed through the examination of artworks, whether these experiences are the retelling of injuries and death, for example, Rover Thomas's paintings of Bedford Downs Station; the depiction of Wandjina on incised boab nuts as a site of negotiation for a people for whom access to their Country is not available; or the performance of *balga/joonba* at festivals to teach today's children and tourists about the vibrant and ongoing living culture of Aboriginal people in the Kimberley.

The fact that incised and painted boab nuts have the capacity to communicate Aboriginal identities and experiences enable artists to demonstrate the impact of cross-cultural interactions. Decorated boab nuts being a long standing and common art form in the Kimberley has allowed maximal opportunities for expression of such encounters. The artists communicate their continuing connection to Country and tell of lived experiences through the decorated boab nuts, while at the same time the specific nature of the pressures of cross-cultural contact on function and context of production are exposed.

By recording the salient imagery depicted on the National Museum of Australia's collections of boab nuts from the twentieth century accessioned or receipted prior to or in 2002, and determining their chronological order and examining stylistic changes, while at the same time identifying associated historical, cross-cultural and other contextual influences, I have presented a cumulative case for decorated boab nuts as embedded in customary Kimberley art practice. The literature accessed has included scholarship from wide-ranging areas and included: Australian history, specifically contact history; art history; material culture and cross-cultural studies; anthropology; and geography. Specific supporting evidence has been provided from numerous sources, including the National Museum of Australia; national and state archives; museums and galleries; scholarly publications, books and newspaper articles; art image websites; an earlier fieldtrip (1997) that I undertook as part of my honours thesis on a closely related topic; and interviews.

Chapter 3 has provided evidence of the relationship of rock art painting and the marking of boab trees to incised and painted boab nuts. The designs used in rock art painting and on boab trees are at the same time motif precursors and ideologically and epistemologically derived through the Dreaming narratives, in that these are repeated in both the subject matter and design aspects of boab nuts. While the introduction of metal tool technology certainly transformed and enabled a greater level of detail in motif design than prior to this innovation, it has been demonstrated that the integrity of the earlier epistemological framework and design elements has been retained. By examining the Western-style landscape boab nuts not as ‘tourist art’ or ‘assimilated craft’ but as integrated, and in fact integral, to this ongoing art practice, I have come to comprehend how the visual arts have the capacity to offer new or different understandings of the contact interactions experienced by Indigenous people. The incised and painted boab nuts reinforce the Dreaming narratives *while simultaneously* observing and commenting upon the presence and actions of the non-Indigenous Other as well as on the changing environments of the Aboriginal artists themselves.

The key concepts investigated and research questions posed in Chapter 4 include considerations about the ‘authenticity’ or otherwise of the art form, the use of images as visual texts, cross-cultural legibility and ways of seeing, and Western realistic space and landscape. The concept that emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century of artwork and objects having a ‘biography’, has established a different way to view artefacts and has to some extent moderated the entrenched binary modes of classification applied to artworks/artefacts along with the notions of progress and evolution underpinning the earlier approach. Instead, the idea of an object or artefact possessing an individual ‘biography’ – a story that can be used to interrogate historical and contemporary ‘local’ practices and processes – has been taking hold, if not entirely replacing these earlier conceptualisations. Chapter 4 assessed these influences on Aboriginal art practices in the Kimberley, concluding that a Western-style realistic landscape category has been evolving in the decoration of boab nuts from the mid-twentieth century onwards. Although the landscapes depicted on boab nuts are often viewed as imitating their Western counterparts, these boab nuts remain profoundly and centrally concerned with the specificities and idiosyncrasies of Country and Dreaming Ancestors: they are embedded in the enduring structures of Kimberley art production and depiction.

Chapter 5 provided illustrations of a number of cross-cultural influences, some imposed by force and some two-way, that specifically impacted upon art forms in the Kimberley. Although assimilatory pressure or the ‘dynamics of accommodation’ has been encompassing, colonialisation can never be total, or entirely uncontested. Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal peoples have often found ways to negotiate around these interactions. The transformative nature of public and other ceremony, and other exchange processes for incorporating lived experiences within the Dreaming narratives allow for new motifs or images to emerge from earlier figurative and geometric styles. Aboriginal people were denied access to Country and their ceremonial life was often controlled or curtailed by pastoralists and missionaries and others, often interfering with the sustained production and retouching of rock art and tree marking. The obligation to perform the required custodial actions of this nature has consequently been fulfilled through the production of Dreaming narratives on portable objects such as boab nuts, slates, boards and canvas. While in some cases the media used may have changed, at the level of the episteme the centrality of Country has not been lost.

Although decorated boab nuts were originally produced as ceremonial objects, boab nuts have been functioning outside this category, reportedly as undecorated children’s rattles in the secular sphere, since the early twentieth century through exchange with non-Aboriginal people and, later, commodification. As settlement of the Kimberley became more widespread and townships became accessible by ship, motor vehicles and airplanes, with infrastructure established for industry and mining, the role of tourism became economically significant for many Aboriginal people, as their earlier land-based economy was increasingly encroached upon by the newcomers. More recently, festivals have become important tourist events and have provided an opportunity for Aboriginal artists to sell their artwork and to promote Aboriginal culture. Ongoing post-colonisation events taking place at the local level, including horse racing and rodeos, have become part of the regional tourism attractions since the mid-twentieth century. With the escalating growth in visitors came the establishment of souvenir businesses, Aboriginal art shows and art centres.

Mowanjum, a hub of activity, has been acknowledged as the boab nut-producing centre of the Kimberley in the 1960s and 1970s and has been used as a case study in Chapter 6 to provide a closer examination of the lives and contexts of the artists from this area. Through the identification of both large and subtle changes around and within their community, the importance of decorated boab nuts in the ongoing dialogue on cross-cultural interactions has been demonstrated.

This is a community well researched by anthropologists during that time. Although more of the literature deals with male artists and their concerns, this is a factor arising from the prevalence of male anthropologists in the timeframe encompassing the 1960s and 1970s. In a gendered society this has meant that documented insight into the role of women artists and their boab nut production has been limited in this research, but this certainly merits further research. As discussed in Chapter 6, the Mowanjum Presbyterian Mission had close involvement with the Derby township and its people after the community moved nearer to Derby in 1956. Access to state and church schools and community involvement in sporting and cultural events were factors in the development of Western realism in boab nut designs over the following few years; nevertheless, the Wandjina motif, the dominant figurative image of the Worora, Ngarinyin and Wunambal, is often incorporated on to boab nuts with Western-style landscapes.

The examination of the National Museum of Australia collections of incised and painted boab nuts in Chapter 7 and in the Appendix lent further weight to the argument that a Western-style landscape style had become established on the boab nuts by the mid-twentieth century. The discussion of the collecting practices of the National Museum of Australia and its colonialist predecessor, the Australian Institute of Anatomy, contextualises the background of the more recently accessioned boab nuts, as well as those from the early twentieth century. The investigation of the various collectors and collector practice illuminated the boab nut's 'life' after leaving the Kimberley artist's hands. These National Museum of Australia collections were created by a variety of people: mission workers, a historian, a doctor, artists, a teacher, an art board, a very small number of professional and amateur anthropologists, and others.

Despite the generally poor provenance records of these boab nuts, a chronological sequence for most of the decorated boab nuts has been determined based on complementary documentation including newspaper articles, archived material, interviews, biography, visual comparisons and reliable non-academic internet sites, for example local church histories, legal reports, and art centres.

Chapter 8 provided discussion of the impact of Western realism on Aboriginal art and reviewed the types of landscapes depicted on decorated boab nuts – non-Western-style: planar, frontal/profile elevation with lateral elements, flattened perspective; and Western-style realistic – arguing that that these landscape types occur concurrently and are often depicted in conjunction with figurative motifs. These styles sometimes coexist on individual nuts, and are being produced today, albeit in different proportions, with Western realism becoming increasingly dominant as younger artists start to produce more incised and painted boab nuts.

This thesis demonstrates that the motifs of Country have been not only expressed over the long-term in rock art, tree marking, ceremonial objects and wooden implements, but also more recently in incised and painted boab nuts sold into the tourist market, as well as being present in the context of other three dimensional ‘tourist’ objects such as incised slates. It is the strength of this unbroken link to Country, in spite of the continuing incursion of colonial activity, that is expressed in traditional and historic ceremonial/religious activity and in the contemporary context revealed and reproduced in so called ‘tourist art’. As shown, these artworks have retained important cultural meaning and cannot be dismissed merely as evidence of large scale assimilation – *they convey the resilience and continuing centrality of Country in the hearts and minds of their makers.*

This thesis provides further evidence of a concurrent movement towards realistic designs which developed out of a figurative genre of land-based traditions as a two-way response to colonialist-settler assimilatory practices in the Kimberley, particularly as a response to restrictions to access to Country. These group and individual responses to lived experiences have led to new iterations of older imagery, new forms of imagery, the introduction of new subject matter to reflect social change, and/or changes in production and function.

In earlier times decorated boab nuts were labelled ‘assimilation’ artefacts and Westernised designs were designated as mere imitations of the so-called ‘real’ thing. This thesis has provided evidence for the Western-style realistic landscape boab nuts in the Aboriginal art milieu of the Kimberley to be positioned within the long-term structure of ongoing processes of innovation in art practices, a process that calls for the incorporation of changes in lived experiences. These landscapes are not exact replications of Western realism but are innovative *Aboriginal* art.

This research comes at a time of increasing reclamation of Indigenous material culture as art, particularly those objects which were previously designated as ‘tourist art or craft’, internationally and in Australia. There is awareness that these are responses to the contemporary environment of communities within a long historical structure of art practices. Objects are a rich untapped resource being held by museums and private collectors, and have been used in this thesis to demonstrate that for decorated boab nuts from the Kimberley, these objects, viewed and understood in conjunction with other resources, provide new insights into engagement in cross-cultural interactions.

The reconceptualisation in this thesis of Western-style landscapes on incised and painted boab nuts as contemporaneous and ongoing visual arts practice is significant for strengthening the understanding of the more recent interpretations of contact interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people of the Kimberley, while adding to the literature on contemporary Aboriginal art practices in that region. This research also supplements the international literature as another ‘local site’ of cross-cultural encounter in the global sphere.

Future directions

A detailed analysis of the major decorated boab nut collections in Australian state and university collections and their assembly within the collections would be a rewarding future project, providing further insights into the imagery over time and comparatively with other objects and artworks. There may be an opportunity of investigating gender differentiation in motif use and production. Such large-scale institutional research would also illuminate Australian collecting and curating trends.

The Berndt Museum of Anthropology holds 24 decorated boab nut collected by anthropologist Kim Akerman between 1975 and 1978, mostly from Mowanjum but including a small number from Halls Creek, Luma and One Arm Point. Predominantly containing boab nuts depicting figurative designs, it would be fascinating to analyse a collection through the prism of an anthropologist-collector who has become renowned for his long-term Kimberley research.

Furthermore, there are numerous decorated boab nuts in collections overseas (Cooper 1989; Lang 1999: 75; P. Jones 2001); for example, Dr. E. Clements (1903), a major collector and donator/dealer of Australian ethnographic collections in Europe (Anderson & Reeves 1994: 86). In America, there are collections of decorated boab nuts assembled by, for example, Professor D. Davidson (1937) held at the University of Pennsylvania, and privately owned collections, the study of which would likewise be a rewarding addition to the literature on this under-documented and from my own perspective, engrossing research subject.

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Legend:

Black text is from the National Museum of Australia OPAL Database and the NMA online catalogue. The NMA description is exactly quoted and may include incorrect or inappropriate comments.

Blue text is my research comment. Comments added to the NMA data lines will be in [blue].

Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1

Number of boab nuts in collection: 5

Number of all objects in collection: 50

Date: 1966-1971

Where: Mowanjum

Catalogue numbers:

1982.0092.0001

1982.0092.0002

1982.0092.0003

1982.0092.0004

1982.0092.0005

Collection Type: National Historic Collection (NHC)

NMA description of collection:

In 1982, the Masters donated 50 objects from Mowanjum – *The Gwen and Wayne Masters No. 1 Collection*.

NMA: The Gwen and Wayne Masters collection no. 1 consist of fifty objects from Mowanjum mission in north-west Australia. The items in this collection include two religious books in Worora language, painting and artists equipment, boab nut carvings, wooden clapsticks, animal parts (turtle), spindles, elliptical concave wooden containers, shields, elliptishield with raised handle, wooden boomerangs for hunting and fighting, four pieces of solid form red ochre, wooden spearthrower, spears for hunting, fishing and fighting, stone tools, fighting sticks, cylindrical wooden clubs, hollow cylindrical dronepipe, bullroarer, fire drill set and cylindrical bark container with string handle

Mowanjum, a Worora word meaning 'settled at last' is a remote Aboriginal community located near Derby in north-west Australia. Members of the Worora, Ngarinyin, and Wunumbul clan groups form the majority of Mowanjum's residents, who were brought together by missionaries in the early twentieth century at the Kunmunya Presbyterian Mission and were forcibly moved across three different locations before arriving at the present site. Since the departure of the missionaries in the 1970s, Mowanjum has operated as an Indigenous corporation with an elected governing committee. The collection was assembled by the Masters whilst working on the Mowanjum mission during the late 1960s and early 1970s and is related to a collection that they donated to the National Museum in 1982. The collection reflects the diverse range of Indigenous objects manufactured for sale by mission residents of Mowanjum during the latter

twentieth century, as well as the collecting interests of Mowanjum mission workers of the time. The objects were highly prized by the Masters and provide material evidence of cultural practices such as traditional hunting, decorative arts, music and storytelling.

In 2009 the Masters donated a further 18 objects from Mowanjum – *The Gwen and Wayne Masters No. 2 Collection*.

NMA: The Gwen and Wayne Masters No 2 collection consists of eighteen objects relating to the Mowanjum mission in north-west Australia. It is comprised of three spears with glass tipped "Kimberley point" blades, two boomerangs, two decorated boab nuts, a wooden spindle with hair string attached, a coolamon, a turtle shell, a spear point, and two paintings, one by Jack Wherra and one by Basel Rangea, as well as two biblical texts in the Worora language and three issues of the mission 'Encounter' magazine.

Mowanjum, a Worora word meaning 'settled at last', is a remote Aboriginal community located near Derby in north-west Australia. Members of the Worora, Ngarinyin, and Wunumbul clan groups form the majority of Mowanjum's residents, who were brought together by missionaries in the early twentieth century at the Kunmunya Presbyterian Mission and were forcibly moved across three different locations before arriving at the present site. Since the departure of the missionaries in the 1970s, Mowanjum has operated as an Indigenous corporation with an elected governing committee. The collection was assembled by the Masters whilst working on the Mowanjum mission during the late 1960s and early 1970s and is related to a collection that they donated to the National Museum in 1982. The collection reflects the diverse range of Indigenous objects manufactured for sale by mission residents of Mowanjum during the latter twentieth century, as well as the collecting interests of Mowanjum mission workers of the time. The objects were highly prized by the Masters. The cultural practices reflected in these objects include the maintenance of language, as evidenced by the bible translations, the maintenance of traditional hunting practices as evidenced by the spears, boomerangs and hair string, and the maintenance of story telling traditions as evidenced by the carved boab nuts and the painting, believed to have been done in the Broome gaol sometime between 1966 and 1970.

These boab nuts are 2009.0003.0003 Boab nut incised with chevron pattern containing emus and turtles; and 2009.0003.0004 Boab nut incised with decorative panels [possibly by Jack Wherra].

NMA Archive information:

File 82/52 – transcript of interview with Gwen and Wayne Masters, Warwick Dix, Tony Martin and Robert Johnson (sections quoted in Chapter 6 and some images in Plate 1).

Summary: Wayne was a general handyman and school bus driver, and Gwenn taught pre-school children at Mowanjum between 1966 and 1971. At the time there were 300 Aboriginal people permanently living there, and during this time busloads of tourists (2-3 a week) were visiting and the commercialisation of art was developing. Of this collection donated in 1982, Gwen Masters kept 1 incised boab nut by Alan Mungulu and 1 incised emu egg by Albert Barunga.

Research Notes:

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Note: see McKenzie 1969: 284 for Gwen & Wayne Masters' entry.

Akerman, K. 1993, 'From Boab Nuts to Ilma: Kimberley Art and Material Culture', *Images of Power. Aboriginal Art of the Kimberley*, J. Ryan & K. Akerman (eds.), National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 106-113

Note: Akerman names other boab nut carvers (Akerman 1993: 106-107), see previously mentioned in Chapter 6.

Akerman, K. 2003, 'Jack Wherra: Quiet Storyteller and Carver of Boab Nuts', *The John McCaffrey Collection of Kimberley Art (Catalogue)*, Sotheby's International July Sales July 28th 2003, Sotheby's Australia, Armadale VIC, 70-71

Note: Includes a Jack Wherra boab nut. Other Jack Wherra nut in the NMA collection is 1987.0050.0315 Enid Bowden Collection [c1970].

Jebb, M. & Mowanjum Aboriginal Community 2008, *Mowanjum: 50 years community history*, Mowanjum Aboriginal Community & Mowanjum Artists Spirit of the Wandjina Aboriginal Corporation, Derby

Note: in the 1974 house plans by Derek Freeman housing report lists homes of prominent boab nut artists: Wherra, Ngerdu, Utemorra May Langi, Woolagoodja, Umagai, Gertie Yarbu, Jean Wonganyet & Collier Bangmorro (Jebb 2008: 128-9).

1982.0092.0001

Collection: Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1

Date collected: 1966-1971

Location collected: Mowanjum

Size: L 175mm x W 110mm x D 105mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised in zig zag linear style featuring naturalistic representations of various hunting tools & weapons. Pigmented. FRAGILE. Broken
[\[Previously A-AN 92.1\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 5395

Decade for chronology: 1960s

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 Kimberley point, 3 boomerangs, 1 shield, 3 spears, 1 club

Incising: zigzag, straight line, scraping, pitting

Pigmented: black and red unknown pigment

Colours: 2

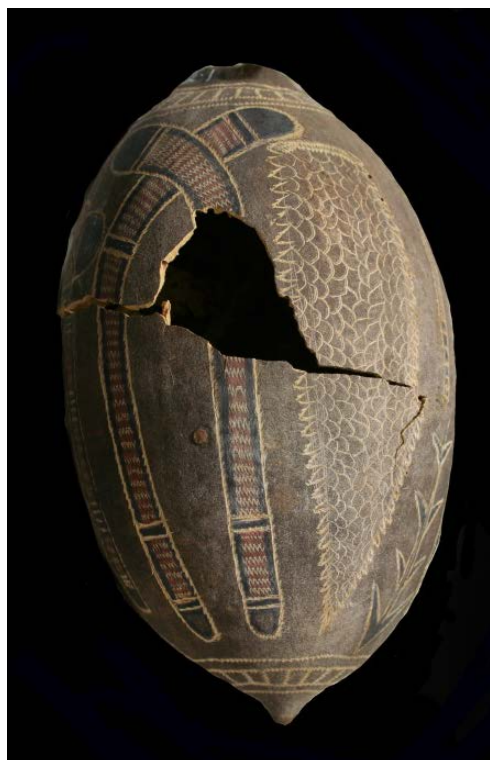
Borders: distal and proximal ends

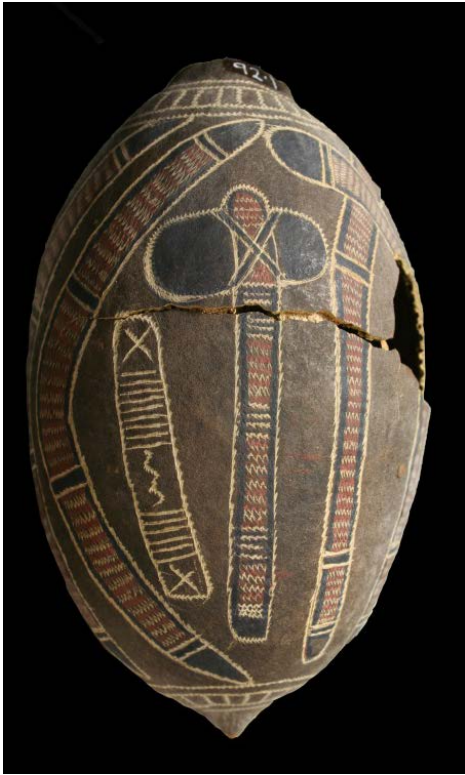
Border description: ladder design with single zigzag line either side of ladder

Partitions:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum '92.1'





Detail of incising – zigzag, line, pitting, scaping in spearhead

Detail of proximal border. Distal boarder is the same design

1982.0092.0002

Collection: Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1

Date collected: 1966-1971

Artist: Jack Wherra

Location collected: Mowanjum

Size: L 145mm x [W 130mm]

Catalogue description: Boab nut surface incised using a zig zag linear style featuring naturalistic figures of birds & animals and an Ancestor figure together with a realistically depicted hunting scene. Carved onto the top of the nut are the words; 'JACK WHERRA'.

[Previously A-AN 92.2]

IRN: 5396

Decade for chronology: 1960s

Genre: figurative, realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): Western-style

Major motifs: Wandjina with snake and nightjar; hunting man with spears in landscape with termite mound; owl and parrot overlooking hilly landscape

Incising: zigzag, straight line, scraping, pitting

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: distal and proximal ends; vertical

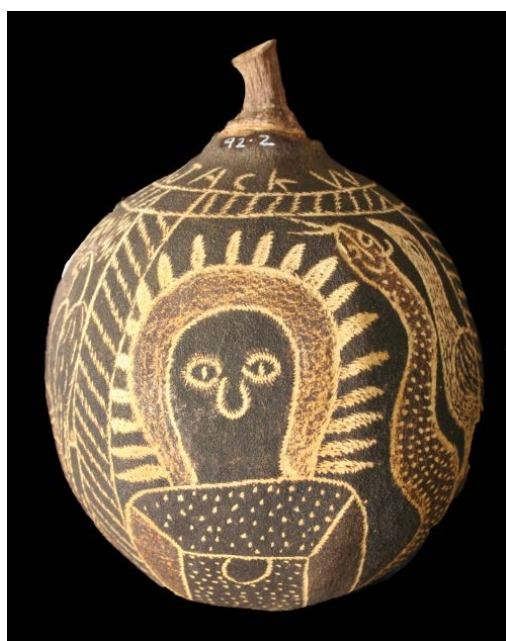
Border description: ladder style – diagonal, where borders meet are squares; proximal end has additional curved line motif; distal end has straight lines to point

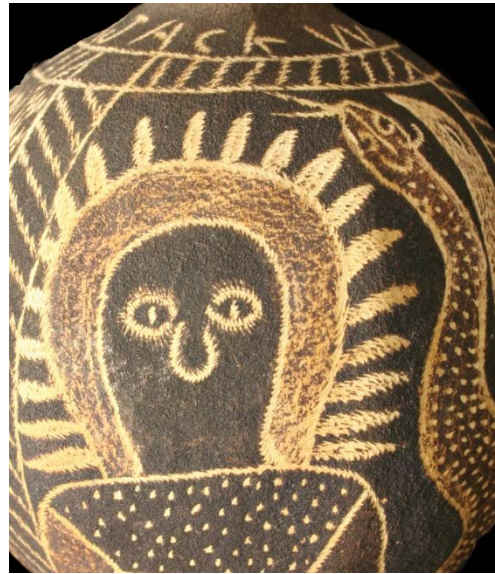
Partitions: 3

Partition type: vertical,

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: signed by artist - Jack Wherra; by museum '92.2'





Detail of incising – zigzag, line, scraping, pitting



Proximal end with signature



Distal end

1982.0092.0003

Collection: Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1

Date collected: 1966-1971

Location collected: Mowanjum

Size: L 230mm x W 80mm x D 70mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut surface incised with plant & animal motifs in a zig zag linear style. [cracked]

[Previously A-AN 92.3]

IRN: 5397

Decade for chronology: 1960s

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style – flattened perspective

Major motifs: 2 human-like figures, 2 boab trees, birds, and owls in tree branches

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented: 1 unknown pigment

Colours: black

Borders: distal and proximal ends

Border description: ladder designs – straight and diagonal; proximal and distal ends have single lines to terminus

Partitions: 4

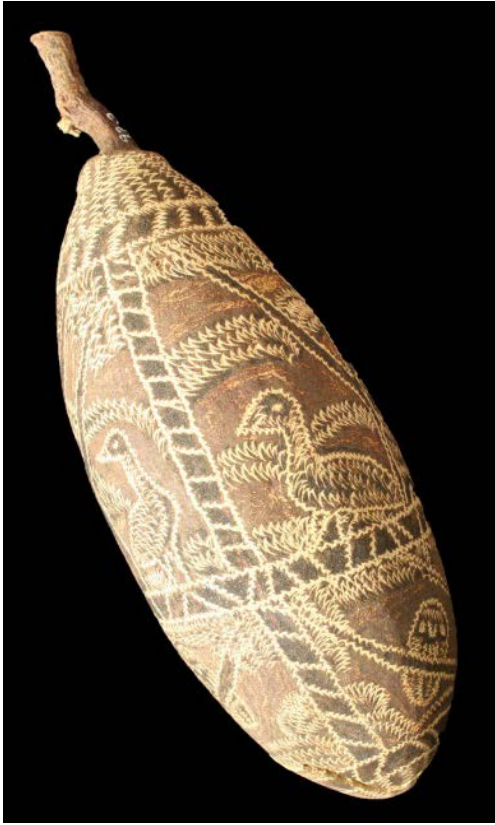
Partition type: vertical, horizontal

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum '92.3'

Notes: Image in (Akerman 2000: 543)





Detail of pigment; and incising – zigzag, scraping

1982.0092.0004

Collection: Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1

Date collected: 1966-1971

Location collected: Mowanjum

Size: L 185mm x W 100mm x D 90mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut surface incised with plant and animal motifs using a zig zag linear style.

