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# Australia's Aboriginal Art Movement

An indigenous culture emerging from poverty through art



"The art means to carry on our stories, to know it belongs to my family and it belongs to my father and grandfather, so that everyone can know about us, so we can carry on, so our kids can carry on forever, even when we're gone. So non-indigenous people can know about us in the future, how we fought to keep our culture strong for the sake of our children's future. The art is about who you belong to, about what country you belong to, it's about the only way you can know and others will know too. Our art has got to be protected because it belongs to individual people and their families. It is their belonging, it belongs to their group so it must be treated right way. The art movement should be really strong the way it's going now and we should be keeping it stronger. We got a lot of strong people in our communities. Those artists are strong about their art."

- Valerie Napaljarri Martin, Chairperson of Desart 2001 -2004

## **Introduction**

Our exploration of non-market factors in the context of international business strategy leads us to the question: How might the international art community lift Aboriginal Australians (“Aborigines”) from generational poverty traps?<sup>i</sup>

To begin our analysis, we interviewed Rena and Manuel Pulido, Australian nationals living in Chicago. In 2007, the Pulido’s founded an art gallery called Aboriginal Art Collection (“a2c”) as a means to focus their passion for native Australian artwork. The gallery “aims to promote and support Australian indigenous artists to enable non-indigenous people to embrace this rich culture and to engender increased knowledge of and respect for Australia’s unique heritage.”<sup>1</sup> a2c purchases the majority of its aboriginal artwork from various art centers located throughout rural Australia. These art centers serve as distribution cooperatives and represent the interests of their local aboriginal community. Since there are over 400 different aboriginal languages, and even more distinct people<sup>ii</sup>, for the sake of this paper, we shall refer to the many aboriginal groups as one whole community. Beyond the gallery’s focus on promoting the culture through artwork, our inquiry focuses on the economic benefits which accrue to the community as a result of relatively new global demand for visual representations of their unique heritage.

The aboriginal art movement has been gaining appeal in international art markets.<sup>iii</sup> Natural forces of the art economy have helped promote Australia’s aboriginal culture and thereby bring needed funds to various local communities. Like many indigenous cultures around the world, the Aborigines have historically existed as a marginalized group with little in common with mainstream society. As “a rising tide floats all boats”, the beginnings of the 21<sup>st</sup> century presents an avenue toward convergence for this particular group. In modern economies, huge capital flows and complex investment schemes has created tremendous personal fortunes. Throughout the 1990’s and continuing today, technological evolution and financial market innovations has created an unprecedented number of millionaires and billionaires. Accordingly, both institutional and individual investors have scoured the globe in search of alternative vehicles of investment opportunity. It seems many believe they have found one vehicle in the art economy as evidenced by the remarkable amounts of new money flowing into western art markets. Accordingly, this excess wealth, shepherded by the citizenry of developed nations, creates such

demand for culture as to enable the inherent markers of aboriginal society to serve as a sort of capital in its own right. Captured in their artwork, Australian aboriginals have begun to use their cultural capital to gradually increase per capita income and creep toward a more “normalized” quality of life.

### **Aboriginal History** - *Setting the poverty trap*

In 1788, British settlers arrived in Australia, and in 1872, gold was found on the aboriginal land which led to the encroachment of British colonization. The British brought disease, staged aboriginal massacres (such as the Coniston Massacre of 1928), and appropriated land and resources, which cut the population in half by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Australian Aborigines were treated in a similar manner and scale as that of native North Americans.

The British also forced their culture and values on the Aborigines, sending them to camps where they were to be “civilized”. Children were forcibly removed from their families and placed in church missions or other “white” establishments in an effort to “protect” them. In reality they were sent as a means of forced assimilation, stripping them of their aboriginal culture. The children taken from their families have been referred to as “The Stolen Generation”<sup>14</sup>, a group that has begun to receive public attention in 1980.

This harsh treatment ultimately produced an extreme set of adverse conditions leading to high incidence of alcoholism, drug abuse, unemployment and high levels of school drop out rates by many in the community. In Australia, per 2001 census data, the average gross household income for indigenous persons is 62% of that of non-indigenous persons; the life expectancy of indigenous persons is 18 years less than non-indigenous persons; and Aboriginal population comprised 22% of incarcerated persons while only comprising 2.2% of the country’s population<sup>13</sup>. Refer to **Appendix 1** for additional statistics. These adverse social conditions of inescapable high poverty levels, plaguing health issues, and disproportionate levels of Aboriginal incarcerations further perpetuate distorted views of their culture. Anecdotally, it is clear that cultural degradation and social ostracism has caused many Aborigines to be ashamed of their heritage. As a result, attempts at assimilation are found to be particularly challenging.

It wasn't until 1948 that Aborigines were granted citizenship in Australia. However, citizenship did not lead to equality. In 1971, the Australian courts ruled in the Gove Land Rights case that Australia was "empty land" prior to British settlement. As a result of this decision, the Australian government successfully stripped the Aborigines of their land right claims. See **Appendix 2** for further information on the land rights movements.

The British discovery of Australian gold essentially set in motion a vicious cycle of poverty and communal decline for the native inhabitants of aboriginal land. The ensuing land grab and resource appropriation was modernized by the 1971 court decision and effectively codified conditions perpetuating their status at the bottom of Australia's social strata. While this fundamental economic support has been institutionally denied to the aboriginal community, it is clearly not the sole factor keeping the group mired in poverty. Arguably, their own cultural norms and general presence in remote areas of the country contribute significantly to persistently poor quality of healthcare, poor nutrition, high incidence of disease and other social maladies. Not only are the Aborigines at the bottom of Australian society, their subsistence is well outside levels considered acceptable for most all mainstream global communities.