[Previously A-AN 92.4]

IRN: 5398

Decade for chronology: 1960s

Genre: figurative (roundel shapes may be geometric)

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: crocodile, fish, vegetal motifs, 2 emus, 2 roundels

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: distal and proximal ends

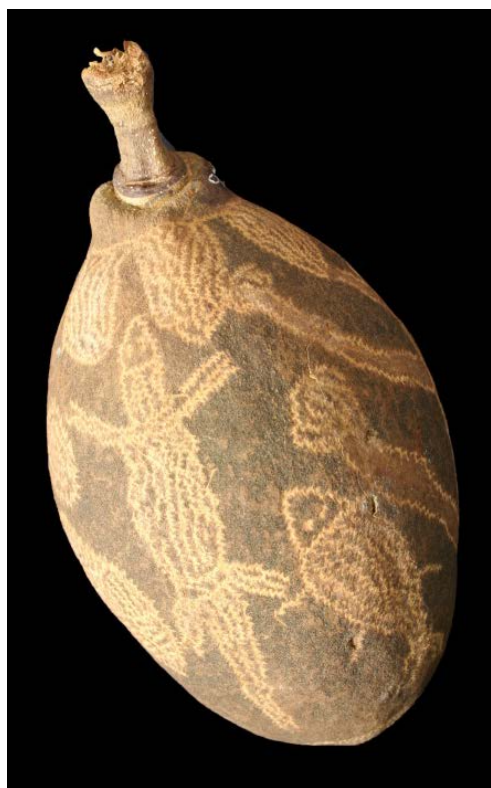
Border description: distal and proximal ends as part of vegetal motif

Partitions: number

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum '92.4'





Distal end as part of vegetal motif



Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

1982.0092.0005

Collection: Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection No. 1

Date collected: 1966-1971

Location collected: Mowanjum

Size: L 250mm x W 150mm x D 135mm

Catalogue description: Large boab nut, surface incised with images of an Ancestor figure, animals and plants in a naturalistic zig zag linear style. Broken & Fragile!!!!

[\[Previously A-AN 92.5\]](#)

IRN: 5399

Decade for chronology: 1960s

Genre: figurative, geometric

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: Wandjina [could be a water Wandjina (Akerman 2015)], emu, dugong, turtle, barramundi, fish and geometric motif

Incising: zigzag

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: distal end

Border description: single zigzag line

Partitions:

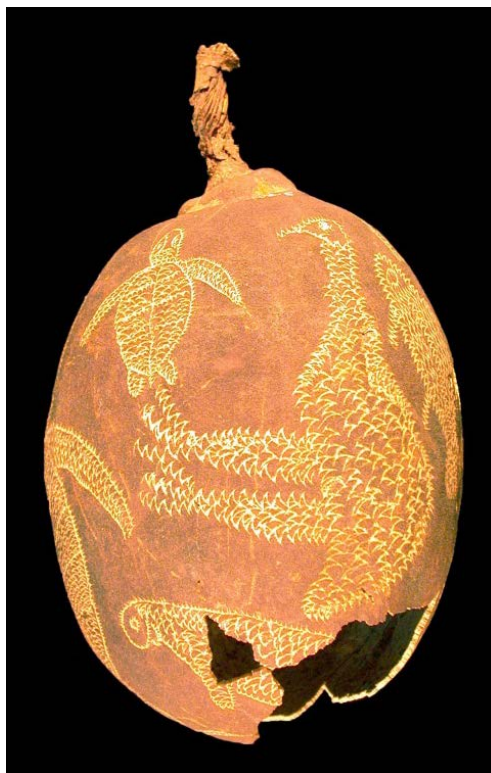
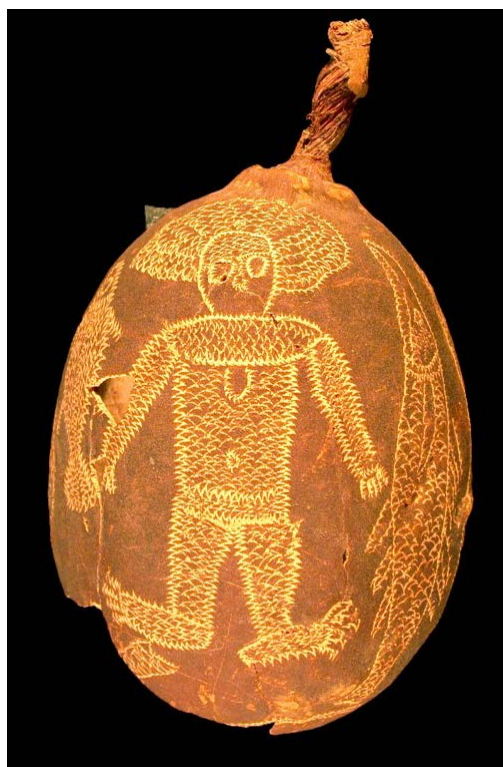
Partition type:

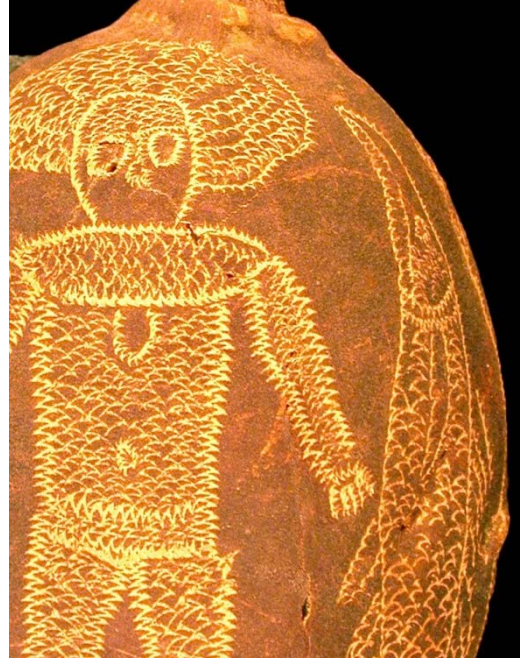
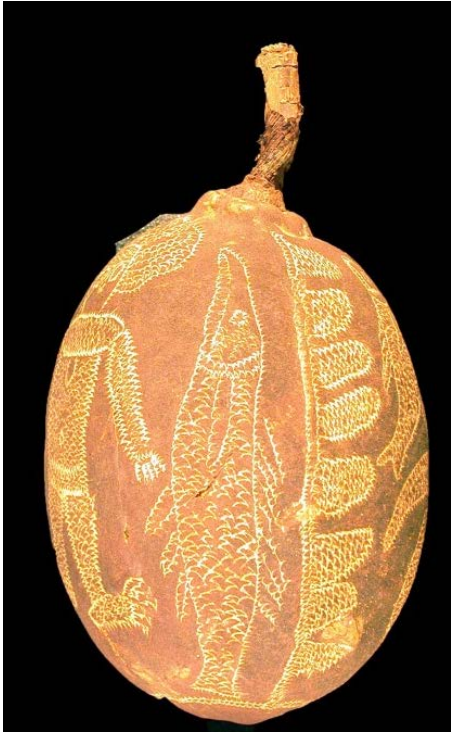
Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum '92.5'

Images courtesy of David Kaus, NMA

Note: Lateral geometric motif may be a site route as discussed in Chapter 3





Detail of different sizes of incising - zigzag

Y. Pettinato Collection

Number of boab nuts in collection: 3

Number of all objects in collection: 42

Date: [c. 1970s]

Where: [North Western Australia]

Catalogue numbers:

1985.0003.0082

1985.0003.0083

1985.0003.0084

NMA description of collection: none

Collection type: NHC

NMA Archive information: none

Research Notes:

David Kaus advises 'Pettinato was running a restaurant when the NMA purchased her collection' (Kaus, pers. comm.). Y. Pettinato is Mrs Yolanda Pettinato b. 1953.

Pettinato donated 2 bark paintings by David Malangi Daymirringu c1965 & 1967; and wooden sculpture 1965. One of her donations was collected by J.A. Davidson who was himself a collector and donated bark paintings to NMA. J.A. Davidson was the agent of bark painter Mathaman Marika in the 1960s. With the details of J.A. Davidson presented below I would attribute a potential date of c. 1970s.

Williams, N. 1976, 'Australian Aboriginal Art at Yirrkala: the Introduction and Development of Marketing', *Ethnic and Tourist Art. Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*, N. Graburn (ed.), University of California, Berkeley, 266-284

Note: J. (Jim) A. Davidson – collector and gallery owner in Melbourne of Aboriginal and South Pacific art. In 1962 the Director of Social Welfare asked Davidson to sell bark paintings from Arnhem Land in Melbourne. His collection is 1960s-1970s. Details of his modus operandi is discussed (Williams 1976: 276).

Yolanda Pettinato was interviewed by Sarah Rood for the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project [sound recording] in 2012 (National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore collection Bib ID: 6104910).

1985.0003.0082

Collection: Y. Pettinato Collection

Date collected: n.d. [c. 1970s]

Location collected: [North Western Australia]

Size: L 223mm x W 100mm x D 90mm

Catalogue description: Painted and pigmented boab nut with an incised design of an abstracted Ancestor figure within the landscape

IRN: 7072

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: figurative, realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style – frontal with lateral elements

Major motifs: Man sitting with headdress [possibly with ceremonial boards], tree, clouds, and hills in lateral view

Incising: zigzag outlines to motifs

Pigmented: 5

Colours: white, blue, pink-red, cream, and green unknown pigment

Borders: proximal end, vertical borders

Border description: painted – proximal end is a zigzag incised line with green paint next to stalk, vertical borders are blue with white dots with incised zigzag outline

Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections: -

Textual labels: -

Note: clouds are not outlined with incising

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Note: laterally depicted hills on either side of a boab tree

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Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Note: incised lining figures except on clouds, and use of white highlights on body of figure

Note: different colours used on trunk of boab to possibly suggest three-dimensionality

1985.0003.0083

Collection: Y. Pettinato Collection

Date collected: [c. 1970s]

Location collected: [North Western Australia]

Size: L 240mm x W 115mm x D 105mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised in a linear zig zag style depicting a landscape scene which includes a naturalistic representation of a boab nut tree. Painted/pigmented in a range of colours.

IRN: 7073

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: figurative, realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style – flattened perspective

Major motifs: 2 boab trees, one with anthills? in foreground and hills behind, the other with hills in the background and rocks and ?grass in the foreground with the top part of a man hiding/hunting?

Incising: zigzag outlines to most motifs, lightly incised straight lines in tree foliage

Pigmented: 6

Colours: white, light green, dark green, pink-red, blue, and brown-orange unknown pigment

Borders: proximal end, single zigzag line for vertical borders

Border description: painted – proximal end is a zigzag incised line with pink-red and brown paint next to stalk, vertical borders are blue with white dots with incised zigzag outline

Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections: -

Textual labels: -

Note: clouds and some rock-like shapes in lower sections are not outlined with incising

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Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Detail of vertical borders

Detail of distal end

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Detail of human figure

1985.0003.0084

Collection: Y. Pettinato Collection

Date collected: [c. 1970s]

Location collected: [North West Australia]

Size: L 170mm x W 115mm x D 110mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut with incised designs and human figures in the landscape. Coloured/pigmented.

IRN: 7074

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style - flattened perspective

Major motifs: 2 men hunting with weapons on either side of a boab tree with rocks in the foreground, a man with spear hiding in the grass with lizard and hills in the background

Incising: zigzag outlines to most motifs

Pigmented: 7

Colours: white, green, red, blue, brown-orange, grey, and black unknown pigment

Borders: proximal end, vertical

Border description: painted – proximal end has single zigzag border with white and green alternating curved bands, vertical bands are single zigzag outline with grey-white background and red widely spaced dots

Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections: -

Textual labels: by museum '1985.3.84'

Note: clouds are not outlined with incising, and some rocks and grass in lower sections

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Detail of borders

Detail of painted rocks which use
shadowing (See Chapter 4 Namatjira
watercolour Fig. 4.4a – lower left
hand side)

Mrs Mary Fox Collection

Number of boab nuts in collection: 2

Number of all objects in collection: 2

Date: 1969/1970, 1975

Where: Derby

Catalogue numbers:

1985.0005.0001

1985.0005.0002

Collection type: NHC

NMA description of collection:

Donated to M.O.A. by Mrs Mary Fox on 8/3/1985. Stored at Mitchell Ethnographic Repository. The collection is as follows:

1. Boab nut, carved with Wandjina design. Purchased by Mrs Fox c. 1969/70 from Derby Boab Festival, Derby W.A. Thoughts to have been carved by an old man from the leprosarium a short time prior to the Festival.
2. Boab nut, carved with hawk and snake design. Purchased by Mrs Fox c. 1975 from a young man who came to the YWCA Shop, Derby W.A. Exhibited at the Derby Boab Festival, Derby W.A., c. 1975/76. Artist thought to have come from Kalumburi [sic], W.A.

NMA Archive information:

NMA File 85/145 containing 2 handwritten minutes recording the details of the purchase of both boab nuts (85/145 29/5/1985 by N. Keith and 8/3/85 by G.H. Sculthorpe).

Research Notes:

Miss Mary Fox (NMA 1985.0005.0001 1969 and NMA 1985.0005.0002 1975) provided details of the purchase of the two incised boab nuts. Fox lived in Derby from 1968 to 1977 and she worked in the Young Women's Christian Association (YMCA) training Aboriginal girls and young women throughout the Kimberley. The YMCA opened an artefact shop in Derby in 1973. Fox mentions that NMA 1985.0005.0001

was purchased from the Derby Boab Festival from a stall believed to be exhibiting incised boab nuts from the Derby Leprosarium patients, while NMA 1985.0005.0002 was purchased from a young man visiting the YMCA shop who had exhibited the boab nut in the Derby Boab Festival in 1975/76.

Ahvenaiden, E. 1970. Sick and tired of Aborigines being patronised, *The Age*, 23 January 1970, 7,

<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1300&dat=19700123&id=e9tAAAIAIBAJ&sjid=zJADAAAIAIBAJ&pg=5284,4017604&hl=en>

'From one challenge to another', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 August 1969, 66

1985.0005.0001

Collection: Mrs Mary Fox Collection

Date collected: c. 1969/70

Location collected: Derby

Size: L 310mm x Dia 140mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with Ancestor/Wandjina figures

IRN: 7172

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: Wandjina; heads & shoulders only - 2 big ones at top & 3 small ones lower, unknown motif between 2 large Wandjina

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

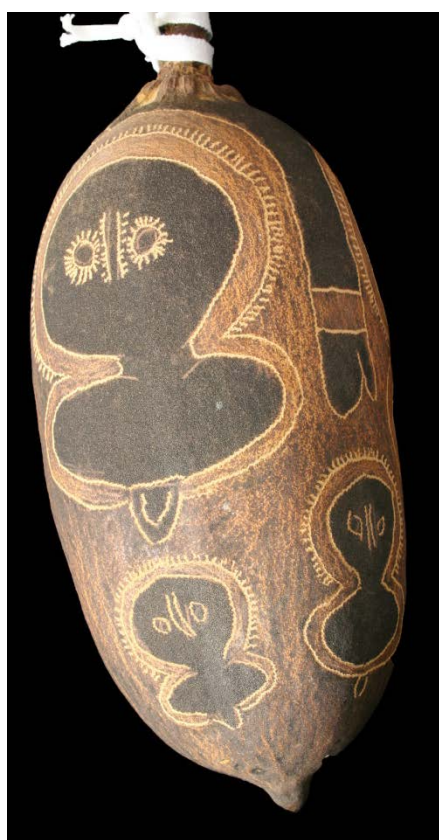
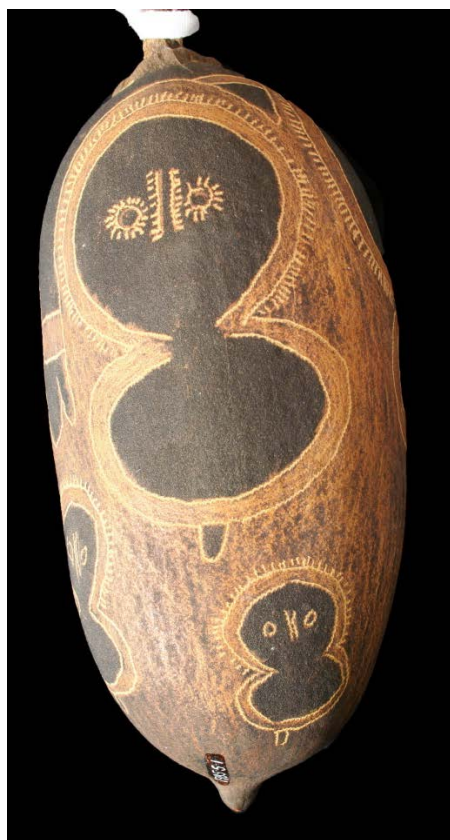
Borders:

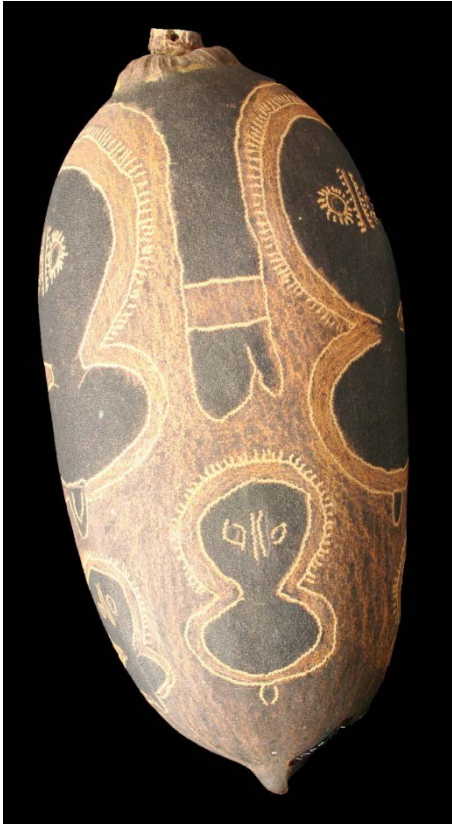
Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Textual labels: by museum '85.5.1'





Detail of lightly engraved straight line incising under the figure especially the eyes and nose



Detail of incising – zigzag, line, scraping

1985.0005.0002

Collection: Mrs Mary Fox Collection

Date collected: c. 1975

Location collected: Derby

Size: L 240mm x W 110mm x D 95mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with realistic motifs of animals in the landscape; birds, snakes & kangaroos.

IRN: 7173

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): Western-style

Major motifs: eagle (hawk) flying with snake in claws and geese and other birds behind, 2 kangaroos sitting and 1 kangaroo running, 2 emus and 1 bird on rocks, hills behind, large tree with snake winding up it

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

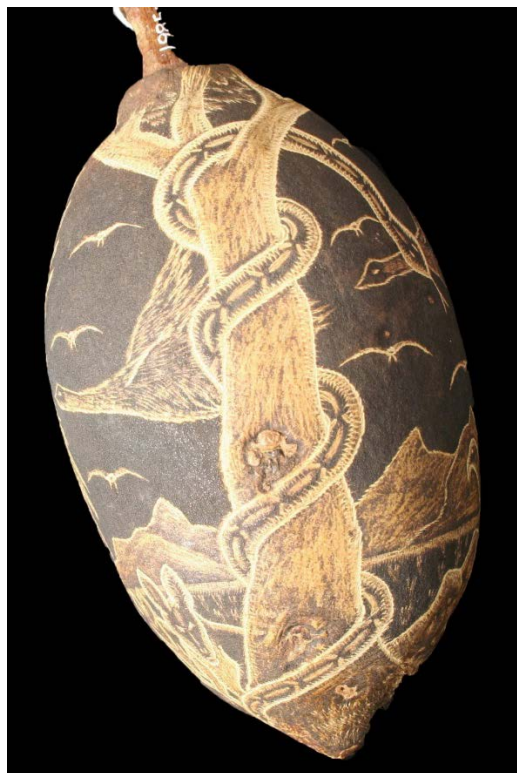
Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Textual labels: by museum '85.5.2'





Detail of proximal end



Detail of distal end. Note the use of scraping kangaroos to provide three dimensionality and the use of boab nut imperfections in tree trunk



Detail of incising – zigzag, straight lines, on scraping

E. Milne Collection

Number of boab nuts in collection: 3

Number of all objects in collection: [415 plus over 700 stone artefacts]

Date: 1914 and [pre-1916]

Where: Western Australia, Northern Western Australia

Catalogue numbers:

1985.0059.0400

1985.0059.0401

1985.0059.0402

Collection Type: NHC

NMA description of the collection: none in catalogue

NMA Archive information:

File 85/310 – Edmund O. Milne (Milne Collection) acquired by AIA in January 1931. List of items:

Previously 1985.13.416 Cat. No. A-AN11 Incised baobab nut 421 Provenance W.A.

Previously 1985.13.417 Cat. No. A-AN12 Incised baobab nut 422 Provenance W.A.

Previously 1985.13.418 Cat. No. A-AN13 Incised baobab nut 420 Provenance Northern W.A. Mr Brown, 7/8/1914

Research Notes:

Edmond Osborn Milne 1861-1917. Milne lived in New South Wales working for the NSW Railways. The Milne collection is discussed in Chapter 7. It is possible that Mr Brown is the same man from Meda Station that Basedow mentions during his 1916 exploration on page 18-19, 45-46 in Basedow, H. 2009 [1918], *Narrative of an Expedition of Exploration in North-Western Australia, Western Australian Explorers' Diaries Project* [reprint], Hersperian Press, Carlisle WA.

National Archives of Australia 1965, Folders of original descriptive lists relating to ethnological collections held by the Institute of Anatomy, A2907, 1 January 1965-31 December 1965

‘E.O. Milne collection, 1910-1947

An original detailed descriptive list of the E.O. Milne ethnological collection of early Australian artefacts (mostly aboriginal), a biography of Mr Milne together with a history of the formation of the collection and correspondence relating to the acquisition of the collection by the Institute of Anatomy’.

Kaus (Kaus pers. comm., 1 November 2006) advises the Australian Institute of Anatomy (AIA) cards state:

1985.0059.0400 – Stain from label ‘Carved baobab nut. Western Australia’. The AIA card gives location as ‘Northern W.A.’ and the source as ‘Mr Brown, 7 August 1914’. This baobab nut bears a stain from a paper label and it is presumed it had the label still adhering when its AIA card was completed. Milne was living in Orange NSW in 1914.

1985.0059.0401 – No trace of label ‘Carved Baobab nut, Western Australia’.

1985.0059.0402 – Does not bear a Thorpe number.¹ Its AIA card places it in The Milne Collection.

‘Death of Mr Edward [sic] Milne. Deputy Chief Commissioner for Railways’. *Tweed*

Milne was ‘reputed to be the greatest authority in Australia on aboriginals’ habits and customs’ (*Tweed Daily* 1917: 3).

‘Milne Collection of Aboriginal Stone Weapons, Priceless Gift to Nation in Institute of Anatomy’, *The Canberra Times*, Thursday 22 January 1931, 2

Hansen, G. 2005, ‘Captivating and Curious: Collecting for a Nation, National Museum of Australia exhibition’, Vol. 7, No. 1,

http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/captivating_and_curious/collecting_for_a_nation, accessed 30 March 2015

‘Another major early collector whose material was deposited in the Institute of Anatomy was Edmund Milne. Milne, an assistant commissioner in the New South Wales Railways, collected Indigenous material from the 1870s through to the 1910s. Milne’s work on the railways took him around the state, enabling him to meet Aboriginal people and build a major collection of artefacts. He displayed his collection in his home, arranging items by

¹ ‘In the late 1920s, Edmund Milne Jr secured the services of W.W. Thorpe, ethnologist at the Australian Museum, to list the collection. ...Thorpe produced a substantial inventory of the collection under a number of headings that included the documentation for individual items. Today this inventory is the only source of information for some items and it is of greater importance as a number of items cannot now be accounted for’ (Kaus 2008: 294).

their type and size. He also gave public lectures on, the 'Australian stone age', emphasizing the importance and value of Aboriginal culture. He bequeathed his collection to 'the first Federal Museum opened in the Federal Capital'.⁶

⁶ David Kaus, 'Collecting by railway: The Milne collection of ethnology', unpublished Masters of Arts thesis, University of Canberra, Canberra, 1998, p.63

Kaus, D. 1993, 'Research on the Edmund Milne Collection of Aboriginal Artefacts', *Bulletin of the Conference of Museum Anthropologists*, Vol. 25, 31-33

'The collection contains 415 ethnographic objects. The stone artefacts have not yet been listed but they number about 700. There are also two photograph albums, a few framed prints, some books on Australia and a small number of skeletal remains. ... Almost half the ethnographic collection came from New South Wales. The remainder comes from all over the country. On a state basis Queensland is next most strongly represented (30.4%), then Western Australia (11.3%), followed by the Northern Territory, South Australia and Victoria. ... Milne's collection contains a lot of weapons (301/415 – 72.5%). There are few women's objects and no toys. There are 24 breastplates and this is one of the better documented components of the collection. The remainder of the collection comprises small numbers of various objects – message sticks, hafted stone tools, ornaments, decorated boab nuts, carved trees, and bullroarers being the main ones' (Kaus 1993: 32).

Kaus, D. 2003a, 'Collectors and collections: Edmund Milne's collection', *NMA Friends Magazine*, Vol 14, No. 3

Kaus, D. 2007, 'Pacific collections in the National Museum of Australia', *Hunting the collectors: Pacific collections in Australian museums, art galleries and archives*, S. Cochrane & M. Quanchi (eds.), Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 357-376

'In 1931, he [Dr Colin MacKenzie], founder of the Australian Institute of Anatomical Research, material displayed in a private museum attached to his home 1919] successfully applied for 'The Milne Collection' which the collector, Edmund Milne, in 1916 had bequeathed to the first Federal Museum opened in the Federal Capital' (Kaus 2007: 366).

Kaus, D. 2008, 'Professionals and Amateurs. Different Histories of Collecting in the National Ethnographic Collection', *The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections*, N. Peterson, L. Allen & L. Hamby (eds.), Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 281-312

1985.0059.0400

Collection: E. Milne Collection

Date collected: 1914

Location collected: Northern Western Australia

Size: L 180mm x W 90mm x 100mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut with incised rudimentary naturalistic design of animal motifs across the surface. Cracked & Fragile!!!

[\[Previously A-AN13\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 10787

Decade for chronology: 1910s

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 4 vegetal motifs, 2 birds, 1 kangaroo

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping, pitting

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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Detail of distal end

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Detail of incising – zigzag, lines, scraping, pitting

1985.0059.0401

Collection: E. Milne Collection

Date collected: [pre-1916]

Location collected: Western Australia

Size: L 180mm x W 90mm x 100mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with rudimentary designs of animal motifs.

[cracked]

[Previously A-AN11]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 10756

Decade for chronology: 1910s

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 unidentified animal, 1 small unidentified motifs, 2 crescents.

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections: yes

Textual labels: by museum 'A-AN11 421'

Note: Similar motifs to 1985.0059.0402.

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Detail of incising – zigzag, line, scraping

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Detail of incising – zigzag, lines

1985.0059.0402

Collection: E. Milne Collection

Date collected: [pre-1916]

Location collected: Western Australia

Size: L 205mm x W 110mm x D 115mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with rudimentary designs of animal motifs

[cracked and faded]

[Previously A-AN12]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 10757

Decade for chronology: 1910s

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 unidentified animal, 1 emu, 1 small unidentified motif, 1 crescent.

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum 'A-AN12 422'

Note: Similar motifs to 1985.0059.0401.

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Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

Detail of line incising in feet

Dr Herbert Basedow Collection

Number of boab nuts in collection: 5

Number of all objects in collection: 424

Date: 1916

Where: Broome

Catalogue numbers:

1985.0060.0803

1985.0060.0804

1985.0060.0805

1985.0060.0806

1985.0060.0807

Collection Type: NHC

NMA description of collection: none in catalogue

NMA Archive information:

Acquired by AIA in 1934

A Different Time: The Expedition Photographs of Herbert Basedow 1903-1928 [exhibition with online catalogue], 11 July- October 2008, Canberra



Map of Basedow's 1916 expedition prospecting for munition minerals in the Kimberley for a South Australian mining syndicate. The Australian Museum gave him £50 to extend his travels beyond the Napier Ranges. Basedow reached Derby in March 1916 on his way to Port Hedland. He made journeys to Port George IV and Forrest River mission via Wyndham (NMA 2008).

Research notes:

Dr Herbert Basedow (1881-1933) was likely Australia's first professionally trained anthropologists as well as a doctor and geologist. He made a number of expeditions to northern and central Australia collecting over 1600 Aboriginal artefacts which have been dispersed in Australia and Europe (Harmstorf 1979: 202-3; Kaus 2008: 1292-3). The NMA holds the largest portion of this collection. His 1925 book *The Australian Aboriginal* which includes observations from his 1916 Kimberley geological expedition on the function and production of decorated boab nuts, and boab tree marking. Basedow 'extended the analysis of Aboriginal art from rock carvings and paintings to an examination of stylised ornamentation on wooden artefacts (Jones 1996: 149).

Basedow in his 1916 expedition 'Narrative of an expedition of exploration in North-western Australia' made stops at missions important in the written history of decorated boab nuts, for example, Sunday Island Mission Station (8/5/1916) and Forrest River Mission (9//6/1916). Basedow reports that during a week-long stay in Derby (28/5-3/6/1916) that: 'The baobab nuts were sufficiently hardened by this time that they permitted of being carved upon by the natives. Some of the men were very clever at artfully decorating their surfaces with designs of the kangaroo, emu, fish and other objects. The nuts are eagerly sought after by the local residents who send them as curios to their friends living south or in the mother country. The carving is done with the point of a knife or of a flint chip' (Basedow 1918: 217).

Kaus notes that: 'Following his death, Basedow's family sold his collection to the Commonwealth Government. Norman B. Tindale, then ethnologist at the South Australian Museum, listed the collection for the Commonwealth and that museum retained some 'duplicates' as payment for Tindale's services. His widow sold other parts of his collection in the 1940s to the Australian Museum and then then National Museum of Victoria' (Kaus 2008: 292-3). Unfortunately, the labels were removed from the objects and many of the labels remain missing, see Chapter 7. Kaus (2008) also observes: 'Few records have been found of Basedow collecting artefacts. These generally lack specific details, like a reference to artefacts collected at the then Port George IV Mission in the western Kimberley in 1916: 'A fine collection was made of

spears, spear-throwers, fire-making sticks, water-carriers, fur and human hair-belts, ceremonial objects, and implements' (Kaus 2008: 296).

Stan Florek, Australian Museum, advises there are 3 Basedow collected boab nuts in the museum -E023988 Basedow 1916 Point Torment, King Sound; E023989 Basedow 1916 Point Torment, King Sound; and E024041 Basedow 1916 Native well off King Sound (Florek, pers. comm., 15 December 2006).

National Archives of Australia 1965, Folders of original descriptive lists relating to ethnological collections held by the Institute of Anatomy, A2907, 1 January 1965-31 December 1965

'H. Basedow collection 1934-62

An original descriptive list of Dr Basedow's ethnological collection, a list of Basedow manuscripts held at the Mitchell Library in Sydney and correspondence relating to the collection and to Dr Basedow's expeditions'.

This list of Dr Basedow's Ethnology Collection (Prepared by Norman B. Tindale, B.Sc., Ethnologist, S.A. Museum: April, 1934.)

Summary: This list of Aboriginal artefacts was divided into spears, spearheads, playsticks, message sticks, clubs, bullroarers, chippings, shields, fishing nets, wooden dishes, hammer-stones, millstones, tjuringas, hair belts, spearthrowers, boomerangs, pointing sticks, hammers, fighting picks, bows, axes, adzes, axeheads, bark buckets, necklets, ornaments, canoes, scrapers, nosepegs, bags, baskets, mating, musical instruments, knives, bark painting, busts, dresses, hooks, firesticks, armllets, flints, and miscellaneous. On page 7 under miscellaneous are the '14 baobab nuts with carved designs – probably Broome, W.A.' and '1 baobab nut – N.W.A.' presumably undecorated. It is important to note that Tindale has only guessed the sources of the boab nuts.

National Archives of Australia, H [Herbert] Basedow collection, 1934-1962, NAA A2907 Folder 2

National Archives of Australia 'Museums, specimens and medical artistry – Collections – Dr Herbert Basedow (Australian Aboriginal artefacts), NAA A2645, 50/2/1 Section 1

Basedow, H. 1918, 'Narrative of an Expedition of Exploration in North-Western Australia', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographic Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch*, Vol. XVIII, 105-295

Basedow, H. 1925, *The Australian Aboriginal*, F.W. Preece & Sons, Adelaide SA

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Kaus, D. 2008, 'Professionals and Amateurs. Different Histories of Collecting in the National Ethnographic Collection', *The Makers and Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections*, N. Peterson, L. Allen & L. Hamby (eds.), Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 281-312

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1985. 0060.0803

Collection: Dr Herbert Basedow Collection

Date collected: 1916

Location collected: Broome [Tindale labelled this as Broome but Basedow also visited Derby, Sunday Island, Forrest River & Wyndham]

Size: L 220mm x W 90mm x D 90mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with an abstract pattern of regional flora.

Broome. W.A.

[Previously A-AN20]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 11578

Decade for chronology: 1910s

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 3 large vegetal motifs, 2 smaller unidentified motifs

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping, pitting

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

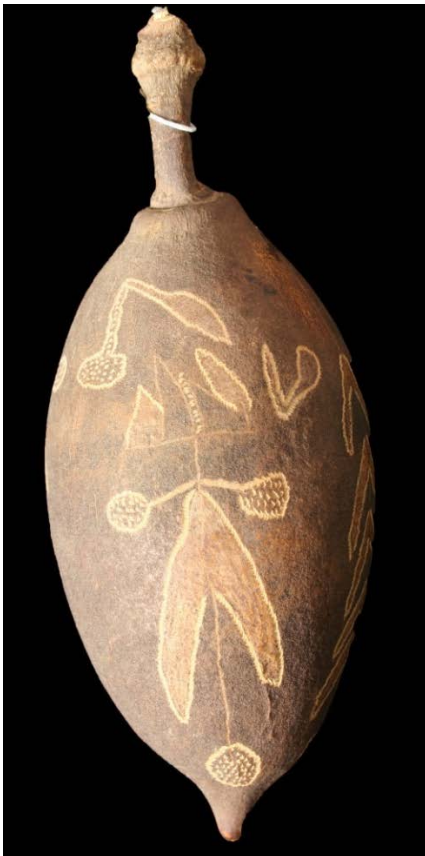
Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum 'A-AN20'





Detail of incising – zigzag, line, scraping, pitting

1985. 0060.0804

Collection: Dr Herbert Basedow Collection

Date collected: 1916

Location collected: Broome [Tindale labelled this as Broome but Basedow also visited Derby, Sunday Island, Forrest River & Wyndham]

Size: L 155mm x W 90mm x D 90mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with rudimentary abstract images scattered across the surface. Broome. W.A.

[Previously A-AN21]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 11579

Decade for chronology: 1910s

Genre: figurative, possibly has a geometric element

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 leg, 1 spear?, 1 arm, bird track?, 5 boomerang shapes, 1 arc shape

Incising: zigzag, scraping, pitting

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

Border description:

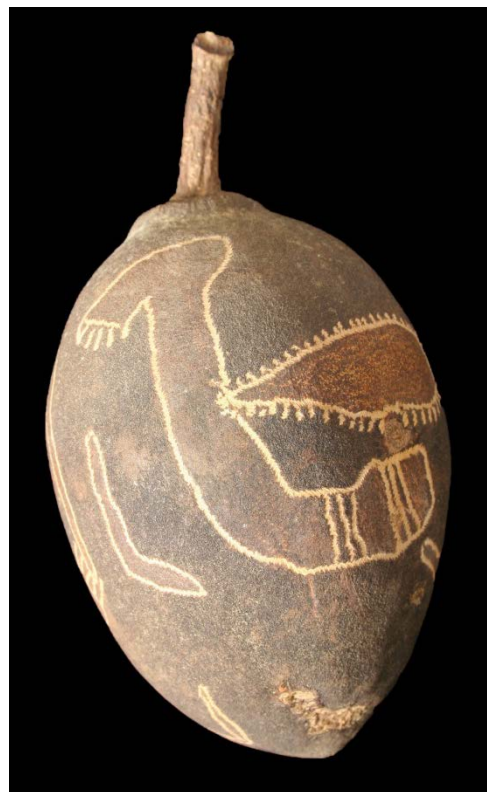
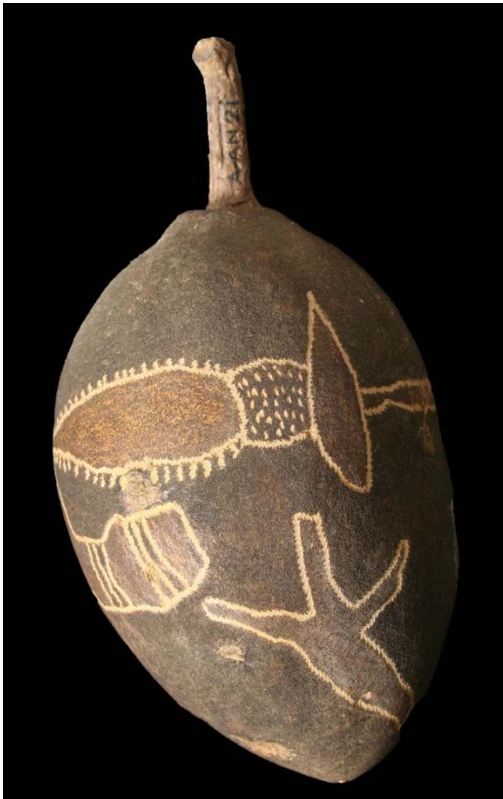
Partitions:

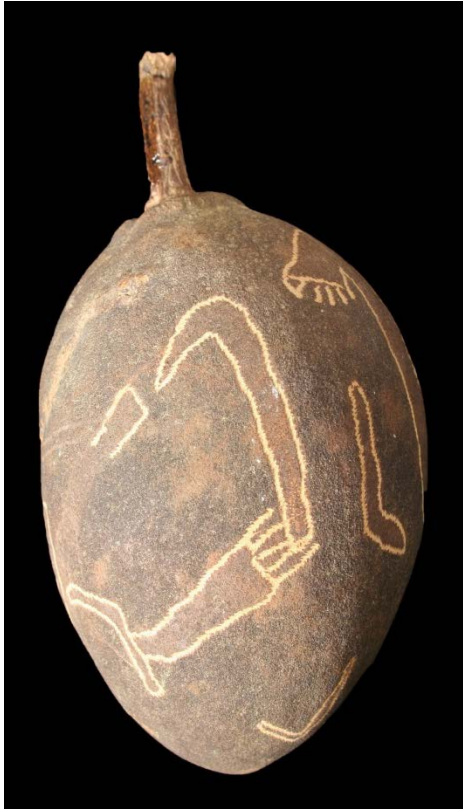
Partition type:

Undecorated sections: yes, where boab nut is scarred

Textual labels: by museum 'A-AN21'

Note: This boab nut may have a sorcerous function. Clendon (2014) notes for the Worora 'body parts are prototypically parts of human beings' (Clendon 2014: 88).





Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping, pitting

1985. 0060.0805

Collection: Dr Herbert Basedow Collection

Date collected: 1916

Location collected: Broome [Tindale labelled this as Broome but Basedow also visited Derby, Sunday Island, Forrest River & Wyndham]

Size: L 150mm x W 80mm x D 80mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with rudimentary organic emblems. Broome. W.A.

[Previously A-AN22]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 11580

Decade for chronology: 1910s

Genre: figurative, possibly has a geometric element

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 large vegetal motif, 6 small vegetal motifs, 2 crescent shapes, 1 unidentified motif

Incising: zigzag, scraping, pitting

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

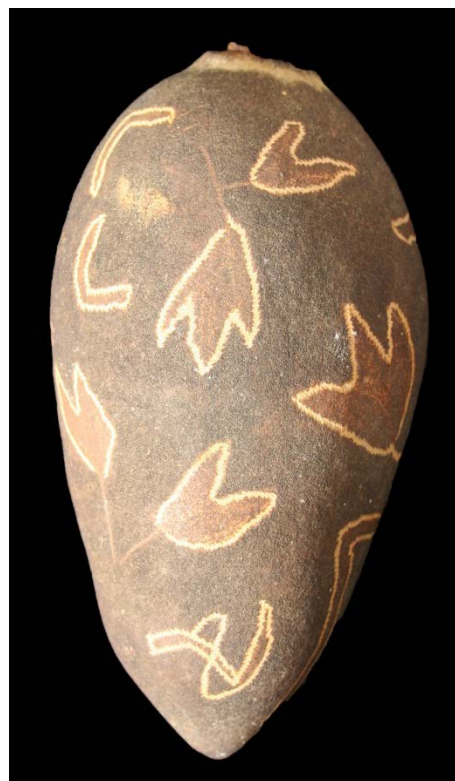
Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:





Detail of incising – zigzag, scaping, pitting

1985. 0060.0806

Collection: Dr Herbert Basedow Collection

Date collected: 1916

Location collected: Broome [Tindale labelled this as Broome but Basedow also visited Derby, Sunday Island, Forrest River & Wyndham]

Size: L 290mm x W 150mm x D 120mm

Catalogue description: Large boab nut with stalk attached, incised with animal motifs and geometric designs in a zig zag linear style. Broome. W.A.

[Previously A-AN23]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 11581

Decade for chronology: 1910s

Genre: figurative, geometric

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 unidentified Being (similar to rock art examples), 4 sharks, 3 large vegetal motifs, 3 geometric? motifs, 1 small geometric? motif, 1 unidentified outline

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping, pitting

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

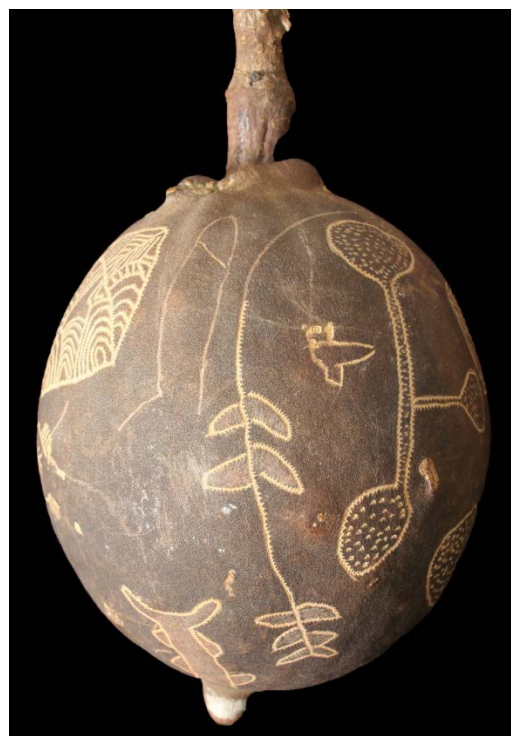
Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum 'A-AN23'





Detail of unidentified geometric? motifs



Detail of four legged figure and geometric motif and incising – zigzag, line, scraping



Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping, pitting

1985. 0060.0807

Collection: Dr Herbert Basedow Collection

Date collected: 1916

Location collected: Broome [Tindale labelled this as Broome but Basedow also visited Derby, Sunday Island, Forrest River & Wyndham]

Size: L 210mm x W 140mm x D 130mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with rudimentary abstract patterning and animal motifs. Broome. W.A.

[Previously A-AN29]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 11582

Decade for chronology: 1910s

Genre: figurative, possibly has a geometric element

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 bull, 1 chicken, 1 donkey?, 1 bird, 1 kangaroo, 2 fish, 1 snake (as proximal border), 1 axe, 1 shield?, 1 basket?, 1 large vegetal motif (over distal end), 9 unidentified motifs

Incising: zigzag, scraping, pitting

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal end

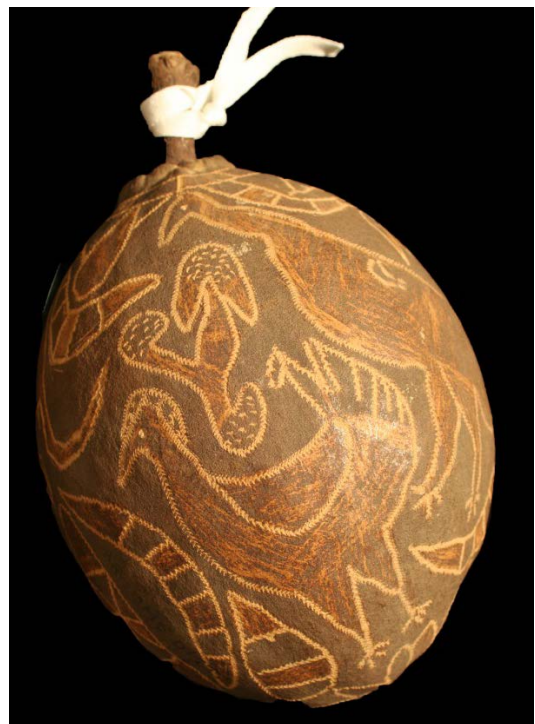
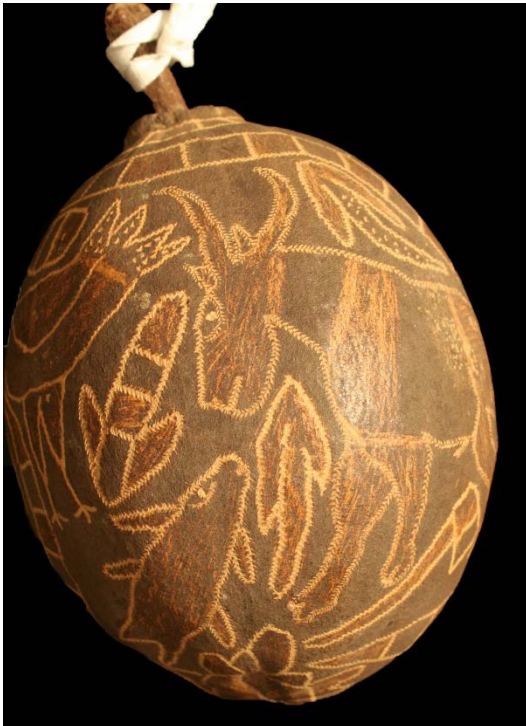
Border description: zigzag ladder with alternate scraped sections as a snake motif

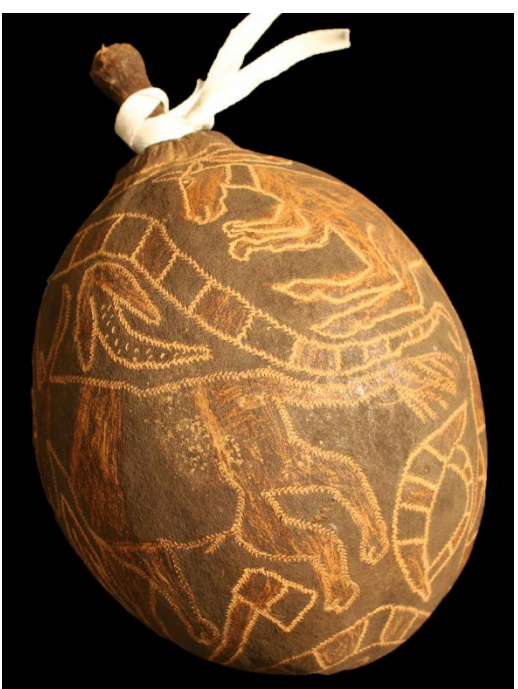
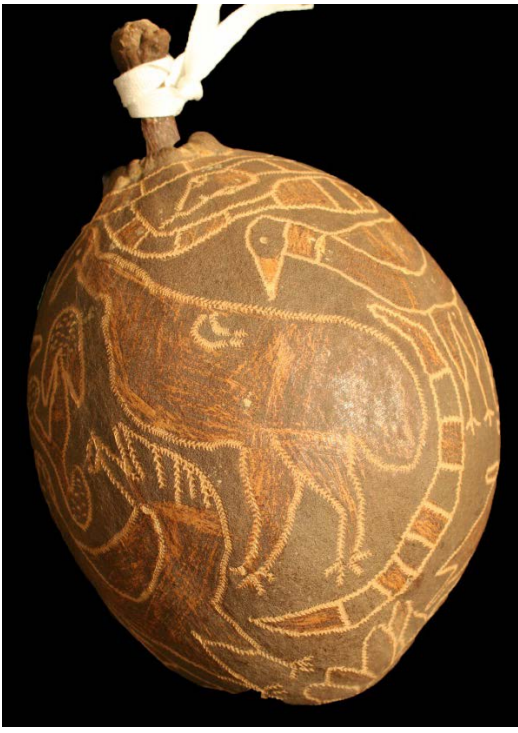
Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum 'A-AN29 Broome Dist.'







Distal end of boab nut



Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping



Detail of incising - pitting

Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Number of boab nuts in collection: 15

Number of all objects in collection: 72

Date: 1953-54

Where: Forrest River Mission, W.A.

Catalogue numbers:

1985.0066.0050

1985.0066.0051

1985.0066.0052

1985.0066.0053

1985.0066.0054

1985.0066.0055

1985.0066.0056

1985.0066.0057

1985.0066.0058

1985.0066.0059

1985.0066.0060

1985.0066.0061

1986.0066.0062

1986.0066.0063

1985.0066.0064

Collection Type: NHC

NMA description of the collection: none in catalogue

NMA Archive information:

File 86/136

NMA Gallery of Aboriginal Australia - Accession Number: 1985.66

NMA No.	AIA No.	Object	Locality/Remarks
50	A-AN1	Baobab Nut	Forrest River Mission W.A.
51	A-AN2	Baobab Nut	Forrest River Mission W.A.
52	A-AN3	Baobab Nut	Forrest River Mission W.A.
53	A-AN4	Baobab Nut	Forrest River Mission W.A.
54	A-AN5	Baobab Nut	Forrest River Mission W.A.
55	A-AN6	Baobab Nut	Forrest River Mission W.A.
56	A-AN7	Baobab Nut	Forrest River Mission W.A.
57	A-AN8	Baobab Nut	Forrest River Mission W.A.
58	A-AN9	Baobab Nut	Forrest River Mission W.A.
59	A-AN10	Baobab Nut	Forrest River Mission W.A.

60	A-AN24	Baobab Nut	Forrest River Mission W.A.
61	A-AN25	Baobab Nut	Forrest River Mission W.A.
62	A-AN26	Baobab Nut	Forrest River Mission W.A.
63	A-AN27	Baobab Nut	Forrest River Mission W.A.
64	A-AN28	Baobab Nut	Forrest River Mission W.A.

Other items in this collection includes 12 shell charms/ornaments, message stick, spearheads and shields, and samples of resin and sinew from Forrest River and Kalumburu.

Single sheet on details by David Kaus:

‘A little more information about Bruce S. Coaldrake. He worked at Forrest River Mission in 1953 (I do not know if he was there earlier) and left in 1954. While there he collected artefacts for himself and gave others away. He sent a letter dated 10 April 1954 to the ‘National Museum’ in Canberra offering his collection as a donation. He was soon leaving the Mission and wanted his collection to go to an appropriate home. The letter was received at the Australian War Memorial who passed it on [to] the Institute of Anatomy. The Institute wrote back on 30 April accepting the offer and the collection was received t hereon 9 July 1954, with four more objects arriving during September 1954. By June 1954 Coaldrake had left Forrest River and for a time mail was sent carer of the post office at Wyndham from where his brother forwarded it to him. From early July he was working for the Public Works Department out of Wyndham. About January 1962 he was working out of Carnarvon and in February 1962 he left the Department. For either all or part of this time he had a “roving commission” and apparently relieved Department staff in various towns. He left for the eastern states on 9 February 1962 and moved to Sydney. This information was extracted from correspondence between Coaldrake and the Institute. In one of his letters, Coaldrake refers to “many hundreds of feet of Kodachrome 16m.m. movie which I have exposed on phases of modern & ancient activities of the Indigents”. Unfortunately I cannot tell you where this footage is now.

Single photocopied sheet of handwritten notes – source unknown, page 7 only

Ornamental Baobab Nuts Joong-ari (The same name as the tree itself)

The uncoloured ones are done by bush natives; the rest by mission dwellers. The favoured tool of the former is the head of a shove spear, which is pushed over the surface with a wagging motion and so engraves the lines. Pocketknife or flattened wire are mainly used by the village boy. These nuts usually crack after a year or so, but may be glued tight again by a dexterous person.

[this photocopied sheet may be part of the ‘Letter to Curator, National Museum, dated 10 April 1954. On NMA file 1986/136’ mentioned by Sculthorpe (1990: 46), a copy of which had not been provided in total for this thesis]

Research Notes:

Government Gazette of Western Australia, 1953, Friday 7th August, No. 67, Perth

‘Native Administration Act, 1905-1947. Regulation 136. Department of Native Affairs, Perth, 4th August, 1953.

IT is hereby notified for general information that permits to Mission Workers for the year ending 30th June, 1954, have been issued as follows:-

Forrest River Mission

Mrs K.J. Coaldrake, Mr W.E. Jamison, Mrs W.E. Jamison, Mr Bruce Coaldrake, Mr T Thompson’ (Government Gazette 1953: 1485-86).

The University of Queensland holds two film reels by Bruce Coaldrake in their Film Archive:

Accession no 632/1 Forrest River Mission, 1952 Forrest River, 8 minute film reel including B.S. Coaldrake’s notes on the film. This is restricted access and gender specific. Clearance for viewing and copies through male elders of Wembria community at Oombulgurri. Topics: Christianity – missions, Christian ceremonies, housing, sport – athletics & running

Accession no LV2970.01 Forrest River Ritual, 1952 Forrest River, 8 minute videocassette. This is restricted access – ceremonial and gender specific. Clearance for viewing and copies through male elders of Wembria community at Oombulgurri. Topics: ceremonial boards, ceremonies – men.

Green, N. 1988, *The Oombulgurri Story: A Pictorial History of the People of Oombulgurri 1884-1988*, Focus Education Services, Cottesloe WA, 6, 97, 110, 120

1944, the Australian Arm Surveyors looked at Camera Pool and decided it was possible to get the water to the mission

1950 money for the water scheme became available 1950

1951 the Southern Cross motor arrived to pump the water and ‘Father Coaldrake’s brother, Bruce, arrived to assist with the project and supervised the laying and joining of the pipes’ (Green 1988: 97) and in May 1952 the first water was pumped.

1967 Mud brick hospital built by Bruce Coaldrake [Coaldrake]’ and others (Green 1988: 10).

Sculthorpe, G. 1990, ‘Designs on Carved Boab Nuts’, *COMA: Bulletin of the Conference of Museum Anthropologists*, Vol. 23, January, 37-47

‘3. A group of nuts from the Forrest River area collected from both “bush” and mission dwelling Aborigines in the 1950s provides an opportunity to examine if there are any fundamental differences in the motifs employed by the two groups. Of the fifteen nuts, the collector Coaldrake noted that the uncoloured ones are done by “bush” Aborigines

and the rest by mission dwellers (Coaldrake 1954). Of the eight nuts carved by “bush” Aborigines, seven have motifs which incorporate a pattern of a geometric nature. Of the seven carved by mission dwellers, only two included geometric patterns.

It would be misleading to assume from the Forrest River sample that only nuts carved by these Aborigines before little contact with Europeans featured only geometric patterns as some of the earliest nuts have patterns of a naturalistic form. This correlated with the information in the literature. Clearly then, both geometric and naturalistic designs were carved contemporaneously. One of the earliest nuts examined (MOV X85153) [Museum of Victoria] from the 1870s, only one features geometric designs. The exact provenance of these is unknown’ (Sculthorpe 1990: 43; see also Coaldrake 1954 in Sculthorpe 1990: 46).

1985.0066.0050

Collection: Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Date collected: 1953-4

Location collected: Forrest River, W.A.

Size: L 180mm x W 120mm x D 125mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with pattern of interlocking designs & regional flora. Pigmented/coloured.

[\[Previously A-AN1\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15461

Decade for chronology: 1950s

Genre: geometric, figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 3 vegetal motifs, 1 butterfly/moth, 4 unidentified but possibly ceremonial objects?, unidentified geometric motifs and designs

Incising: zigzag, pitting

Pigmented: 3

Colours: red, blue, and black unknown pigment

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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[Detail of incising – zigzag, pitting](#)

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Detail of pigment – red, blue, black

1985.0066.0051

Collection: Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Date collected: 1953-4

Location collected: Forrest River, W.A.

Size: L 230mm x W 115mm x D 100mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut with rudimentary incised & scraped patterning depicting images of regional fauna and hunting tools.

[\[Previously A-AN2\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15462

Decade for chronology: 1950s

Genre: geometric, figurative, 'animal-shaped' boab

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: echidna, 4 unidentified animals on the 'underside' of the echidna, various unidentified geometric motifs

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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[Echidna-shaped boab nut with head of echidna on the distal end](#)

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Detail of distal end

Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

1985.0066.0052

Collection: Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Date collected: 1953-4

Location collected: Forrest River, W.A.

Size: L 185mm x W 90mm x D 90mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut with rudimentary incised images of indigenous regional fauna together with a pattern of interlocking key designs.

[\[Previously A-AN3\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15463

Decade for chronology: 1950s

Genre: geometric, figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 turtle, 1 emu, 1 snake?, 1 boomerang?, 2 'star/sun' motifs, various geometric designs

Incising: zigzag

Pigmented: 1

Colours: black unknown pigment

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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[Detail of pigment and incising - zigzag](#)

1985.0066.0053

Collection: Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Date collected: 1953-4

Location collected: Forrest River, W.A.

Size: L 175mm x W 75mm x D 70mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut with rudimentary incised patterning of landscape & hunting tools. Pigmented/coloured. [\[Distal end is damaged\]](#)

[\[Previously A-AN4\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15464

Decade for chronology: 1950s

Genre: geometric, figurative

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style – flattened perspective

Major motifs: sun rising about hills and grasses with unidentified ‘cross and heart’ design surrounded with unidentified tools/weapons; large unidentified ‘cross and circle’ design surrounded with unidentified tools/weapons?

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping

Pigmented: 5

Colours: yellow, green, dark green, light blue, and purple unknown pigment

Borders: proximal end, vertical

Border description: proximal end has single line, vertical border has single zigzag lines

Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

Note: some fine line outlined motifs possibly incomplete

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[Detail of distal end](#)

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Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Detail of proximal end

Detail of pigment, and incising – zigzag, scraping

1985.0066.0054

Collection: Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Date collected: 1953-4

Location collected: Forrest River, W.A.

Size: L 220mm x W 120mm x D 110mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut with incised images of reptiles and birds incorporated into foliated design. Coloured. 'Joong Ari'. Forrest River. N.W.A. [\[cracked\]](#)

[\[Previously A-AN5\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15465

Decade for chronology: 1950s

Genre: figurative, geometric

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 butterfly/moth, 1 crocodile, 1 snake, 1 fish, 1 waterbird, 1 turtle, 1 arc, 1 'star-shape', 1 *wananga*, 1 ceremonial object, 3 ceremonial boards?, 1 small sun rising over hills design?, 4 floral motifs, 1 unidentified geometric design,

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping, pitting

Pigmented: 6

Colours: red, light blue, blue, orange, yellow, black

Borders: proximal end

Border description: 2 single zigzag lines with orange band and with zigzag design infilled with blue and orange dots attached and on proximal side yellow infill with blue dots next to 'petal' design around stalk in light blue

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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Detail of distal end on one side

Detail of distal end on one side

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Detail of proximal end

Detail of incising – zigzag, line, pitting

1985.0066.0055

Collection: Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Date collected: 1953-4

Location collected: Forrest River, W.A.

Size: L 200mm x W 85mm x D 85mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut with incised rudimentary patterning of animals, landscape and hunting & gathering tools. Painted/pigmented.

[\[Previously A-AN6\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15466

Decade for chronology: 1950s

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style – frontal and planar

Major motifs: 1 crocodile in landscape of cliffs and water with unidentified motif with 2 vegetal motifs and 3 weapons?

Incising: zigzag

Pigmented: 7

Colours: yellow, green, dark green, blue, dark blue, pink, and brown unknown pigment

Borders: proximal end

Border description: proximal end has painted double light blue lines with yellow painted infill

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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Detail of proximal end

Detail of incising – zigzag

Image not
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due to copyright
restrictions

Detail of pigment

1985.0066.0056

Collection: Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Date collected: 1953-4

Location collected: Forrest River, W.A.

Size: L 170mm x 110mm x 110mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut with incised patterns in a zig zag linear style depicting landscape motifs. Coloured/pigmented. [\[cracked\]](#)

[\[Previously A-AN7\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15467

Decade for chronology: 1950s

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style – frontal and planar

Major motifs: trees, termite hills/rock? with escarpments, river, mountain range and sky

Incising: zigzag

Pigmented: 6

Colours: green, brown, light blue, dark blue, red-brown, and black unknown pigment

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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Detail of distal end

Detail of proximal end

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Detail of pigment; and incising - zigzag

1985.0066.0057

Collection: Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Date collected: 1953-4

Location collected: Forrest River, W.A.

Size: L 135mm x Dia 70mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut, incised with rudimentary images of an emu in the landscape, together with symbological patterning across the rest of the surface.

Coloured/pigmented. [pigment flaking & cracked]

[Previously A-AN8]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15468

Decade for chronology: 1950s

Genre: figurative, geometric

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style - flattened perspective

Major motifs: emu and termite hills in grassy landscape with cloudy sky, 2

weapons/tools? and 2 crescents, unidentified incised geometric design which has been painted over

Incising: zigzag

Pigmented: 7

Colours: beige, pink, white, green, brown, light blue, and yellow unknown pigment

Borders: proximal end

Border description: proximal end has zigzag star-shape around stalk painted in pink with green edging

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum 'A-AN8'

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Detail of proximal end

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Detail of distal end

Detail of incising - zigzag

1985.0066.0058

Collection: Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Date collected: 1953-4

Location collected: Forrest River, W.A.

Size: L 230mm W 145mm x D 150mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut with incised & coloured patterns of interlocking key designs, together with flora and fauna motifs. [\[cracked\]](#)

[\[Previously A-AN9\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15469

Decade for chronology: 1950s

Genre: figurative, geometric

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 emu, 1 kangaroo, 1 turtle, 1 fish, 1 lizard, 1 crescent, 1 star-shape, various geometric designs

Incising: zigzag, scraped

Pigmented: 4

Colours: light blue, dark blue, black, and white unknown pigment

Borders: proximal and distal ends, vertical

Border description: proximal end has double zigzag star-shape painted black around stalk with white infill and black dots closest to stalk; distal end has single zigzag line with tip painted dark blue; one vertical border has diamond patterns of double zigzag lines with dark blue infill and black edging, one vertical border has single zigzag diamonds with light blue infill, and one vertical border with curved 'chain' design of double zigzag lines with scraped infill

Partitions: 3

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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[Detail of one vertical border](#)

[Detail of one vertical border](#)

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Detail of one vertical border

Detail of distal end

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Detail of proximal end

1985.0066.0059

Collection: Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Date collected: 1953-4

Location collected: Forrest River, W.A.

Size: L 195mm x Dia 152mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with rudimentary images of birds, plants and a crocodile. Pigmented/coloured. [\[cracked\]](#)

[\[Previously A-AN10\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15470

Decade for chronology: 1950s

Genre: figurative, geometric

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 crocodile, 1 bird, 1 vegetal motif, 4 crescents, various small unidentified geometric motifs, various unidentified motifs

Incising: zigzag, scraped

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum '1985.66.59' and 'A-AN10'

Note: NMA comment on pigmentation is incorrect - scraping and irregular natural colour of boab skin

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Detail of “pigmentation” which is actually scraping

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Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

1985.0066.0060

Collection: Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Date collected: 1953-4

Location collected: Forrest River Mission, W.A.

Size: L 200mm x W 130mm x D 130mm

Catalogue description: Large boab nut incised with naturalistic motifs of animals and an Ancestor figure. Coloured/pigmented. [damaged]

[Previously A-AN24]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15471

Decade for chronology: 1950s

Genre: figurative, geometric

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 2 human-like figures, 1 male figure, 1 crocodile (possible Ancestor figure due to limb positioning), 1 emu, various unidentified geometric motifs

Incising: zigzag, scraped

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: distal end

Border description: single zigzag line with single zigzag lines radiating to point

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

Notes: a number of fine lines which may be unintentional scratching after production.
NMA comment on pigmentation is incorrect - zigzag incising only

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[Detail of distal end](#)

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[Detail of incising - zigzag](#)

1985.0066.0061

Collection: Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Date collected: 1953-4

Location collected: Forrest River, W.A.

Size: L 190mm x W 90mm x D 90mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with intricate geometric patterning of mazes & interlocking key motifs across the surface. Pigmented.

[\[Previously A-AN25\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15472

Decade for chronology: 1950s

Genre: figurative, geometric

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 crocodile (possible Ancestor figure due to limb positioning), 1 unidentified geometric motif, various geometric designs and *Tingari* designs

Incising: zigzag

Pigmented: 1

Colours: black unknown pigment

Borders: proximal end

Border description: single zigzag ladder design

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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Detail of proximal border

Detail of pigmentation, and incising - zigzag

1985.0066.0062

Collection: Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Date collected: 1953-4

Location collected: Forrest River, W.A.

Size: L 215mm x Dia 82mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut with incised emu and two dog-like figures surrounded by complex and intricate layered patterning.

[\[Previously A-AN26\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15473

Decade for chronology: 1950s

Genre: figurative, geometric

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 bird (likely an emu), 2 animals (possibly one is a bullock), 1 unidentified figure/geometric design?, various unidentified geometric designs

Incising: zigzag

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal end

Border description: proximal end has single zigzag star-shaped line with single zigzag lines radiation to stalk and tip

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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[Detail of proximal end](#)

[Detail of incising - zigzag](#)

1985.0066.0063

Collection: Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Date collected: 1953-4

Location collected: Forrest River, W.A.

Size: L 160mm W 80mm x D 80mm

Catalogue description: Small boab nut incised in the zig zag linear style incorporating naturalistic motifs of a human male figure hunting with a dog, emus and trees together with a moon & a star. [cracked]

[Previously A-AN27]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15474

Decade for chronology: 1950s

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style – flattened perspective and scale

Major motifs: 1 man with hunting weapons and dingo/dog with 3 emus either behind or beside tree in rocky landscape, 1 star, 1 crescent (possibly moon)

Incising: zigzag, scaping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal end

Border description: single zigzag scalloped line

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum 'A-AN27'

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[Detail of proximal end](#)

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[Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping](#)

1985.0066.0064

Collection: Bruce Coaldrake Collection

Date collected: 1953-4

Location collected: Forrest River, W.A.

Size: L 205mm x W 130mm x D 140mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised in the zig zag linear style with naturalistic motifs of animals scattered across the surface together with an ancestral male figure.

[\[Previously A-AN28\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15475

Decade for chronology: 1950s

Genre: figurative, geometric

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 male figure, 1 humanoid figure, various geometric designs

Incising: zigzag

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum '1985.66.64'

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[Detail of incising - zigzag](#)

Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection

Number of boab nuts in collection: 6

Number of all objects in collection: 30

Date: c. 1927-28

Where: North Western Australia

Catalogue numbers:

1985.0073.0042

1985.0073.0043

1985.0073.0044

1985.0073.0045

1985.0073.0046

1985.0073.0047

Collection type: NHC

NMA description of collection: none in catalogue

NMA Archive information:

Photocopy of paragraph from The Bulletin, 15 September 1927, 22

‘A.P. Elkin, a Sydney University graduate who tacks “Rev.” to his name, specialises in the study of the Australian abo, He was offsider to Elliot-Smith when the well-known anthropologist led his expedition through the N.T. and Centralia. Elkin returned from Britain recently, and the National Council of Research promptly nailed him for investigation work among the natives of Norwestralia. He will spend a year in the Kimberley district examining social laws and customs of the resident Binghi.’

Research Notes:

Adolphus Peter Elkin (1891-1979) was born in New South Wales and was the rector of Wollombi in 1922-25 and taught part time in Sydney. He studied the Aboriginal people under Grafton Elliot Smith at University College in London gaining a PhD in 1927.

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, foundation profession of anthropology at Sydney University helped Elkin obtain a Rockefeller grant to undertake field work in the Kimberley. This field work was undertaken in 1927-28. In 1929 he became rector of Morpeth and continued to pursue his anthropological interests. Elkin was head of Sydney University Anthropology Department 1933-1956. Elkin wrote academic publications and a series of articles for the general press and spoke throughout NSW for justice and citizenship

for Aboriginal people. Elkin was president of number of anthropological societies and a founding councillor of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies and trustee of the Australian Museum. Elkin retired in 1956 but continued editing *Oceania* until his death (Wise 1996: 87-88).

‘Aboriginal Research: Dr Elkin Sets to Work: Twelve months in the Kimberleys [sic]’, *The Daily News*, Perth WA, Wednesday 21 December 1927, 7

‘Work in Western Australia.

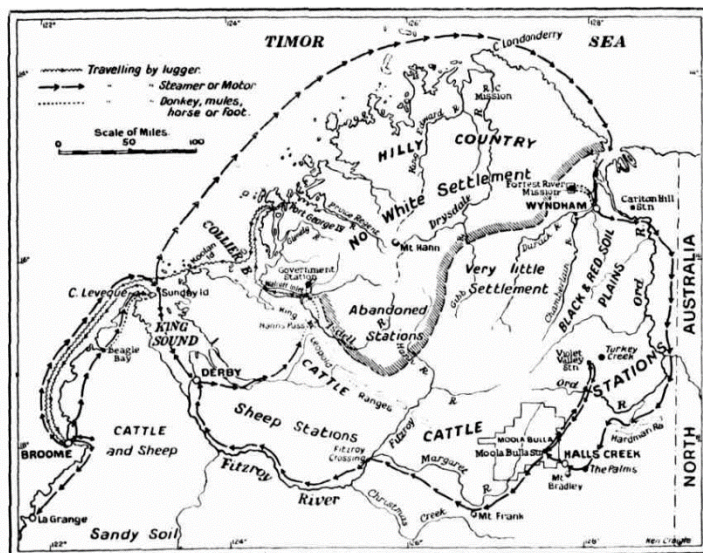
Furthermore, the Rockefeller Foundation has agreed to contribute up to 20,000 dollars (£4000) annually for five years to assist in research work, contingent upon the States’ and Commonwealth quotas ... being forthcoming. ... One of these fellowships has been awarded to Dr. A.P. Elkin, to enable him to take up research in the north of this State.... The State of Western Australia has agreed to pay its share of the £1,500 under the Rockefeller Foundation scheme, and Dr Elkin is already at work in the north of the State. Dr Elkin began here a few weeks ago, and it is his intention to spend twelve months in the north staying the aborigines and their customs. He will spend most of his time in the north west Kimberleys. At present Dr Elkin is on the Dampier Peninsula making a thorough survey of the natives.’

A.P. Elkin Personal Archives, University of Sydney Archives, P130 66-84, 1927-1928

De Berg, H. 1965, ‘A.P. Elkin interviewed by Hazel de Berg for the Hazel de Berg collection’, Sound Recording of interview with A.P. Elkin, Session 1, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-214364446/listen?searchTerm=elkin%20Kimberley>

Elkin, A. 1929, ‘Travelling the Kimberleys [sic], Western Australia’, *The Sunday Mail*, Wednesday, February 13 1929, 8-10

Note: Elkin’s boab nuts discussed in Chapters 3, 5 and 7. Elkin visited Beagle Bay Mission, Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Forrest River Mission, George IV Mission, La Grange, Moola Bulla Government Aboriginal Station at Halls Creek, King Leopold Ranges, Sunday Island Mission, Turkey Creek, and Wyndham.



TRAVELLING IN THE KIMBERLEYS.
This map shows the country through which Mr. Elkin travelled, and which he very interestingly describes in the accompanying article.

Map of Elkin's fieldtrip journey in 1928-9 (Elkin 1929:8)

Elkin, A. 1929, 'Northern Kimberley: An Inhospitable Coast', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney NSW, Tuesday 2 April 1929, 11

Gray, G. 1996, "'The natives are happy'": AP Elkin and AO Neville and Anthropological Research in Northwest Western Australia'. *Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 50/51, 106-117.

Elkin stayed at La Grange for a fortnight. He had a 'most profitable time with the aborigines...On the second day, the men took me to their sacred ground to show me their sacred objects and to sing me sacred songs...They also brought me various curios (Gray 1996: 112).

Gray, G. 1997, 'Mr Neville did all in [his] power to assist me': A.P. Elkin, A.O. Neville and Anthropological Research in Northwest Western Australia, 1927-1928', *Oceania*, Vol. 68, 27-46

'Obituary: Professor A.P. Elkin', *The Canberra Times*, Canberra ACT, Thursday 12 July 1979, 11

People, Power, Politics: the first generation of anthropologists at the University of Sydney [exhibition catalogue], Macleay Museum, 1 February- 20 July 2008

Wise, T. 1996, 'Elkin, Adolphus Peter (1891-1979)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 14, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/elkin-adolphus-peter-10109>, accessed 15 April 2015

1985.0073.0042

Collection: Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection

Date collected: c. 1927-8

Location collected: Northern Kimberley, W.A.

Size: L 200mm x W 130mm x D 140mm

Catalogue description: Incised boab nut with naturalistic motifs of totemic animals scattered across the surface.

[\[Previously A-AN14\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15934

Decade for chronology: 1920s

Genre: figurative, possibly also geometric

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 crocodile eating a fish, 1 native cat?, 1 lizard, 1 bird, 1 snake, 1 crocodile-like motif, 2 fish, 1 crab, 1 unidentified animal, 2 long oval motifs, 1 unidentified motif

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum 'A-AN14'

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Detail of distal end

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Detail of incising – zigzag, line, scraping

1985.0073.0043

Collection: Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection

Date collected: c. 1927-8

Location collected: Northern Kimberley, W.A.

Size: L 150mm x W 105mm x D 90mm

Catalogue description: Incised boab nut using the zig zag linear style to depict an abstract landscape motif [cracked]

[Previously A-AN15]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15935

Decade for chronology: 1920s

Genre: geometric, figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: circle and line motif 'Tingari', emu tracks, animal tracks, 2 unidentified geometric motifs

Incising: zigzag

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum 'A-AN15'

Note: *Tingari* – possibly from Eastern Kimberley with Western Desert languages and influences

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[Detail of proximal end](#)

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[Detail of distal end and incising - zigzag](#)

1985.0073.0044

Collection: Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection

Date collected: c. 1927-8

Location collected: Northern Kimberley, W.A. [Sunday Island]

Size: L 160mm x W 95mm x D 95mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with an abstracted westernised house form placed within a landscape.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15936

Decade for chronology: 1920s

Genre: figurative, realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): Western-style

Major motifs: 2 Western-style houses in front of 3 palm trees and other tree with fences, 2 Aboriginal men, 2 birds, 1 butterfly,

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends

Border description: proximal border has circles and dots within 2 single zigzag lines with large zigzag nearest the end; distal end has a 4 lobed design in two toned scraping with a single zigzag border

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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[Detail of distal end](#)

[Detail of incising – zigzag, line, scraping](#)

1985.0073.0045

Collection: Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection

Date collected: c. 1927-8

Location collected: Northern Kimberley, W.A.

Size: L 195mm x W 110mm x D 110mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with geometric naturalistic motifs of flora & stars, including an interlocking key design scratched around the circumference area.

[cracked]

[Previously A-AN17]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15938

Decade for chronology: 1920s

Genre: figurative, possibly also geometric

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: floral vegetal motifs attached to borders, geometric central band

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal

Border description: floral vegetal motifs attached to double lined and scraped straight border; distal border has floral vegetal motifs attached to double lined large zigzag border

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum 'A-AN17'

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[Detail of proximal end](#)

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[Detail of distal end and central geometric band](#)

1985.0073.0046

Collection: Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection

Date collected: c. 1927-8

Location collected: Northern Kimberley, W.A.

Size: L 200mm x W 90mm x D 85mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with simple geometric plant patterning.

[\[Previously A-AN18\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15938

Decade for chronology: 1920s

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 3 vegetal spray motifs

Incising: zigzag, line, pitting

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum 'A-AN18'

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Detail of incising – zigzag, line, pitting

1985.0073.0047

Collection: Professor Adolphus Elkin Collection

Date collected: c. 1927-8

Location collected: Northern Kimberley, W.A. [likely West Kimberley]

Size: L 130mm x W 85mm x D 75mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with the patterning of ancestor figures and animals contained within the landscape. [chipped]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 15939

Decade for chronology: 1920s

Genre: figurative, realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style - flattened perspective and scale

Major motifs: 2 Wandjina heads with snake, kangaroo and unidentified animal, escarpments with tree and 2 birds, 1 snake with Wandjina head

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends

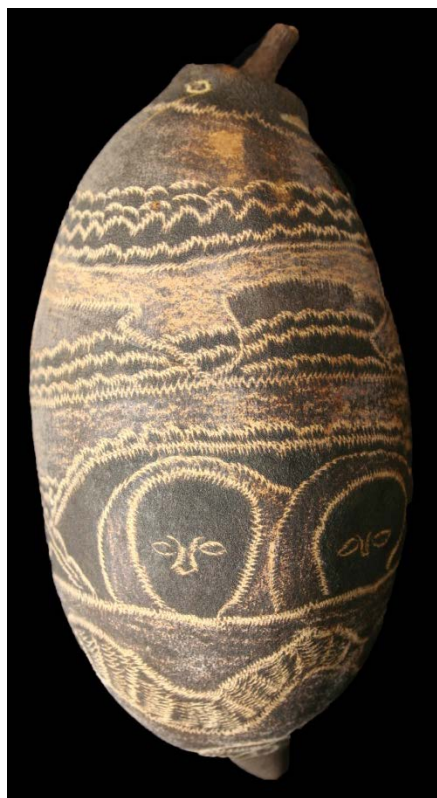
Border description: proximal end is single zigzag line with gouged ovals; distal end is a ladder design with diagonal zigzags

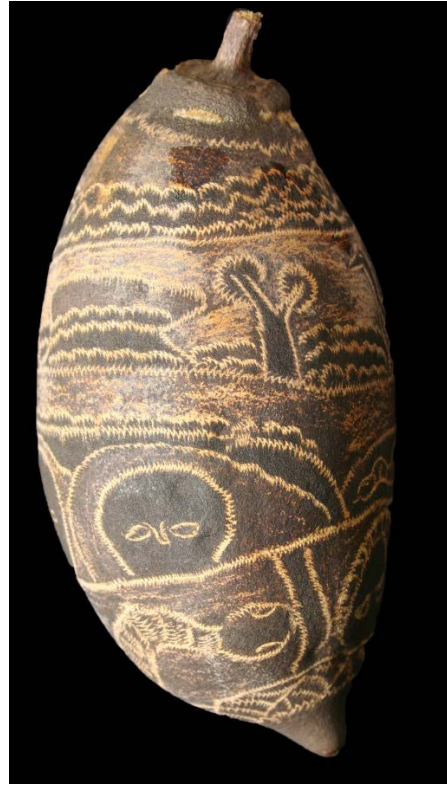
Partitions: 4

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:





Detail of proximal end and incising - zigzag, scraping



Detail of distal end

Dr Robert Wishart Collection

Number of boab nuts in collection: 3

Number of all objects in collection: 968 [mainly wooden and hafted stone objects]

Date: [1940s] and 1944

Where: North-west Western Australia

Catalogue numbers:

1985.0102.0423

1985.0102.0424

1985.0102.0425

Collection Type: NHC

NMA description of the collection: none in catalogue

NMA Archive information:

File 86/544 – Dr Robert Wishart Collection acquired by AIAS in 1964 then transferred to the NMA. The file includes:

2 photographs: ‘Robert Milne WISHART, Xmas, College Cres.’ (no date) & ‘Robert Milne WISHART and daughter Alison, Worrodyte Bridge, c. 1923’ (no date)

NMA Gallery of Aboriginal Australia Collection list – Dr R. Milne Wishart

Accession Number 1985.102

NMA no. 423 - AIA no. A-AN30 Decorated baobab nut North-western Australia

NMA no. 424 – AIA no. A-AN32 Decorated baobab nut North-western Australia

NMA no. 425 – AIA no. A-AN31 Decorated baobab nut Northern Australia [sic]

Newspaper article: Sayers, S. 1961, ‘Doctor has Aboriginal Relics Galore’, *The Age*, Wednesday, September 6, 1961, 17

Newspaper article: ‘Melbourne Flat Holds Work if Dunedin Doctor’s Hobby’, unknown source or date

Research Notes:

Dr Robert Milne Wishart (1894-1963) was a medical doctor who came to Melbourne in 1920 from Dunedin, New Zealand. Wishart was an amateur collector and a founding

member and a President of the Anthropological Society of Victoria. His collection was acquired in 1964 by the AIA.

Kaus (2006) advises:

RM (Bob) Wishart (died 1963) was a Melbourne-based medical doctor who was an amateur collector. He received 1985.102.424 in 1944 but his source is not given. There are no further details in his catalogue for the other nuts. No further details in his catalogue for the other nuts. In 1935 he received a number of Kimberley points from a Mr Adcock and Harry Balfour and other Kimberley items from fellow Melbourne-based collector S.R. (Stan) Mitchell. He also received others from Balfour in 1937 but most of his Kimberley material is unsourced. I cannot tell if Wishart went to the Kimberley himself. (Kaus pers. comm., 1 November 2006)

Kaus, D. 2007a, 'Pacific collections in the National Museum of Australia', *Hunting the collectors: Pacific collections in Australian museums, art galleries and archives*, S. Cochrane & M. Quanchi (eds.), Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 357-376

The AIAS collections comprise predominately Aboriginal artefacts, but include one or two small 'Pacific-only' collections. Similar to the AIA, some of the collections were assembled by amateurs and had Aboriginal and Pacific components. Of particular note were two Melbourne based collectors and friends. Stan Mitchell and Bob Wishart. In 1985, the AIAS transferred the collections it had acquired up to that point to the NMA. (Kaus 2007a: 371)

Dr Robert (Bob) Wishart (1895-1963) Collection, acquired by AIAS in 1964. This is predominantly a collection of Aboriginal material but included about 250 objects from PNG, Trobriand Islands, Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, Vanuatu and Fiji. Wishart was a New Zealand-born surgeon who lived in Melbourne from about 1920. He was a friend of SR Mitchell and, had similar interest that included anthropology, botany and ornithology. (Kaus 2007a: 377)

National Archives of Australia 1965, Folders of original descriptive lists relating to ethnological collections held by the Institute of Anatomy, A2907, 1 January 1965-31 December 1965. This file includes:

- 1) 'R. Wishart collection, 1961-64
Correspondence relating to Dr R Milne Wishart's ethnological collection of wooden and stone implements from Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea and the Pacific Islands and an article issued by the Australian News and Information Bureau about the collection.'
- 2) Wurms, H. 1963, Ethnological Collection of the late Dr R.M. Wishart, reporting correspondence on AIA letterhead dated 8 October 1963, 1-2, National Archives of Australia, Series no. A2907.

Dr Helen M. Wurms records in her recommendation to the AIA for the purchase of the full Wishart collection:

'The Wishart Collection consists of approximately 20,000 items and is divided into two sections, one consisting of wooden implements and hafted stone implements, and the other of stone implements.

The latter were collected mainly from Aboriginal camps sites throughout Victoria but there are also items from various other parts of Australia.

The wooden collection, containing many beautiful and rare items, consists of Aboriginal weapons, ornaments, carvings, etc. These are all genuine relics and not copied made for the tourist trade as is most of the material available to-day. Also included are some items from New Zealand, New Guinea and the Pacific Islands.

The whole collection was officially valued by the Museum of Victoria for £3.200/0/0. ... I have been advised that both the National Museum of Victoria and the Australian Museum, Sydney, are also interested in the purchase of the Wishart Collection...'

- 3) Carroll, L. 'Aboriginal Relics Mark Wanderings of the First Australians', News and Information Bureau, 1-7, E61/852

Carroll (1961) records that Wishart's interest in natural history and on weekends and holidays spared from a busy practice, Dr Wishart travelled the country districts of Victoria, looking for old camp sites or kitchen middens which marked the seasonal movements of parties of aborigines around their hunting grounds (Carroll 1961: 2).

- 4) Handwritten list of items (partial only) noting boab nuts are located in:
'I. Case (Study)' –1 baobab nut
'Case 10' – 1 baobab nut
- 5) Correspondence from J. McNally (Director) to Miss D. Barwick, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 5 June 1964, JMcN/GMK 1642-1964 regarding the National Museum of Victoria's interest in this collection:

'The part of the collection which is of most interest to the National Museum [of Victoria], is the quite extensive and well documented series of stone artifacts [sic] of Victorian origin. These are the most important and from the scientific aspect are of very great value. ... Wooden and stone implements [sic] and objects which comprise the other part of the collection are also valuable specimens, but are already well represented in the National Museum collections. If acquired, a portion could be used for loan or exchange purposes.'

Sayers, S. 1961, 'Doctor Has Aboriginal Relics Galore', *The Age*, Wednesday Magazine, September 6 1961, 17, NMA file 86/544. Wishart recalls in this newspaper article that:

About 1922 I began wandering about Victoria, looking for stone implements on former aboriginal camp sites...I also started collecting wooden items, buying them from secondhand shops, or sending donations to missions in the outback and hinting tactfully that I would be grateful for any weapons or such that they might care to let me have...My waiting room was decorated with wooden and stone implements and weapons, both aboriginal and from the Pacific Islands. Many choice specimens were given to me by patients and friends once they became aware of my hobby (Sayers 1961: 17).

1985.0102.0423

Collection: Dr Robert Wishart Collection

Date collected: [\[1940s\]](#)

Location collected: North-western Australia

Size: L 160mm x W 65mm x D 65mm

Catalogue description: North West Australian boab nut incised with geometric designs incorporating two reptilian shapes. Pigmented red.

[\[Previously A-AN30\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 18087

Decade for chronology: 1940s

Genre: geometric, figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: meanders, 3 circles, 2 crocodiles

Incising: line, pitting

Pigmented: 1

Colours: red unknown pigment

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum 'A-AN30' and '1691'

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Detail of incising – line, pitting; red pigment has been rubbed into incising

1985.0102.0424

Collection: Dr Robert Wishart Collection

Date collected: 1944

Location collected: North-western Australia

Size: L 195mm W 115mm x D 110mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with geometric patterning across the surface area.

[\[Previously A-AN32\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 18088

Decade for chronology: 1940s

Genre: geometric?

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: looping design, ladder design with blocks of scraping and dotting, dotting

Incising: zigzag, scraping, pitting

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends

Border description:

Partitions: 2 zigzag lines with scraped band

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum 'A-AN32' and '1542'

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Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping, pitting

1985.0102.0425

Collection: Dr Robert Wishart Collection

Date collected: [\[1940s\]](#)

Location collected: Northern Australia

Size: L 170mm x W 95mm x D 95mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised in the zig zag linear style depicting abstracted motifs of organic shapes.

[\[Previously A-AN31\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 18089

Decade for chronology: 1940s

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: large vegetal motif (possibly yam), smaller vegetal motifs

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum 'A-AN31' and '1790A'

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Detail of distal end

Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

Mrs H Wood Collection

Number of boab nuts in collection: 2

Number of all objects in collection: 7

Date: [1970s]

Where: Western Australia

Catalogue numbers:

1985.0168.0006

1985.0168.0007

Collection Type: NHC

NMA description of the collection: none in catalogue

NMA Archive information:

File 86/254 - Mrs H Wood Collection accessioned by the NMA in 1985 [and had probably been held in the AIA collections based on having an A-AN number]. The file includes:

NMA Gallery of Aboriginal Australia Collection list – Mrs H Wood

Accession Number 1985.168

NMA no. 6 - A-AN33 Decorated baobab nut Western Australia

NMA no. 7 - A-AN34 Decorated baobab nut Western Australia

Draft biography by David Kaus (NMA) for NSW catalogue (21 June 1994):

‘Mrs. Helen Wood (1907-1991)

A small collection of seven objects including a club from Taree and a boomerang possibly from the Manning River. Nothing could be found on the history of this collection.

Better known by her professional name, Helen Lempriere, Wood was an artist who, like most other women artists of her time, is only now beginning to earn due recognition. A retrospective of some of her work was held at the Wolloomooloo Gallery in October 1993. Some of her worked [sic] was inspired by various aspects of Aboriginal culture and the second part of her retrospective, held in July 1994, reflects this interest.

Wood was born into a wealthy Melbourne family on 12 December 1907. After her decision to choose art as a career, she joined the school that taught dark tonal painting. She has classes with Archibald Cameron (c1927-1930) and with Justus Jorgensen (1930-45), later joining the “bohemians” at Elthan, outside of Melbourne. From about 1940 she began to paint in an impressionist style, as well as continuing with tonal portraits. In 1945 she married Keith Wood and they moved to Sydney in 1946. Later

they lived overseas where she briefly studied under Fernand Leger and Fred Klein. From 1950 to 1958 they lived in Paris and it was here that her almost exclusive use of Aboriginal motifs in her paintings began. This was one way of affirming her nationality, as well as her individuality an [sic] an artist. In 1966 the Woods returned to live permanently in Sydney. She exhibited overseas as well as in Australia and her work is held in the Australian National Gallery, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Woolloomooloo Gallery, Queensland Art Gallery, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and museums in the USA and Israel and private collections in Australia and overseas.

(Kerr (1993) and Smith (1993).

First draft (21 June 1994) by David Kaus for NSW catalogue'

Biographic extracts for Lempriere, Helen from:

Germaine, M. 1984, *Artists and Galleries of Australia*, Boolarong Publications, Brisbane, 309

Germaine, M. 191, *A dictionary of women artists of Australia*, Craftsman House, Tortola, 262

McCulloch, A. 1984, *Encyclopedia of Australian art*, Vol. 2, Hutchinson, Hawthorn, 690

Smith, R. 1993, *Concise Dictionary of Australian Artists*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 151

Catalogue: Helen Lempriere 97-1991, Retrospective Exhibition Part 1: Paintings from 1930s-50s, 6th-24th October 1993, Woolloomooloo Gallery

Research Notes:

Helen Lempriere was a well biographied Australian artist as shown above. How she as Mrs H Wood collected is not documented however the collection contains 2 boomerangs (Central Queensland & ?Manning River, NSW), a club (Taree, Manning River, NSW), 2 spearthrowers (WA) 2 boab nuts (WA).

The State Library of New South Wales holds texts and objects from her and her husband's life – textual records, graphic material, moving images, and sound recordings.

The biographic note attached to this SLNSW file state:

'Melbourne, daughter of Charles Algernon Lempriere, grazier, and his wife, Dora Elizabeth Octavia, nee Mitchell. She was a niece of Dame Nellie Melba and a great-granddaughter of colonial Tasmanian portrait painter, Thomas James Lempriere. She studied art under Archibald Colquhoun and Justus Jorgensen. In 1945, in Melbourne, she married radio producer, Keith Augustine Wood (1912-1995), the son of Henry William Wood, miner, and his wife Nellie, nee Moran. A

year later the couple moved to Sydney and in 1947 they began building their residence, 'Towri', at Hunters Hill.

Helen and Keith lived in Paris, 1950-1958, where she studied under Ferdinand Leger and the Dutch artist, Fred Klein, and he produced and marketed educational radio programs for UNESCO. Helen's reputation as a painter flourished in Europe and England, where she lived from 1958-1965, after a number of solo exhibitions which featured Australian Aboriginal themes. She also exhibited at the Chase Gallery in New York, 1958 and 1960.

In 1966 Helen and Keith returned to Sydney and lived at Bayview. In the late 1960s they formed Lemwood Productions Pty Limited to produce and distribute documentary and education films. In 1970 Keith produced, and Helen was art director of, the film 'Rajarata – Land of Kings', about the lost cities of North Ceylon. **Another film following in 1971-1972, being 'Centralia', about the area of central Australia embracing Alice Springs, Glen Helen Gorge, Hermansburgh [sic], Ayres Rock, the Olgas and adjacent regions.** In 1993-1994 Woolloomooloo Gallery held a two-part retrospective exhibition on Helen Lempriere's work.'

Series 04 Helen Lempriere and Keith Wood papers regarding and records of Lemwood Productions Pty Limited, ca. 1940-1974, 1990

Note: 'Centralia/Distribution', 1971-1974, 1990, being red clip folder of papers mainly regarding distribution and sale of the documentary film 'Centralia'.

It is likely that the two decorated boab nuts came from this expedition into central Australia in 1971-1972.

1985.0168.0006

Collection: Mrs H Wood Collection

Date collected: [1970s]

Location collected: Western Australia

Size: L 160mm x W 105mm x D 195[105]mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut, surface incised in the zig zag linear style with avian and land animal imagery in a circular longitudinal design across the surface. Broken & fragile!!!! [very faded]

[Previously A-AN33]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 19450

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: geometric, figurative, ?geometric

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 2 emus, 2 kangaroos, 2 unidentified motifs

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal end

Border description: single zigzag line

Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical borders with ?geometric designs

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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[Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping](#)

1985.0168.0007

Collection: Mrs H Wood Collection

Date collected: [1970s]

Location collected: Western Australia

Size: L 175mm x W 120mm x D 120mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised in the zig zag linear style depicting naturalistic motifs of animals and plants. Pigmented. Faded & cracked.

[Previously A-AN34]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 19451

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: geometric, figurative, geometric

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 2 emus, 1 turtle, 2 snakes, 1 crescent, 3 unidentified motifs

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends

Border description: zigzag ladder with diagonal lines with alternate scraping

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

Detail of distal border

A.R. Eadie Collection

Number of boab nuts in collection: 1

Number of all objects in collection: 4

Date: [unknown]

Where: Western Australia

Catalogue numbers:

1985.0291.0041

Collection Type: NHC

NMA description of the collection: none in catalogue

NMA Archive information: none

Research Notes:

A.R. Eadie's collection of 2 spear-throwers, 1 tap-stick and 1 boab nut was acquired in 1977 by the AIA. There is a relationship of some type to D.F. Eadie who is named as associated in the NMA online catalogue.

Sculthorpe, G. 1990, 'Designs on Carved Boab Nuts', *COMA: Bulletin of the Conference of Museum Anthropologists*, Vol. 23, January 37-47

Note: 1985.02091.0041 is designated by Sculthorpe as A-AN37 donated in 1977

1985.0291.0041

Collection: A.R. Eadie Collection

Date collected: [unknown]

Location collected: [Northern Western Australia]

Size: L 230mm x W 110mm x D 100mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with crudely naturalistic images of humans and animals using a rudimentary zig zag linear style. [Cracked]

[Previously A-AN37]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 21552

Decade for chronology: unknown

Genre: geometric, figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 3 'European-style clothed' male persons (2 with 'hats'), 2 birds, 2 unidentified animals (one possibly a horse)

Incising: zigzag

Pigmented: 2

Colours: blue, red (possibly also white which has flaked)

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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[Detail of larges male figure – note no mouth](#)

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due to copyright
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[Detail of incising – zigzag; and pigment application](#)

Gabriella Roy Collection

Number of boab nuts in collection: 1

Number of all objects in collection: 34

Date: [c. 1950s]

Where: Western Australia

Catalogue numbers:

1986.0025.0109

Collection Type: NHC

NMA description of the collection: none in catalogue

NMA Archive information:

File 85/436 C1985.025:

Partial list of 25 items including '1 boab nut W.A.' the other items are weapons and tools, and wooden objects from Victoria, Cape York, New South Wales, North-east Arnhem Land, Western Australia, Bathurst/Melville Islands and Queensland.

Photocopied statement: 'Ex-Father Worm Collection. Collected in 50's & 60's [sic], from older collections. Some with area documentation etc. Artifacts [sic] from North West Australia (mostly)'.

[Father Worms was appointed Pallottine parish priest in Broome in 1931, and worked in the Kimberley intermittently until 1957. He died in 1963.](#)

Photocopy of Chapter Twenty-five 1930-1939 from Mary Durack's book *The Rock and the Sand* (Durack 1969: 235-246)

List of Worm's publications from unknown source, pages 178-182.

Research Notes:

[Gabriella Roy has her own collection and is a dealer, accredited government valuer since 1986. The following detail comes from her Aboriginal & Pacific Art Gallery website:](#)

[Aboriginal & Pacific Art Gallery represents contemporary Aboriginal art from around Australia. Working with community-owned and -governed art centres, the gallery shows monthly exhibitions of new works including painting, sculpture and works on paper,](#)

from established and emerging artists. Aboriginal & Pacific Art was established by Gabriella Roy in 1996 at the Sydney Dymock's Building. She has worked with both Aboriginal and Pacific arts and artefacts for the past four decades and brings an acute sense of history and aesthetics to the gallery. At the Dymock's space, Aboriginal & Pacific Art presented many ground breaking shows, including solo exhibitions of the late Tiwi artists Kitty Kantilla (Kutuwulumi Purawarrumpatu) and Freda Warlapinni, and the late Fitzroy Crossing artist Janangoo Butcher Cherel. The gallery is also a long-standing representative of Tiwi artist Timothy Cook and South Australian Ngarrindjeri weaver Yvonne Koolmatrie.

Gabriella works together with the art advisors from community art centres to best represent the artists and their works. In 2005, the gallery moved to its current location in Waterloo's 2 Danks Street, attracting a new and diverse audience. Here, Aboriginal & Pacific Art has presented the yearly Sydney exhibitions of various community art centres such as Tjala Arts, Tjungu Palya, and Warakurna Artists, based in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, SA, and Ngaanyatjarra (NY) Lands, WA, as well as solo exhibitions of Tiwi artists Jean Baptiste Apuatimi and Timothy Cook.

Aboriginal & Pacific Art is a member of the Australia Commercial Galleries Association (ACGA) and Gabriella is an accredited government valuer of Australian and Indigenous Oceanic art and artefacts (since 1986). The gallery also represents works in the secondary market. The 'Pacific' of its title refers to Gabriella's extensive knowledge and secondary market representation of Oceanic arts.' <http://www.aboriginalpacificart.com.au/about-us>

Kaus notes Roy 'was (could still be) a dealer in Sydney so this was a collection she sold on an unknown client's behalf' (Kaus, pers. comm., 23 August 2006).

Akerman, K. 2015, *Wanjina. Notes on Some Iconic Ancestral Beings of the Northern Kimberley*, www.kimberleyfoundation.org.au/.../a-wanjina-paper-20-march-edit-2015

'In 1953-54 the Catholic priest and scholar, Ernest A. Worms, inspired by the correspondence of Father Nicholas Emo, conducted fieldtrips to the north and central Kimberley. While his intent was to gather information on non-Wanjina art, Worms did introduce the results of this work with a description of the Wanjina-Ungur paintings (Worms 1955: 547-552)' (Akerman 2015: 30)

Newstead, A. 2014, *The dealer is the devil: an insider's history of the Aboriginal art trade*, Brandl & Schlesinger, Blackheath NSW

Newstead notes that Roy worked for 'The Company', the Aboriginal Arts and Craft Pty. Ltd. established by the Federal Office of Aboriginal Affairs in 1971 (Newstead 2014: 159; see also 181, 197, 295, 414, 434 & 496).

The Company operated a wholesale warehouse in Harrington Street, Sydney, and Peter Brokensha operated a large retail outlet in the Argyle Art Centre nearby in Sydney's Rocks district. Anthony 'Ace' Bourke and Gabriella Roy both began working with Aboriginal artists in this fledgling commercial environment' (Newstead 2014: 181).

'Roy opened her Aboriginal and Pacific Art Gallery, first near Central railway station in Sydney in partnership with Vivien Anderson, before striking out on her own in the Sydney Dymocks Building, later relocating to the Danks Street complex in Waterloo' (Newstead 2014: 295).

Carr, C. 2010, What is a Rover Thomas painting?, PhD thesis, University of Wollongong

See Plate 3.7 and Plate3.9 Ulu & sorcery (Carr 2010: 37-38)

Nicholls, C. 2014, 'Dreamings' and place – Aboriginal monsters and their meanings', *The Conversation*, <http://theconversation.com/dreamings-and-place-aboriginal-monsters-and-their-meanings-25606>

1986.0025.0109

Collection: Gabriella Roy Collection

Date collected: [c. 1950s]

Location collected: Western Australia

Size: L 200mm x W 110mm x D 120mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with naturalistic representations of animal, reptile & plant motifs. Cracked & fragile.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 27330

Decade for chronology: 1950s

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 humanoid figure, 2 unidentified large animals, 2 kangaroos, 1 turtle, 4 birds, 1 large vegetal motif on distal end

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends

Border description: ladder design with scraped sections on both ends, distal end has additional vegetal motifs attached

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum 1986.25.109 and A231

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Detail of distal end

Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

Mr Herbert Keys Collection

Number of boab nuts in collection: 2

Number of all objects in collection: 80 [mainly stone objects]

Date: [unknown but likely collected c. 1960s-1970s]

Where: Derby & Broome, Western Australia

Catalogue numbers:

1987.0044.0047

1987.0044.0048

Collection Type: NHC

NMA description of the collection: none in catalogue. Items from this collection were donated in 1961 and 1987.

NMA Archive information:

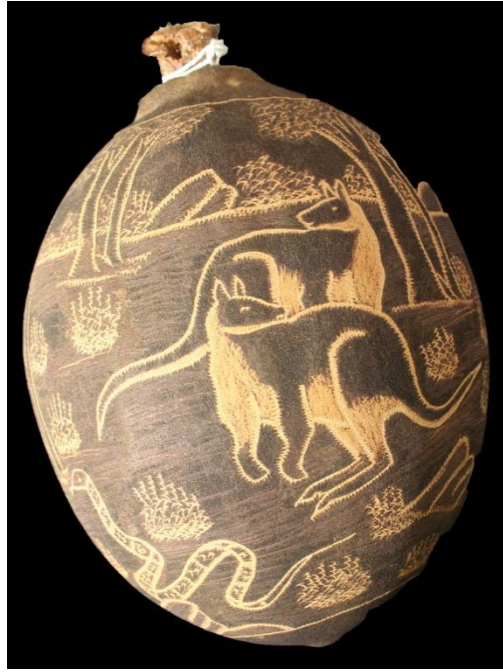
Partial list of 6 objects – 2 boab nuts from Derby and Broome (number 61 & 62), 1 pearl shell from Derby; and 1 bullroarer, and 2 *tjurunga* from MacDonell Downs, Central Australia.

Research Notes:

1987.0044.0047 known to be from Derby is stylistically similar to a boab nut in the Lang Private Collection which was collected in the late 1970s by Greg Wilding from the Derby area. This boab nut is signed by Noel Collier, and depicts a Western-style landscape of a man spearing an emu. The straight line 'shading' of the ground is distinctive, as is the shadowing of the rocky outcrops and animals (as below).



Noel Collier
c. 1970s
Lang Private Collection



NMA 1987.0044.0047

1987.0044.0047

Collection: Mr Herbert Keys Collection

Date collected: [unknown]

Location collected: Derby

Size: L 181mm x W 150mm x D 150mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised in the zig zag linear style with realistic motifs of flora, fauna & human figures in the landscape.

[Previously '62']

Internal Record Number (IRN): 35514

Decade for chronology: unknown

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): Western-style

Major motifs: 2 Aboriginal men with a 'dog' sitting next to a campfire with 2 emus, 2 kangaroos, a bird and a snake in a treed landscape with rocky outcrops

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends

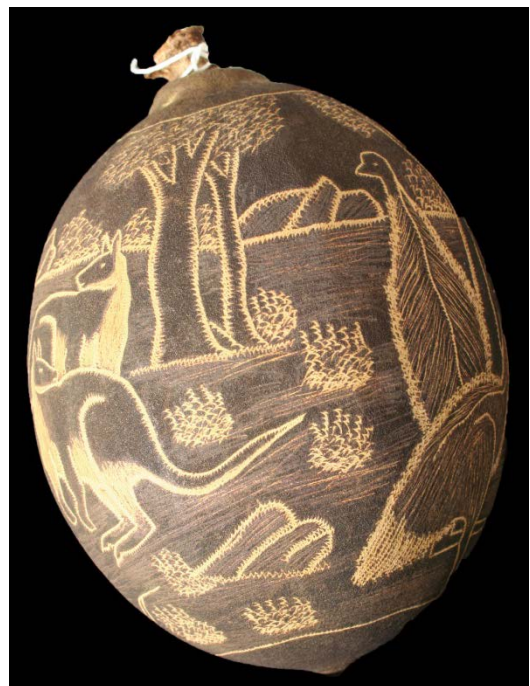
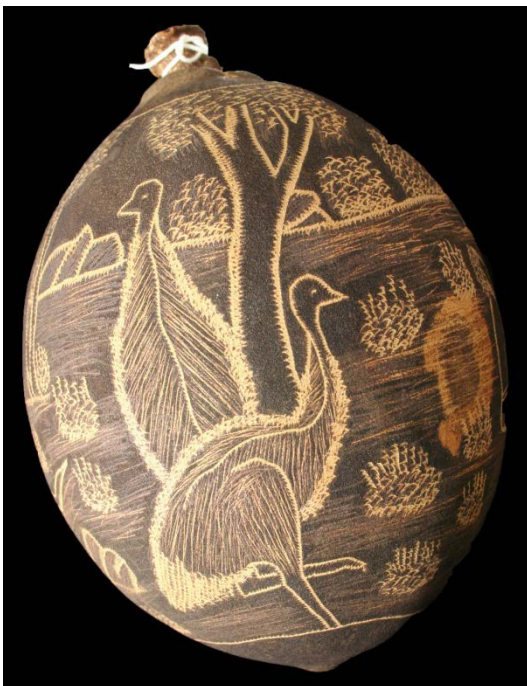
Border description: single zigzag line

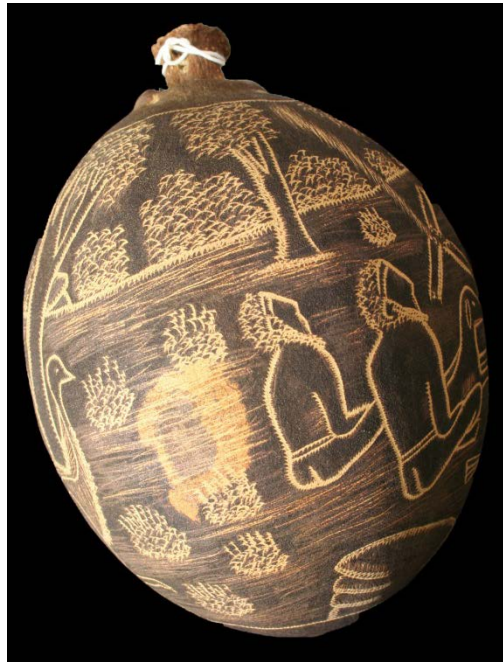
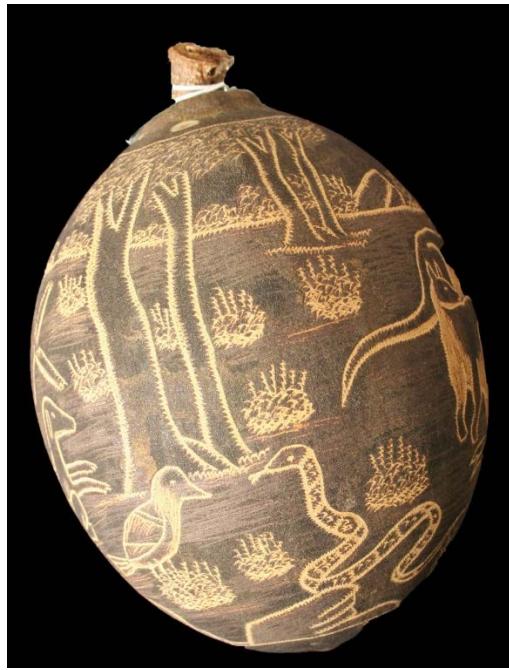
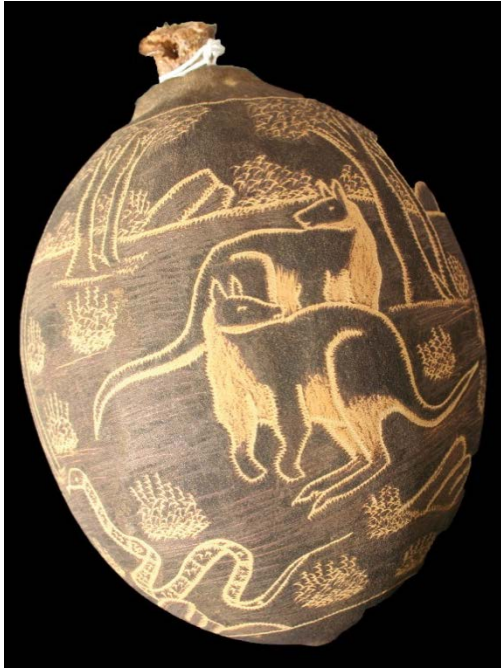
Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:





Detail of incising – zigzag, line, scraping

1987.0044.0048

Collection: Mr Herbert Keys Collection

Date collected: [unknown]

Location collected: Broome

Size: L 200mm x W 115mm x D 105mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with naturalistic motifs of kangaroos in the landscape.

Previously '61'

Internal Record Number (IRN): 35515

Decade for chronology: unknown

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style – flattened perspective and scale

Major motifs: 2 kangaroos in flattened perspective landscape of hills and 'trees'

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends

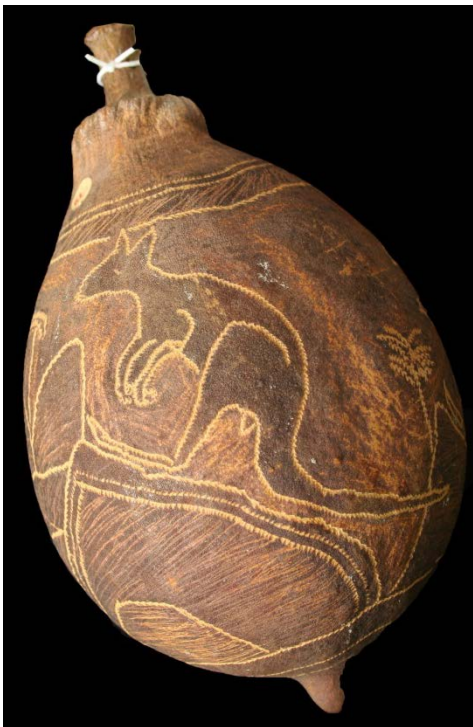
Border description: proximal and distal ends have double zigzag lines attached to a scraped zigzag band

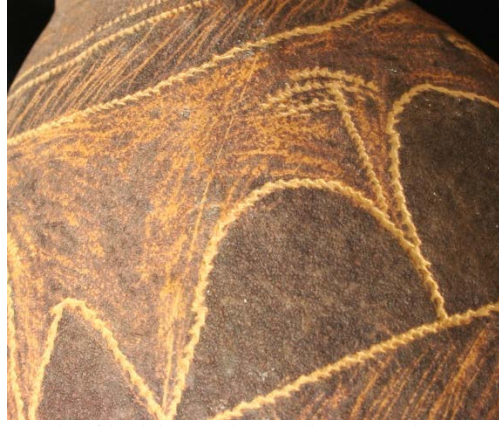
Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum sticker '61'





Detail of incising – zigzag, line, scraping

Edith Bowden Collection

Number of boab nuts in collection: 10

Number of all objects in collection: 227

Date: [c. 1970s]

Where: Kimberley, Western Australia & Derby, W.A.

Catalogue numbers:

1987.0050.0312
1987.0050.0313
1987.0050.0314
1987.0050.0315
1987.0050.0316
1987.0050.0317
1987.0050.0318
1987.0050.0319
1987.0050.0320
1987.0050.0321

Collection Type: NHC

NMA description of the collection: none in catalogue

NMA Archive information:

Partial list of objects (page 9 object nos. 309-347) including 10 boab nuts and 2 boards from the Kimberley, W.A., wall hangings, sculpture, rug, feather shoes from Ernabella, S.A.; and bullroarers and ceremonial items from Arnhem Land, N.T.

Object No	Ident.	Locality/Remarks
312	59	Kimberleys, W.A. [sic]
313	60	Kimberleys, W.A
314	61	Kimberleys, W.A
315	62	Kimberleys, W.A
316	63	Kimberleys, W.A
317	64	Kimberleys, W.A
318	65	Kimberleys, W.A
319	66	Kimberleys, W.A
320	67	Kimberleys, W.A
321	67a	Kimberleys, W.A

Kaus advises Bowden 'was part of the Presbyterian Church in Melbourne and as jointly responsible in setting up an early outlet for Aboriginal art and craft in that city' (Kaus, pers. comm., 1 November 2006).

Research Notes:

During the 1980s Bowden was managing a shop called Aboriginal Handicrafts, located in Collins Street, Melbourne. The shop was run by the Aborigines Auxiliary of the Uniting Church of Australia. It was here Bowden became involved with Ernabella craft sales and Miss Winifred Hilliard. Most of her collection was acquired by the NMA in 1987. This includes the Bark painting depicting male and female Wandjina (1987.0050.0270) by Alan Mungulu (1925-1978) (Fig. 3.46b). A number of bark paintings were presented to the National Gallery of Victoria in 1987 by Dr Ross Bowden

Five of the boab nuts have a 'Museum of Australia' paper tag attached.

'Ernabella Collection: A living document', NMA Friends, June 2007

http://www.nma.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/3026/FriendsJun07-Ernabella-collection-living-document.pdf

'The National Historical Collection of material related to Ernabella is highly significant. Chronologically, it begins with a collection donated by Enid Bowden that included a small number from Ernabella and other Pitjantjara/Yankunytjara communities.'

Dexter, N. 1980, 'Batik is part of the Dream', *The Age*, May 13, 1980, 20

'Mrs Enid Bowden, recently returned after more than 10 years as manager of the shop [Aboriginal Handicrafts], said some designs appeared almost to be maps of the territory [Kimberley] ... "I say this when I was flying over in a little plane. I could see those designs coming alive in front of my eyes." She said' (Dexter: 1980: 20).

Akerman, K. 2003, 'Jack Wherra: Quiet Storyteller and Carver of Boab Nuts', *The John McCaffrey Collection of Kimberley Art* (Catalogue), Sotheby's International July Sales July 28th 2003, Sotheby's Australia, Armadale, Vic, 70-71

Note: Includes a Jack Wherra boab nut. Other Jack Wherra nut in the NMA collection is 1982.0092.0002 Mr and Mrs Wayne Masters Collection [1966-71].

Jebb, M.A. 2006, 'Jack Wherra's Boab Nut Carving: A Cross-cultural History', *Early Days: Journal of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 12, Is. 6, 697-715

1987.0050.0312

Collection: Enid Bowden Collection

Date collected: [c. 1970s]

Location collected: Kimberley, Western Australia

Size: L 225mm x W 105mm x D 105mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with a naturalistic design of the landscape containing animals and hunting tools.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 36379

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: figurative, realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style - lateral elements and scale

Major motifs: boab tree in flattened grassy landscape with 'hills' in lateral elevation, 3 boomerangs, 2 emus, 3 baskets?, 7 shields/boards, 4 spears, 1 spearthrower, 1 palm? tree

Incising: zigzag, scraping, pitting

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends

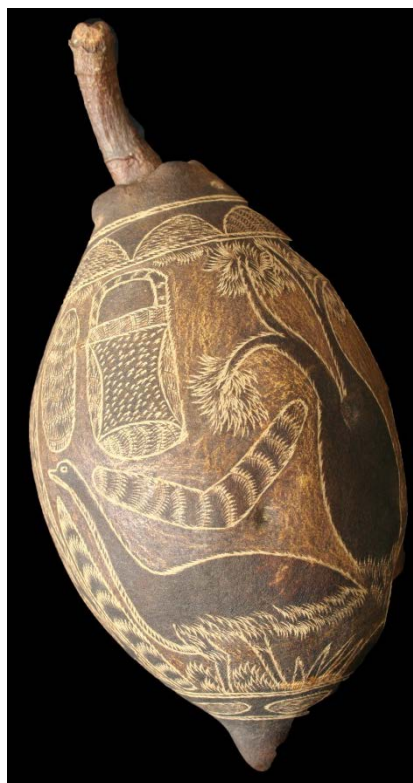
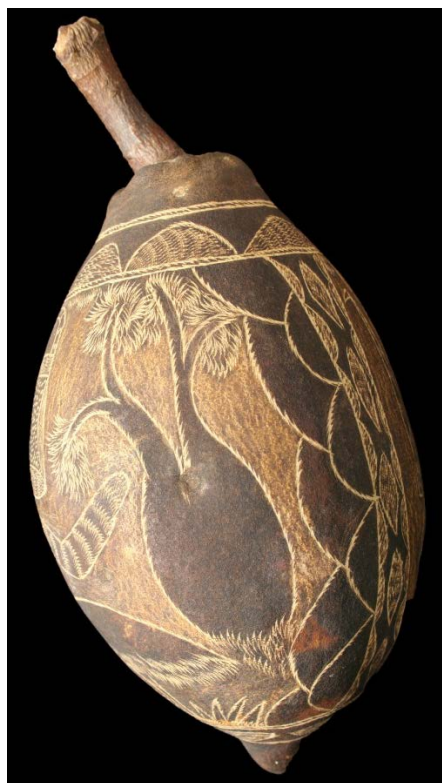
Border description: proximal end has a band of half circles with zigzag infill with 2 single zigzag lines on each edge; distal end has ovals with zigzag infill with 2 single zigzag lines on each edge

Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:





Detail of vertical partition



Detail of proximal border



Detail of distal border



Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping, pitting

1987.0050.0313

Collection: Enid Bowden Collection

Date collected: [c. 1970s]

Location collected: Kimberley, Western Australia

Size: L 195mm x W 95mm x D 90mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with the realistic depiction of human figures in the landscape together with an Ancestor figure and several images of hunting tools.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 36380

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: figurative, realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): Western-style

Major motifs: Wandjina; Aboriginal man and woman sitting next to a fire in a treed landscape with an escarpment; 2 boards?, 2 pears, 1 spearthrower, 1 shield

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends, vertical

Border description: proximal and distal ends have a band with single zigzag line either side and radiating zigzag lines to either stalk or point; zigzag ladder design

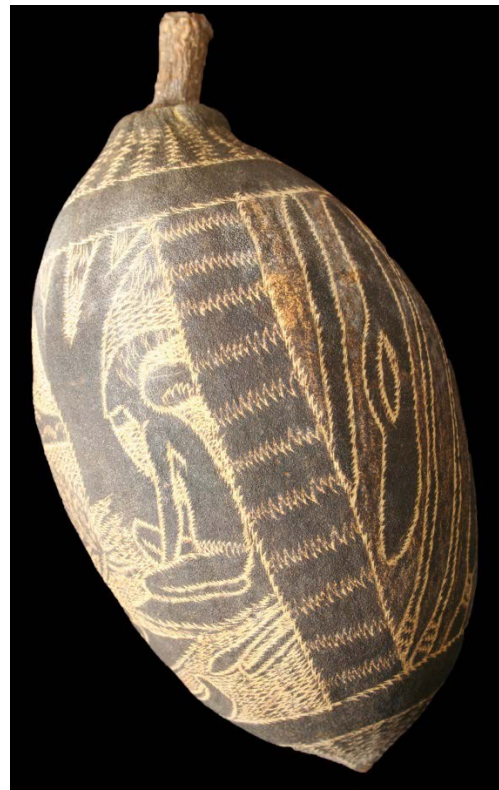
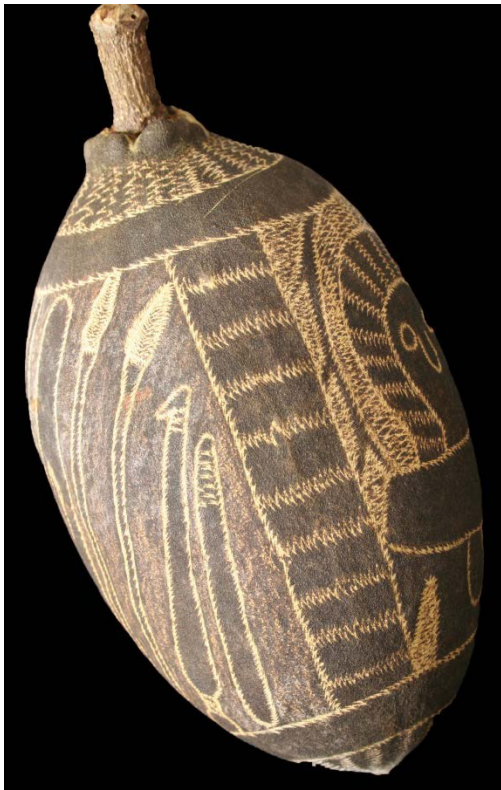
Partitions: 3

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:





Detail of incising – zigzag



Detail of proximal border

1987.0050.0314

Collection: Enid Bowden Collection

Date collected: [c. 1970s]

Location collected: Kimberley, Western Australia

Size: L 160mm x W 85mm x D 80mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with zig zag linear designs of the landscape [?], animals, artefacts [?] and an Ancestor figure.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 36381

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: figurative, possibly geometric

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 crocodile, 1 lizard, 1 scorpion?, 2 snakes, 1 unidentified geometric? motif

Incising: zigzag, scaping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends

Border description: 2 single zigzag lines with single zigzag lines to either stalk or point

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:





Detail of unidentified geometric motif



Detail of proximal border



Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

1987.0050.0315

Collection: Enid Bowden Collection

Date collected: [c. 1970s]

[Artist: Jack Wherra]

Location collected: Derby, W.A.

Size: L 205mm x W 100mm x D 100mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with naturalistic motifs depicting a particular hunting scene, together with an Ancestor figure and a range of animals moving through the landscape. The words: "DERBY W.A." are inscribed on the lower bottom edge of the nut. [cracked]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 36382

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): Western-style

Major motifs: 2 Aboriginal men hunting with hills in background; 3 Wandjina with sun? and moon?; 2 emus with termite mound and escarpment; Aboriginal man and women in treed landscape; 2 kangaroos under hanging branches; Derby prison tree with 2 boab trees in background

Incising: zigzag, scaping

Pigmented: 1

Colour: black unknown pigment

Borders: proximal and distal ends; vertical and horizontal borders

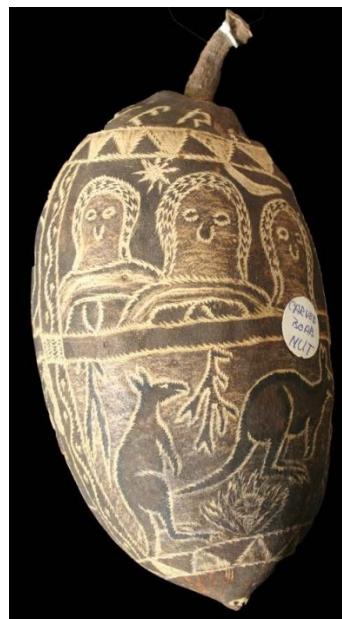
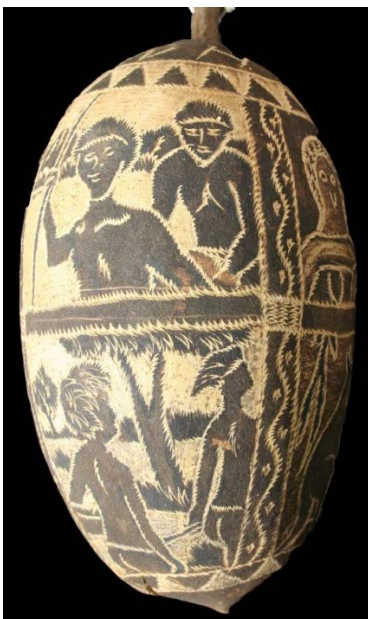
Border description: 2 single zigzag lines infilled with alternating scaped and un-incised triangles; vertical borders have 2 single zigzag lines with s-curving line with 'dots' within curves; horizontal borders have 2 single zigzag lines with square junction between vertical horizontal borders infilled with zigzags

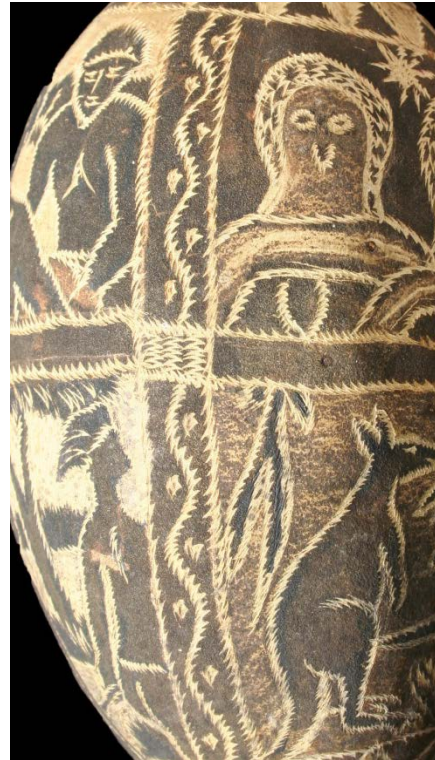
Partitions: 6

Partition type: vertical and horizontal cartoon-style

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by artist 'J Whera' [sic] & 'Derby W.A.', by museum – sticker 'carved boab nut'





Detail of vertical and horizontal borders



Detail of proximal border and signature



Detail of black pigment used as shading



Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

1987.0050.0316

Collection: Enid Bowden Collection

Date collected: [c. 1970s]

Location collected: Kimberley, Western Australia

Size: L 200mm x W 90mm x D 90mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with naturalistic motifs of two large reptiles in a zig zag linear style.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 36383

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 2 snakes

Incising: zigzag, scaping, pitting

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends; vertical borders

Border description: proximal end has 6 single zigzag lines that merge into vertical border; distal end has 8 uneven single zigzag lines that merge into vertical border; vertical border has 3 single zigzag lines on either side of a band infilled with 2 large ellipse shapes with scraped section in between

Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:





Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping, pitting



Detail of vertical border



Detail of proximal end

1987.0050.0317

Collection: Enid Bowden Collection

Date collected: [c. 1970s]

Location collected: Kimberley, Western Australia

Size: L 230mm x W 100mm x D 95mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with realistic motifs of animals and reptiles in the landscape as well as geometric designs along the sides.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 36384

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style - scale

Major motifs: 3 birds and 1 kangaroo; 1 kangaroo and 2 birds in hilled landscape with tree and termite mound; 2 snakes, 1 birds, 2 kangaroos, 1 lizard and 2 boomerangs?; 1 board?, 1 palm ?tree

Incising: zigzag, line, scaping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends; vertical and horizontal

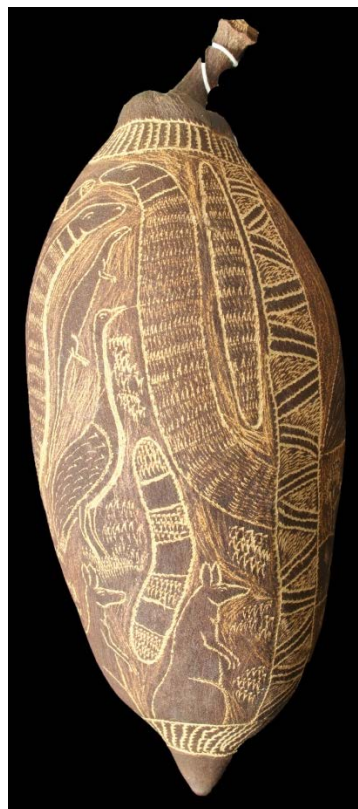
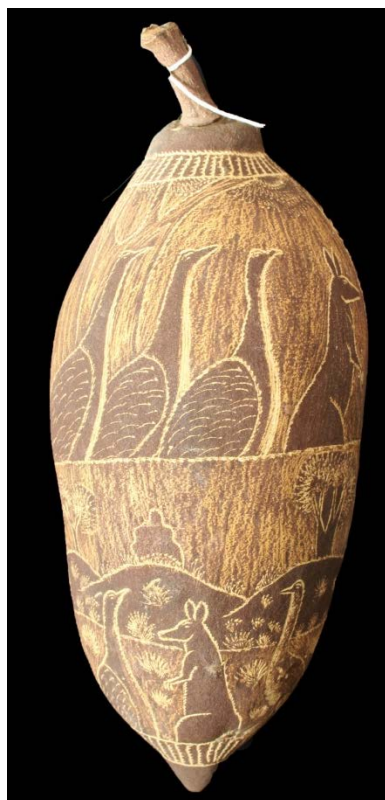
Border description: proximal and distal ends have single zigzag ladder style border; vertical borders are single zigzag lines with diagonal ladder design of 3 single zigzag lines and zigzag infill; single horizontal boarder is single zigzag line

Partitions: 3

Partition type: horizontal in 1 panel and vertical between the panels

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:





Detail of incising – zigzag, line, scraping

1987.0050.0318

Collection: Enid Bowden Collection

Date collected: [c. 1970s]

Location collected: Kimberley, Western Australia

Size: L 175mm x W 100mm x D 95mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with a rudimentary design depicting the landscape, animals and hunting, gathering tools. [cracked]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 36385

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: figurative, realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style – flattened perspective, lateral elements and scale

Major motifs: boab tree in grass with emu and 2 shields?; emu with lateral rocky hills and 2 weapons?

Incising: zigzag, scaping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends; vertical

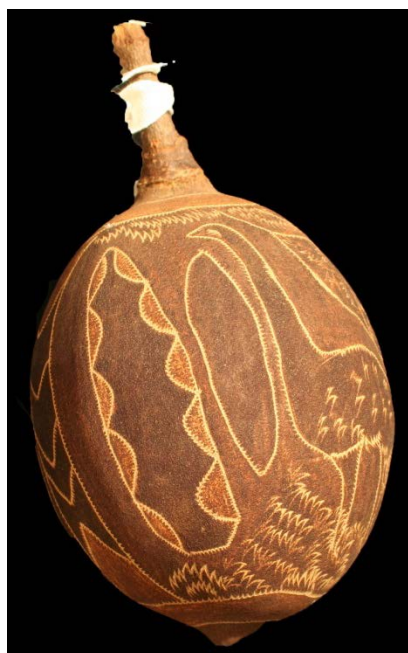
Border description: proximal end has 2 single zigzag lines with scraped band; distal end has 2 single zigzag lines with scraped band and scraping to point; vertical has 2 single zigzag lines with zigzag line chevrons – only one with scraped end chevrons

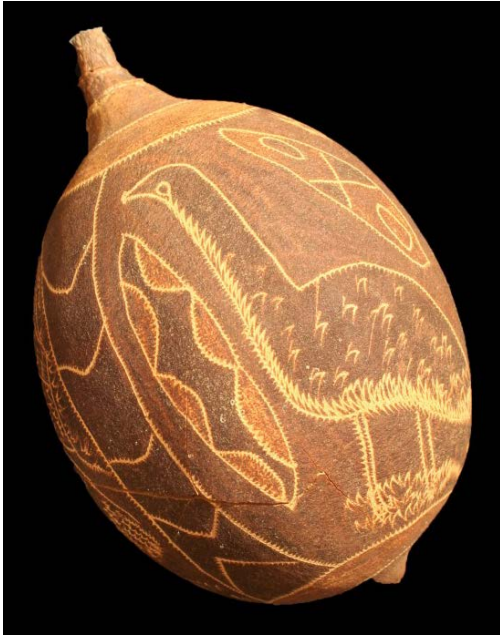
Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:





Detail of vertical border



Detail of distal end



Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

1987.0050.0319

Collection: Enid Bowden Collection

Date collected: [c. 1970s]

Location collected: Kimberley, Western Australia

Size: L 160mm x W 100mm x D 100mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with realistic motifs of animals in the landscape. [cracked]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 36386

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): Western-style

Major motifs: 1 boab tree, 4 birds, 1 emu, 3 kangaroos, in treed and rocky landscape

Incising: zigzag, line, scaping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends

Border description: proximal end has 2 single zigzag lines with zigzag dashes within band; distal end has 2 single zigzag lines with zigzag dashes within band with zigzag lines to line around the point

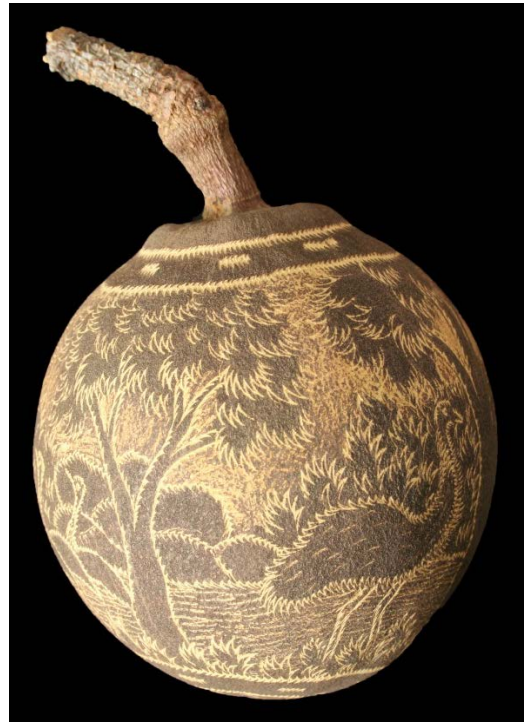
Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:





Detail of distal end



Detail of incising – zigzag, line, scraping

1987.0050.0320

Collection: Enid Bowden Collection

Date collected: [c. 1970s]

Location collected: Kimberley, Western Australia

Size: L 270mm x W 100mm x D 90mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with naturalistic motifs depicting animals in the landscape. Fragile!!!! Cracked.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 36387

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style – flattened perspective and scale

Major motifs: 1 dingo/dog, 4 birds, 1 frog, 1 lizard?, 1 unidentified 'star-shape', 1

snake, 1 unidentified vegetal design attached to distal end border in treed landscape

Incising: zigzag, scaping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends

Border description: proximal end has a band of 3 single zigzag lines with zigzag infill; distal end has 2 single zigzag lines with vegetal design attached

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:





Detail of proximal end



Detail of distal end

Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

1987.0050.0321

Collection: Enid Bowden Collection

Date collected: [c. 1970s]

Location collected: Kimberley, Western Australia

Size: L 150mm x W 70mm x D 70mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with motifs of hunting tools in a zig zag linear style. Fragile!!! Cracked & broken.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 363878

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: geometric, figurative?

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 2 crescents, most of the other motifs unidentified due to damage

Incising: zigzag, scaping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum 'A-AN'?' – likely '67a'





Detail of extensive damage



Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2

Number of boab nuts in collection: 9

Number of all objects in collection: 561

Date: 1974

Where: Mowanjum

Catalogue number:

1991.0024.4196

1991.0024.4197

1991.0024.4198

1991.0024.4199

1991.0024.4200

1991.0024.4201

1991.0024.4202

1991.0024.4520

1991.0024.4569

Collection Type: NHC

NMA description of the collection: none

NMA Archive information:

Files 83/109; 91/25

Synopsis of Aboriginal Arts Board Collection (attachment C: unknown source)

'The collection then was made principally during the latter half of the 1970's [sic]. There are some 1000 objects in total. It includes a very large collection of bark paintings from Aboriginal communities in Arnhem Land, excellent Pukamani poles made by the Tiwi of Bathurst and Melville Islands, a number of very fine Tiwi Ancestral figures, some excellent acrylic paintings of canvas by Western Desert artists and many original watercolours by the artist Dick Roughsey of Mornington Island (Qld).'

Kaus advises the Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2 was 'part of the Australia Council, which transferred a large collection of art etc in the early 1990s' (Kaus, pers. comm., 1 November 2006).

Research Notes:

The Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2 comprises of close to 600 objects with the majority of these being bark paintings (456). Other types of objects named in the NMA online catalogue include drawings, containers, wood carving, boab nuts, necklaces, and other contemporary and innovative examples of vases, bowls, jars, jugs, teapots and wall tiles. Nine items in addition to the boab nuts are from Mowanjum produced in 1979 – 2 rock carvings, 5 bark paintings, and a didgeridoo.

Berrell, N. 2009, 'Inroads offshore: The international exhibition program of the Aboriginal Arts Board, 1973-1980', *reCollections*, Vol. 4, No. 1,

http://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol_4_no1/papers/inroads_offshore

'Abstract

This paper explores the important work carried out by the first Aboriginal Arts Board in raising the profile of Aboriginal arts overseas in the 1970s, through a series of art exhibitions. It examines the circumstances that activated its international program, the content of the exhibitions and the response overseas. It draws attention to the board's efforts to kindle an alternative audience for Aboriginal arts, during a decade when local response was relatively indifferent.'

Michaelis, N. 2008, 'A history of Australia: a new genre unfolds. Aboriginal children's art', *NMA Museum Friends*, Vol. 19, No. 3, September

<http://www.nma.gov.au/friends/friends-magazine2>

'The collection was transferred to the National Museum of Australia by Deed of Gift in 1991. The collection had become complex in terms of administration, as it required facilities for its long-term safekeeping. It formed a core for a national collection of contemporary Aboriginal material: it was acknowledged that this collection offered exceptional research potential with the identification of new trends in Aboriginal art and material culture. The majority of the contemporary objects produced between 1973 and 1989 reflected subsistence tools for hunting, fishing and warfare, with a large disclosure of ceremonial objects, principally bark paintings' (Michaelis 2008: 8-9).

Newstead, A. 2014, *The dealer is the devil: an insider's history of the Aboriginal art trade*, Brandl & Schlesinger, Blackheath NSW (especially pages 173-177; 111, 135, 143, 160-1, 168, 181-2, 195, 197, 213, 218, 229, 278, 292-3, 334)

'The AAB [Aboriginal Arts Board] now made a vital decision. Despite operating on just 4 per cent of the total Australia Council annual budget, it began actively purchasing and commissioning art and craft directly from artists and art cooperatives, instead of giving out grants. By the following year [1973] the Board's acquisitions ranged across Arnhem Land, the Tiwi Islands and the Western Desert. Before long, it too had barks, artefacts and canvases stacked along the office walls. Its purchases and those of a few dedicated retailers, kept the nascent art movement alive in the face of intense bureaucratic pressure from government auditors' (Newstead 2014: 174-5).

1991.0024.4196

Collection: Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2

Date collected: 1974

Location collected: Mowanjum

Size: L 180mm x Dia 115mm

Catalogue description: Balloon-shaped boab nut incised with a design of a large reptile amongst trees, grasses & shrubs, images divided in two sections. Location: Mowanjum, WA. Date: 1974.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 46258

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): Western-style

Major motifs: a hilly and treed landscape; trees in landscape; large snake within treed landscape

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends; horizontal in one panel only

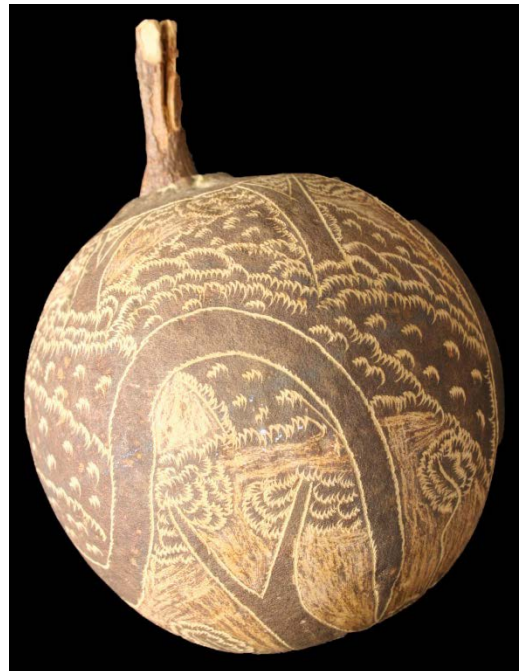
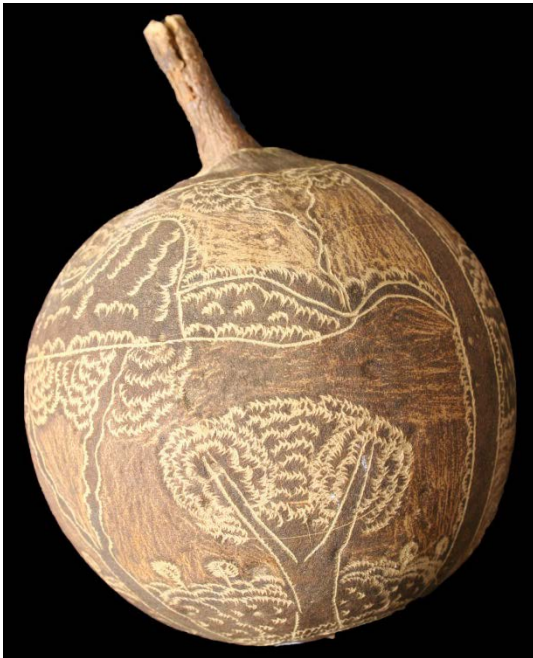
Border description: single zigzag line at proximal and distal ends; single zigzag line horizontally in one panel; double zigzag line band vertically

Partitions: 3

Partition type: vertical and horizontal

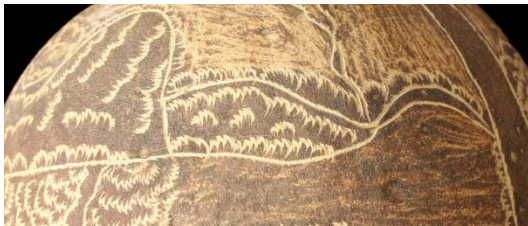
Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:





Detail of proximal end



Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

1991.0024.4197

Collection: Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2

Date collected: 1974

Location collected: Mowanjum

Size: L 190mm x W 120mm x 100mm

Catalogue description: Oval-shaped boab nut incised with realistic designs separated into two scenes. One scene depicts two birds, a tree with mountain in the background, while the other scene depicts a large reptile amidst shrubs. Location: Mowanjum, WA. Date: 1974.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 46259

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style – flattened perspective and scale

Major motifs: 2 birds and tree in background with mountain range; 1 snake in shrubby landscape

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends; vertical

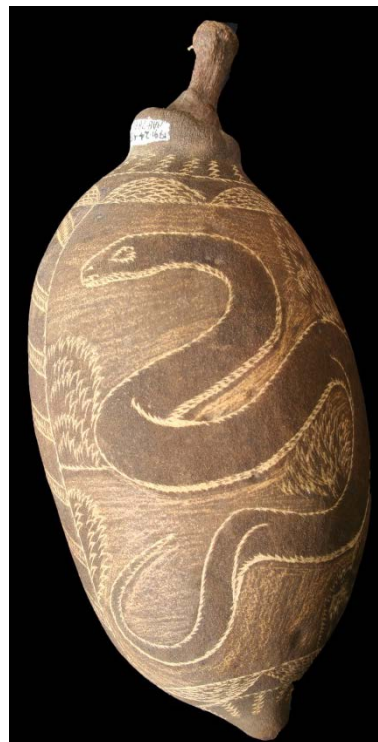
Border description: proximal and distal end has 2 single zigzag lines with half-circles infilled with zigzags between and single zigzag lines radiating to stalk or point; vertical borders are zigzag ladder designs with diagonal zigzag bands alternating between zigzag infill

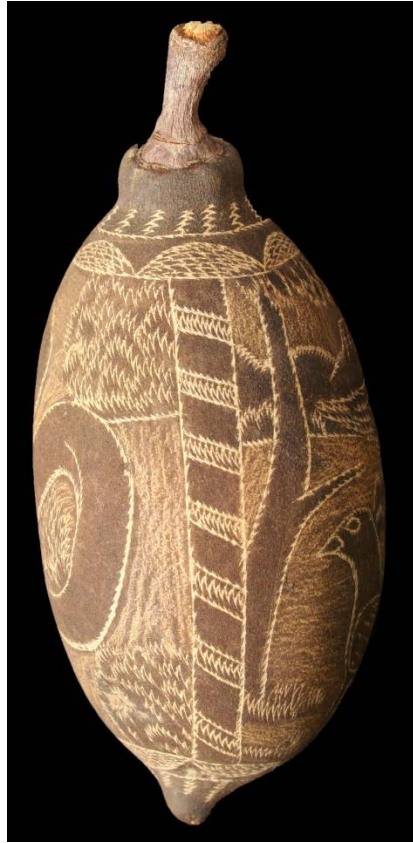
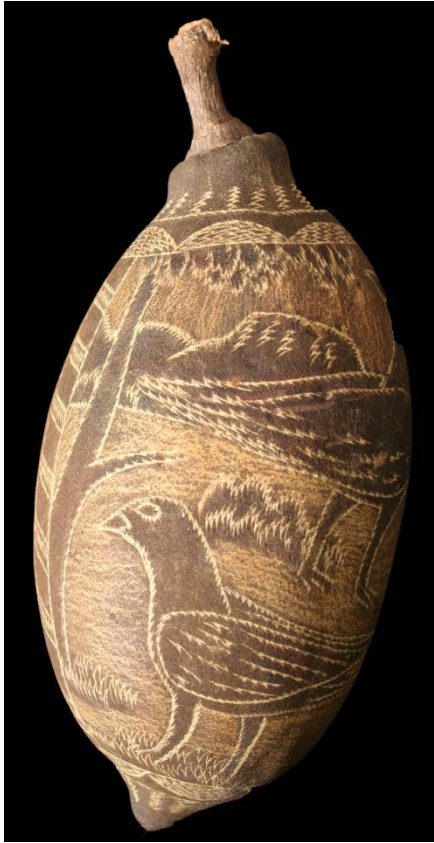
Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum '1991.24.4197'; Aboriginal Arts Board 'AAB 78.8118'





Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

1991.0024.4198

Collection: Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2

Date collected: 1974

Location collected: Mowanjum

Size: L 185mm x Dia 83mm

Catalogue description: Oval-shaped boab nut, stalk attached. Outer surface decorated with a finely-incised pattern of weapons arranged vertically on a background of horizontal parallel bands. At top is a ring of triangular design, at bottom is a ring of linear design. Large seed inside, rattles when shaken. Location: Mowanjum, WA. Date: 1974.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 46260

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 2 Kimberley points, 1 spearthrower, 3 spears, 1 unidentified weapon

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping, pitting

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends

Border description: proximal

Partitions:

Partition type:

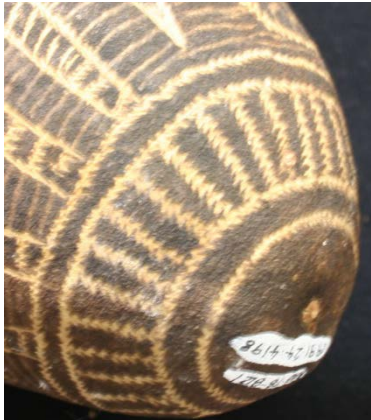
Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum '1991.24.4198'; Aboriginal Arts Board 'AAB 78.8121'





Detail of proximal end



Detail of distal end

Detail of incising – zigzag, line, scraping, pitting

1991.0024.4199

Collection: Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2

Date collected: 1974

Location collected: Mowanjum

Size: L 170mm x Dia 70mm

Catalogue description: Oval-shaped boab nut, stalk still attached. Outer surface decorated with a finely-incised design of two reptiles, separated by two vertical bands of zig-zag linear design flanked by triple arcs. Double bands at top and bottom of nut. Large seed inside rattles when the nut is shaken. Location: Mowanjum, WA. Date: 1974. [\[cracked\]](#)

Internal Record Number (IRN): 46261

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 2 snakes, 1 unidentified motif

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping, pitting

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends; vertical

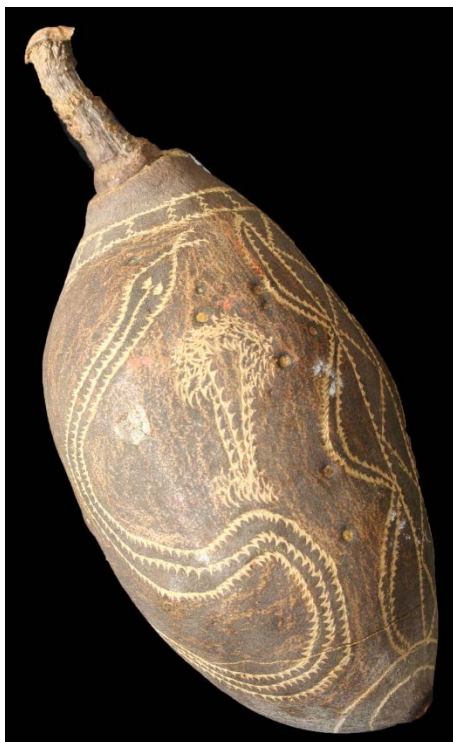
Border description: proximal end has a zigzag ladder design; distal end has 2 zigzag lines; vertical border has 2 zigzag lines with large inner zigzag within the band and triple double zigzag line arcs on either side

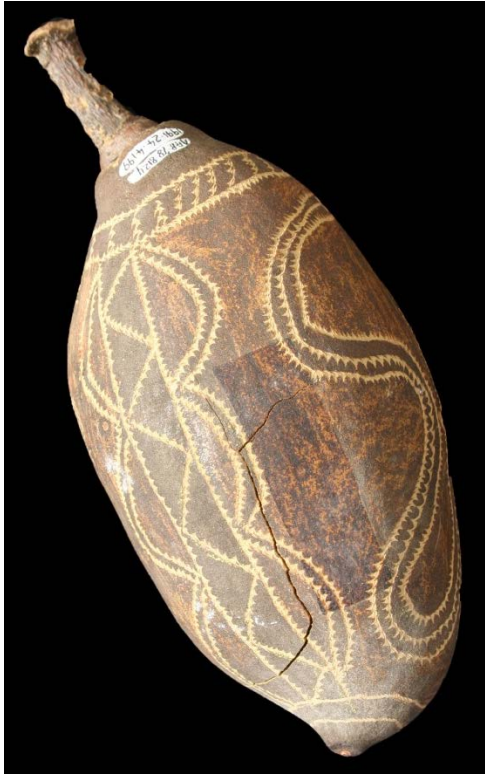
Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum '1991.24.4198'; Aboriginal Arts Board 'AAB 78.8124'; square shape unfaded – possibly a label missing





Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

1991.0024.4200

Collection: Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2

Date collected: 1974

Location collected: Mowanjum

Size: L 145mm x Dia 105mm

Catalogue description: Round boab nut, stalk still attached. Outer surface decorated with a finely-incised design of two birds with long necks and legs, near two trees, a goanna and a large reptile. Birds and reptiles separated by two vertical bands decorated with wavy lines. Large seed inside that rattles when nut is shaken. Location:

Mowanjum, WA. Date: 1974

Internal Record Number (IRN): 46262

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 snake, 1 lizard, 2 birds, 2 trees

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends; vertical

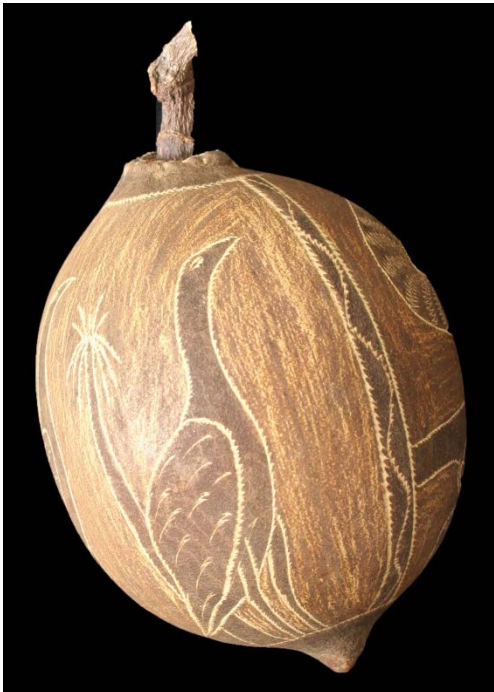
Border description: proximal and distal ends have single zigzag line; vertical border has 2 single zigzag lines with curving single zigzag line between

Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum '1991.24.4200'; Aboriginal Arts Board 'AAB 78.8171'





Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

1991.0024.4201

Collection: Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2

Date collected: 1974

Location collected: Mowanjum

Size: L 220mm x Dia 135mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with design of two panels, each further divided into two sections producing a total of four scenes. Each scene depicts trees & other vegetation. There is a circle incised around the base & around the stem. Small vertical strip acting as a border between the two sections. Location: Mowanjum, WA.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 46263

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: realistic

Landscape style: Western-style

Major motifs: 3 landscapes with trees and hills; 1 landscape with trees, hills and heavy cloud cover

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends; vertical and horizontal

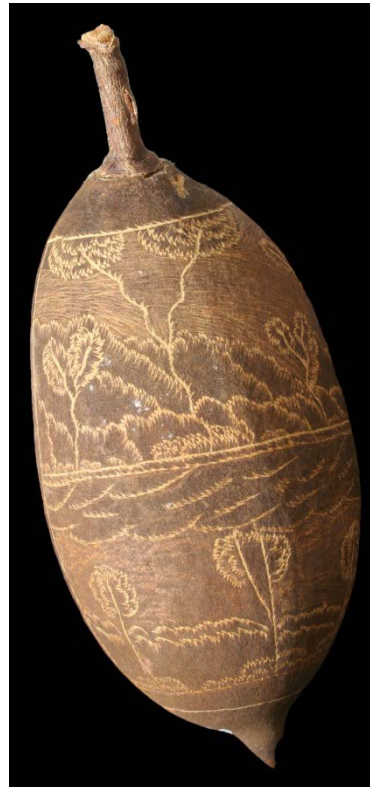
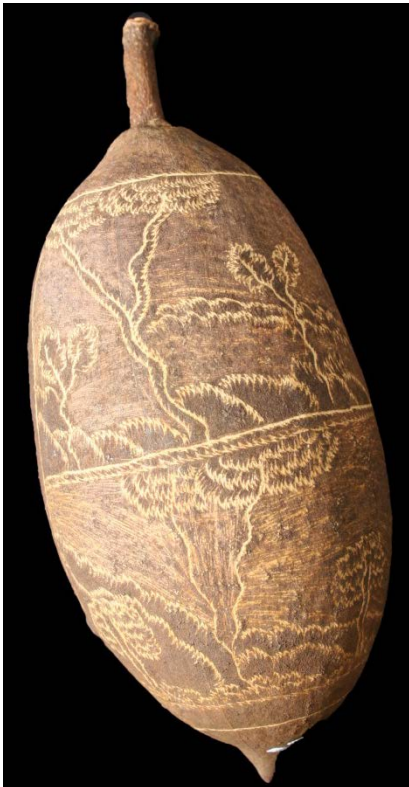
Border description: proximal and distal ends have single zigzag line; vertical border has 2 single zigzag lines, horizontal border has 2 single zigzag lines close together

Partitions: 4

Partition type: vertical and horizontal

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum '1991.24.4201'; Aboriginal Arts Board 'AAB 78.[unclear]'





Detail of incising – zigzags, scraping

1991.0024.4202

Collection: Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2

Date collected: 1974

Location collected: [likely Mowanjum]

Size: L 150mm x Dia 90mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with two realistic landscape scenes separated by two vertical borders consisting of short diagonal stripes. One scene has three emus with two trees within a hilly background and grass at their feet. The other scene has an emu standing under tree with mountains and hills in the background. A circular border incised at the stem & the base. Date: 1974.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 46264

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): Western-style

Major motifs: 3 birds, grass and trees in hilly landscape; 1 emu with tree, grass, scrub and hills in background

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends; vertical and horizontal

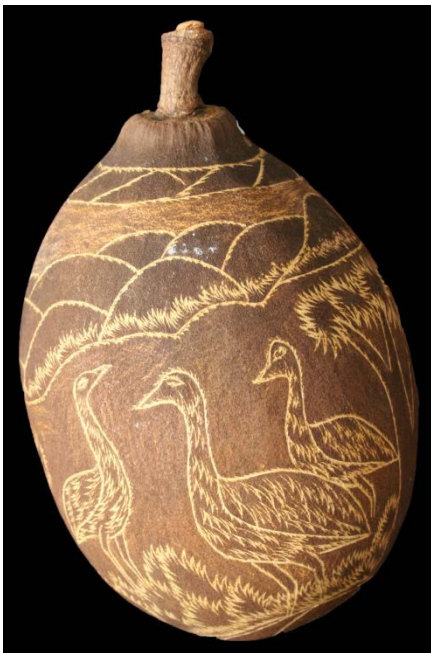
Border description: proximal and distal ends have 2 single zigzag lines with diagonal single zigzag lines within band; vertical border has 2 single zigzag lines with diagonal stripes with alternating scraping within band

Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum '1991.24.4202'; Aboriginal Arts Board 'AAB 78.8178'





Detail of proximal end



Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

1991.0024.4520

Collection: Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2

Date collected: 1974

Location collected: Mowanjum

Size: L 180mm x W 100mm x D 105mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with naturalistic avian and reptile imagery. Large piece broken and missing from one side. Large piece broken and missing from one side. Mowanjum, near Derby. Kimberley Region. WA.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 46588

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style – flattened perspective, lateral elements and scale

Major motifs: 2 birds and 2 crocodiles in mountain landscape with 2 unidentified motifs; 2 owls sitting on tree branch with laterally elevated hills

Incising: zigzag, line

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends; vertical

Border description: proximal end has single zigzag line; distal end has vegetal? design; one vertical border has 2 single zigzag lines; one vertical border has 2 single zigzag lines with wavy zigzag line between them

Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum '1991.24.4520'; Aboriginal Arts Board 'AAB 78.8179'





Detail of distal end



Detail of incising – zigzag, line

1991.0024.4569

Collection: Aboriginal Arts Board Collection No. 2

Date collected: 1974

Location collected: Mowanjum

Size: L 170mm x Dia 88mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut, stalk still attached and outer surface decorated with a finely-incised zig zag line of naturalistic motifs depicting animals in the landscape.

Location: Mowanjum, WA. Date: 1974.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 107883

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style – flattened perspective and lateral elements

Major motifs: 1 snake and 1 kangaroo in spinifex? landscape with hills in the background; 2 emus in treed landscape

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends; vertical

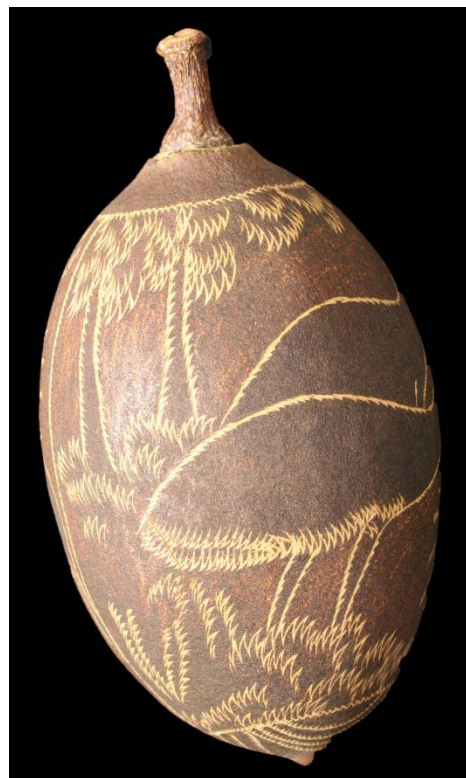
Border description: proximal end has single zigzag line; distal end has single zigzag line with 3 groups of 4 zigzag line arcs; vertical border has 1 single zigzag line

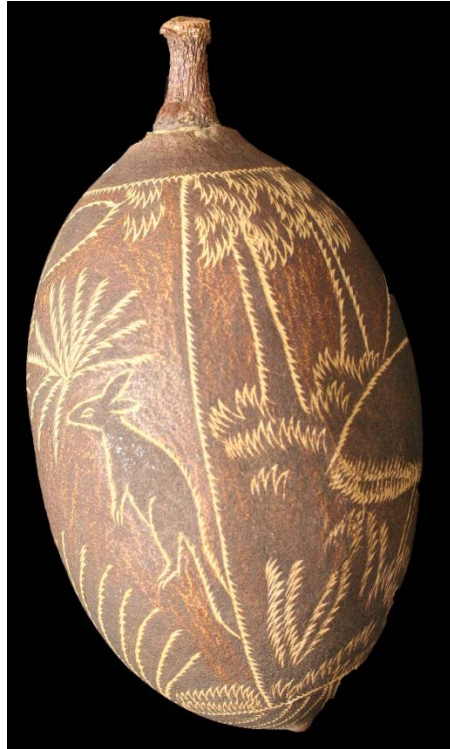
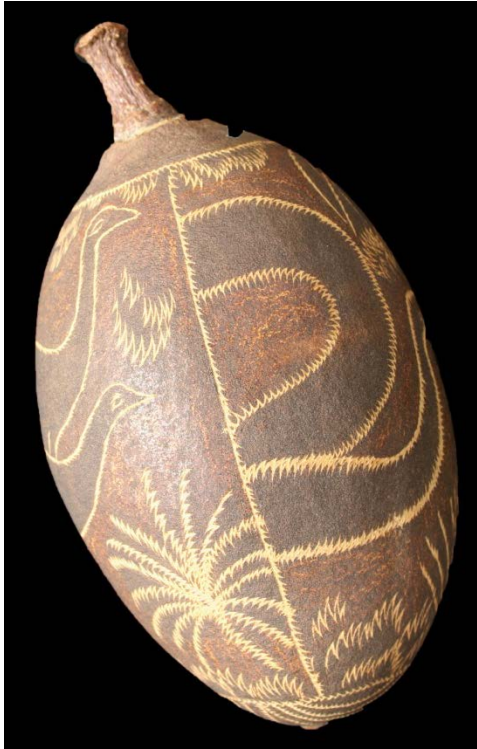
Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by Aboriginal Arts Board 'AAB 78.8169'





Detail of distal end



Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

Professor Henry Krips MBE and Mrs Luis Krips Collection

Number of boab nuts in collection: 4

Number of all objects in collection: 65

Date: [c. 1950s-1970s]

Where: Northern Western Australia

Catalogue numbers:

1993.0047.0215

1993.0047.0216

1993.0047.0217

1993.0047.0218

Collection Type: NHC

NMA description of the collection: none in catalogue

NMA Archive information:

File 92/61

Single page - NMA Krips Collection: Background Information

‘The collection was put together by the late Professor Henry Krips and Mrs Luise Krips over about 20 years. Professor Krips was resident music conductor for 23 years with Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. The couple migrated to Australia from Vienna, Australia in 1938. They took an interest in their adopted country and *began gathering Aboriginal items from collectors and dealers in Australia and England.* (my emphasis)

The collection contains objects from all over the country including many early pieces particularly from south-eastern Australia. The pieces being handed over to the National Museum will complement the existing collection which mostly dates from the very late 19th century onward.

Research Notes:

Sudrabs, Z. 2007, Krips, Henry Joseph (1912-1987), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 17, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/krips-henry-joseph-12758/text23011>

‘With his wife he developed a passion for collecting Australian art, Aboriginal artefacts and carved Chinese jade.’

1993.0047.0215

Collection: Professor Henry Krips MBE and Mrs Luise Krips Collection

Date collected: [c. 1950s-1970s]

Location collected: Northern Western Australia

Size: L 210mm x W 90mm x D 90mm

Catalogue description: Burnished boab nut, incised with naturalistic motifs of a snake, a tree and a dingo in the landscape. Northern WA. [possibly varnished]

Internal Record Number (IRN): 53752

Decade for chronology: unknown

Genre: figurative, realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style – flattened perspective

Major motifs: dingo/dog standing on rocks in a grass and tree landscape; 1 snake, 1 tree

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: distal end, vertical

Border description: distal border has 2 single zigzag lines with single zigzag lines radiating to point; vertical border has 2 single zigzag lines with zigzag outlined and scraped diamond pattern in band

Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: sticker '401' placed over scraped off painted white label

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Detail of vertical border

Detail of distal end

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Detail of sticker and fine line incomplete? design

1993.0047.0216

Collection: Professor Henry Krips MBE and Mrs Luise Krips Collection

Date collected: [c. 1950s-1970s]

Location collected: Northern Western Australia

Size: L 175mm x W 75mm x D 70mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with fish motifs using the zig zag linear style.

Northern WA.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 53753

Decade for chronology: unknown

Genre: figurative, geometric

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 7 fish, 1 unidentified geometric

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal end

Border description: 2 single zigzag scalloped lines

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: sticker '400'; by museum '1993.47.216'

Note: it is possible that this is also a 'animal shaped nut' with the boab nut blemishes at distal end as eyes and the unusual proximal border as a tail fin?

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[Detail of proximal end](#)

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[Detail of distal end](#)

1993.0047.0217

Collection: Professor Henry Krips MBE and Mrs Luise Krips Collection

Date collected: [c. 1950s-1970s]

Location collected: Derby W.A.

Size: L 194mm x W97mm x 94mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with two panels depicting two boab trees in a scrimshaw, scraping linear style. 'Derby WA' written on side in black text. 'ex 687' inscribed on upper surface near stem. Derby W.A.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 53754

Decade for chronology: unknown

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): Western-style

Major motifs: gum? tree with mountains in landscape; boab tree in rocky landscape

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal end, around 2 oval panels at proximal and distal ends; vertical

Border description: single zigzag line next to larger single zigzag line; single zigzag line around oval panel a double zigzag line and at proximal end another zigzag line; vertical border is between the oval borders and includes a truncated oval with vertical and horizontal arcs and a zigzag chevron infilled with 2 zigzag lines

Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: 'Derby W.A.', faded '102?'; by museum '1993.47.217'

Note: stylistically similar to Figs 3.5 & 5.25

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[Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping](#)

1993.0047.0218

Collection: Professor Henry Krips MBE and Mrs Luise Krips Collection

Date collected: [c. 1950s-1970s]

Location collected: Northern Western Australia

Size: L 150mm x W 100mm x D 100mm

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised with a stylised leaf pattern design worked across the surface, together with a boab nut half, attached with 2 ply fibre string.

Northern Western Australia.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 53755

1993.0047.0218 comprises of 1993.0047.0218.001 and 1993.0047.0218.002

Decade for chronology: unknown

Genre: figurative, geometric

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: on whole boab nut: 3 vegetal motifs, 3 unidentified geometric? motifs; on half boab nut: 3 unidentified geometric designs with 3 smaller unidentified geometric motifs

Incising: zigzag

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum '1993.47.218A' on interior of half boab nut; '1993.47.218B'

Note: no function has been attributed to this assemblage

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Detail of proximal end of whole boab nut

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Detail of distal end

Half boab nut

Image not available due to copyright restrictions

Detail of incising - zigzag

Adrian Luck Collection No. 2

Number of boab nuts in collection: 1

Number of all objects in collection: 7

Date: 1971

Where: Mowanjum

Catalogue number:

2002.0018.0063

Collection Type: NHC

NMA description of the collection:

The Adrian Luck Collection [No. 1 (56) & No. 2 (7)] comprises eighty objects collected between 1961-1973, when Mr Luck was a teacher in six Aboriginal communities: Hermannsburg, Papunya, Goulburn Island and Yirrkala in the Northern Territory and Aurukun and Lockhart River in Queensland. The collection includes boomerangs, spears, armbands, hair string, headdresses, carvings and grass skirts. Some of the objects were made within the communities where he taught, others were gifts from communities he visited.

This important collection documents the interaction between a teacher and communities in the sixties and early seventies. (Film, tapes and photographs documenting Mr Luck's life in the various communities are held at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies).

NMA Archive information: none

Research Notes:

[National Museum of Australia Annual Report 2001-2002 \(part 5 Appendix 8\)](#)
[Adrian Luck collection: 'Donation' \(NMA 2001/2: 142\)](#)

2002.0018.0063

Collection: Adrian Luck Collection No. 2

Date collected: 1971

Location collected: Mowanjum

Size: L 240mm x Dia 90mm

Catalogue description: Carved presentation, friendship Boab nut, Mowanjum 1971.

Decorated with incised scenes of wildlife.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 62001

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): Western-style

Major motifs: 3 emus with hills in background; 2 budgerigars on tree limbs; frilled-necked lizard on rocks; 3 birds on a grassy plain with mountain range in background

Incising: zigzag, scraping

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal and distal ends, vertical and horizontal

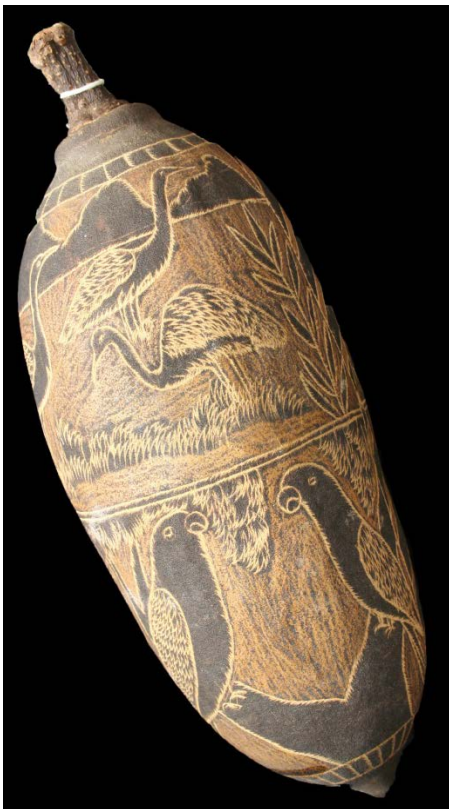
Border description: snake design (like a ladder design) on proximal end; zigzag ladder design on distal ends; double zigzag line between horizontal panels; curving design with scrapped bars and outlined in single zigzag line between vertical panels

Partitions: 4

Partition type: horizontal and vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:





Detail of proximal border – snake design



Detail of incising – zigzag, scraping

R. G. Kimber Collection

Number of boab nuts in collection: 4

Number of all objects in collection:

Date: 1974 & 1977

Where: La Grange & Derby, W.A.

Catalogue numbers:

IR2971.0074

IR2971.0075

IR2971.0076

IR2971.0126

Collection Type: under assessment [\[in 2006\]](#)

NMA description of the collection: none in catalogue

NMA Archive information:

File 97/53

4 pages detailing part of the R.G. Kimber Collection (unknown source: 1-2, 2552, 3652)

‘The donor, Dick Kimber, has had a long association with Aboriginal people and an even longer interest in their cultures. He went to Alice Springs in January 1970 as a school teacher and since then has been friends with Aboriginal people all over southern Northern Territory to the extent that he is widely consulted on matters by both Aboriginal and non-indigenous people and organisations.’ (1-2)

‘88. Decorated boab nut, Lagrange, 1974, no label
89. Decorated boab nut, Lagrange, 1974, no label
90. Decorated boab nut, Lagrange, 1974, no label’ (2552)

‘141. Decorated boab nut, Derby 197, label reads “DERBY, W.A. 1997”
Dick purchased this in Alice Springs, as he recalls from the Aboriginal Arts and Crafts shop. A number of these boab nuts had been sent from Lagrange Mission along with other items to the shop in 1974-75 period, and these items from north-west Australia continued to be sent in very small number until the late 1970s or into the 1980s. Dick purchased this one from Derby and others that will be mentioned because they appealed to him for their finely detailed work as well as for the variations in depiction. They provide a striking contrast to the central Australian boomerang naturalistic art of the similar period. Dick was also interested in them because he had seen pearlshell illustrations in central Australian pearlshell that included fish, a turtle and other sea creatures very similarly depicted to the sea creatures on the boab nuts.’ (3652)

All 4 boab nuts were purchased in Alice Springs.

Koval, R. 1995, 'Central to history', *The Age*, 20 August 1995, 11

'A former teacher, sacred sites officer and coordinator of the Papunya Tula artists, Dick Kimber is one of the few white men in Central Australia to have attended, over the years, many Aboriginal men's ceremonies.'

David Kaus advised that Kimber was a retired school teacher (Kaus, pers. comm., 23 August 2006)

Research Notes:

NMA Annual Report 2001-02: Appendix 5, 2001-02,
www.nma.gov.au/_data/assets/.../nma_annrep2001-02_part05.pdf

'Kimber RG

Pintupi wooden, bark and stone implements and ochre and contemporary Western Desert Aboriginal artworks dealing with the theme of biological invasion – 1970s-1980s

This collection consists of ethnographic items which belonged to a group of nine Pintupi people who lived fully traditional lives in the isolated Lake Mackay area of the Western Desert until 1984, when they made contact with the Kiwikurrer community. At this time, they met Europeans for the first time. This collection documents the last known fully traditional Aboriginal group in Australia, and the last case of initial contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The collection also includes some post-contact contemporary artworks from the Western Desert which deal with environmental history themes such as Indigenous responses to the introduced European wild rabbit.

Donation' (NMA Annual Report 2001-02: 141)

Newstead, A. 2014, *The Dealer is the Devil: An Insider's History of the Aboriginal Art Trade*, Brandt and Schlesinger, Blackheath NSW

Note: Kimber mentioned on pages 174-5, 207, 394.

IR2971.0074

Collection: R.G. Kimber Collection

Date collected: 1974

Location collected: Lagrange (purchased Alice Springs)

Size: L 155mm x [Dia 140mm]

Catalogue description: Incised in both the zig zag and a fine linear style, this Boab nut is decorated with several naturalistic figures including animals, plants and an Ancestor figure. Lagrange, 1974. Purchased in Alice Springs

Internal Record Number (IRN): 69389

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: geometric?, realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style – flattened perspective and lateral elements

Major motifs: 3 birds and 3 snakes in rocky landscape with tree and 2 arc? motifs;

Wandjina with head depicted over distal end and body vertical to proximal end

Incising: zigzag, line

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal end

Border description: proximal end has single zigzag line with zigzag infill to stalk

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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Distal end with Wandjina head

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Detail of incising – zigzag, line

IR2971.0075

Collection: R.G. Kimber Collection

Date collected: 1974

Location collected: Lagrange (purchased Alice Springs)

Size: L 152mm x [Dia 109mm]

Catalogue description: Incised in the zig zag linear style, the nut is decorated with several figurative motifs of animals drawn naturalistically. Lagrange, 1974. Purchased in Alice Springs

Internal Record Number (IRN): 69390

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 1 crocodile, 1 snake, 1 turtle, 2 fish

Incising: zigzag, line

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal end

Border description: single zigzag line with single zigzag lines radiating to stalk

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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Detail of incising – zigzag, line

IR2971.0076

Collection: R.G. Kimber Collection

Date collected: 1974

Location collected: Lagrange (purchased Alice Springs)

Size: L 131mm x [Dia 108mm]

Catalogue description: Incised in both the zig zag and linear style, this Boab nut is decorated with several naturalistic figures including plants and animals. Lagrange, 1974. Purchased in Alice Springs

Internal Record Number (IRN): 69391

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: figurative, realistic

Landscape style (whole/section): non-Western-style – flattened perspective

Major motifs: 4 birds in grass on top of 6 single arced lines; 1 fish, 1 dugong, 1 turtle

Incising: zigzag, line

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders: proximal end; vertical

Border description: single zigzag line on proximal end; vertical border is single zigzag line

Partitions: 2

Partition type: vertical

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels:

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[Detail of vertical border](#)

[Distal end](#)

IR2971.0126

Collection: R.G. Kimber Collection

Date collected: 1977

Location collected: Derby (purchased Alice Springs)

Size: [L 90mm x Dia 45mm]

Catalogue description: Small carved boab nut incised with naturalistic motifs of animals & plants in the zig zag linear style. "Derby W.A. 1977" is written in black ink on one side of the nut.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 69441

Decade for chronology: 1970s

Genre: figurative

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: an 'animal boab nut' possibly bird? or echidna?

Incising: zigzag

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: by museum 'Derby W.A. 1977'

Note: see Figs. 3.39a & 3.39b

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[Detail of incising - zigzag](#)

Presbyterian Church Collection

Number of boab nuts in collection: 1

Number of all objects in collection: [unknown]

Date: [unknown]

Where: Hall's Creek [Kimberley, W.A.]

Catalogue numbers:

IR3095.0002

Collection Type: under assessment [in 2006]

NMA description of the collection: none in catalogue

NMA Archive information: none

Research Notes:

Find & Connect, 'Australian Inland Mission (1912-1977),

<http://www.findandconnect.gov.au/ref/wa/biogs/WE00261b.htm>

'The Australian Inland Mission (AIM) was founded by the Presbyterian minister, John Flynn in 1912. The AIM ran the Halls Creek Mission in Western Australia. In 1977, the Uniting Church was established and the inland missions of the Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist Churches were combined to form Frontier Services.'

Government of Western Australia Heritage Council, 'Assessment documentation – inherit 1/4/1999 inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au/Public/Content/PdfLoader.aspx?id

'The Rev F.G.H. Brady died on 24th October, 1925, in the service of the A.I.M., at the outpost station of Broome in the North-West. Here he and Mrs. Brady endeared themselves to everybody and did splendid service for the Church. For several years after leaving Broome, he was parish minister at East Fremantle, where he became the Moderator of the Church of W.A. He again volunteered for service, and for the second time settled in Broome. He did most valued work there until his death. His last long journey of 1,700 miles, when he took Sisters McDonagh and Streatfield out to Hall's Creek from Derby and returned Sisters Cousin and Bennett to Wyndham, proved too much for his overtaxed strength. He was attacked by malaria, and very soon after his return to Broome, passed on to his reward. His comparatively early death was due to his vigorous attention to duty and his arduous labours, and was no doubt hastened by the very gruelling journey he had just undertaken and the difficulties encountered on the way.'

IR3095.0002

Collection: Presbyterian Church Collection

Date collected: [unknown]

Location collected: Hall's Creek

Size: [unknown]

Catalogue description: Boab nut incised in the zig zag linear style with figurative motifs of plants & animals in a naturalistic manner. Original label accompanying the nut reads: 'Baobab Nut Carved by native near Hall's Creek'.

Internal Record Number (IRN): 70345

Decade for chronology: unknown

Genre: figurative, geometric?

Landscape style (whole/section):

Major motifs: 2 snakes, 3 crescents, 2 large unidentified motifs (possibly vegetal), 5 smaller unidentified motifs

Incising: zigzag, line, scraping, pitting

Pigmented:

Colours:

Borders:

Border description:

Partitions:

Partition type:

Undecorated sections:

Textual labels: Original Label - 'Baobab Nut. Carved by native near Hall's Creek

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Detail of incising – zigzag, line, pitting

Detail of incising – zigzag, line, scaping



Original label