### **The Beginning of the Art Movement** – *Creating trade with the outside world*

Ironically, also in 1971, the aboriginal art movement began at one of the camps established by the Australian government. In that year, Geoffrey Bardon, an art instructor, encouraged aboriginal children to paint stories of their culture as a mural on the exterior school wall. Traditionally, Aborigines pay tribute to their culture and environment through sacred ceremonies which include painting on their bodies, rocks, and in the sand but not on transportable surfaces. These ancestral stories are called "dreaming"<sup>20</sup> and tribal artists are only allowed to depict certain stories based on their birth rights. Age is often a function of the level of depiction available to the artist; the more ceremonies one has participated in, the greater honor that the community typically bestows on an individual. Hence the more detail that artist may convey in representing a particular "dream", or aspect of the community's historical beliefs and cultural identity. On this occasion, the mural project became a large community affair with the elders providing detailed narratives and authority for selection of artists and the depiction of particular "dreamings".

The Papunya community gained much attention for the mural, and Bardon soon began supplying them with acrylics and canvas on which to paint. In 1972, the artists began to receive commissions to create artworks on transportable mediums like canvas. Since then the artwork has gained a substantial following for its high standards and style. Today the work created in Papunya is found in many public galleries, museums, institutions and collections in Australia and overseas<sup>17</sup>. Aboriginal art in Papunya established an official form of aboriginal trade, a sort of currency the community could share in order to obtain needed resources like healthcare not previously provided in abundance.

Values of the aboriginal art market have been increasing since its inception. In Timothy Pascoe's report to the Australia Council, the market for aboriginal artwork equaled \$2.5 million (AUD) in 1979-80. At that time, sixty producing communities were in existence. This represented 5,000 artists, and 80 to 90% of their artwork ended up overseas. The market for aboriginal artwork in 2002 was estimated at \$100 to \$300 million (AUD)<sup>6</sup>. Other statistics show that aboriginal art has increased its total value 76-fold while non-aboriginal art has increased its total value 8-fold by 2007 (indexed to the art market in 1993). In addition, the aboriginal art market increased at a 25.7% compound annual rate, while non-aboriginal market increased at 16% for the time period 2001 to 2007<sup>1</sup>.

### **Art Brings Pride** – *Ending the cyclical poverty at home*

Many aboriginal communities are located in desolate areas of Australia that do not have fertile land to cultivate for farming, and the communities are not suitable for manufacturing. These areas have few other employment opportunities, and communities are essentially living in poverty, being supported by government welfare. Thus, art can often be their only means of self-generated economic development, and art seems to be one of the few revenue producing activities making an impact on the poverty in the regions.

According to Bernadette Eggington at the Australian Trade Commission in the Northern Territory, art plays a significant role in aboriginal life. It is not only a means of transfer of information, but also an important source of self-esteem, energy, enthusiasm, pride and hope<sup>2</sup>.

For example, a client of a2c inquired about acquiring a larger version of a particular painting. The mere inquiry created great excitement for the artist. The artist happened to be in transit to the airport to fly to a UN function when he heard of the request. Upon (unfortunately) missing his flight, the artist rushed home and started painting the larger piece before even knowing if the painting would truly be sold. Joel Newman, the Business Development Manager with the Australian Trade Commission in LA, describes the psychological impact of selling art by Aborigines. He says there is added dimension of personal growth for the artist knowing that the artist's work is valued by someone very far away (from the artist's community) and that a part of the artist's life is now being shared in this very far away place<sup>4</sup>. There is evidence that the joy created through art center growth also helps to increase the retention in schools.

### **Community and Art Centers – Organizing for shared benefits**

Many of the local communities have created cooperative art centers to assist in the business operations of their small art economy and to insulate group members from negative influences. The Lockhart River Art Center ("Center") is a well-known example of what an art center can accomplish for a community. The Center, established in 1995, has been able to provide financial independence, jobs, international recognition and travel to those associated with it. The Center is focused on promoting the traditional aboriginal culture; being a keeping place for the culture as well as helping encourage artists to further develop technical execution of their work<sup>18</sup>. In keeping the culture alive, elders have a strong role in the Center as they have the knowledge in tradition and history of Lockhart River. They pass this on to the next generation by telling stories and teaching the traditional ways of living. A core group of about ten artists known as the Lockhart River Art Gang have gained international recognition. The artwork helps to link the past and future by essentially keeping the true culture alive while economically growing the community. The profit from the artwork keeps the Center running and also helps to solve the social problems within the community. Over the past five years, the Center has averaged annual revenue of \$750,000 (AUD) and distributes two-thirds of its income to artists<sup>6</sup>.

Cecilia Alfonso, the art center manager for the Warlukurlangu community at Yuendumu, has lived in aboriginal communities for the past 6 years. She confirms the art centers have been almost the only source of income outside of government benefits. The lack of income sources is

placing an assault on the communities, but the art helps to strengthen the people and the culture. The art centers are an important part of the community as the artists do not have to pay for any of their supplies and are provided lunch each day as these are paid for by the art center's portion of sale proceeds (the artist personally receives a large portion from the sale proceeds as well). Additional profits retained by the art centers are directed to community projects such as building a community swimming pool, employing a dialysis support person, and a series of additional health projects. The art center also helps to support the travel of their artworks to exhibitions which further promotes the art, culture, and respect of the communities. In aboriginal communities, Western concepts, such as individual property, do not apply, so the profits generated by an artist are dispersed willingly to their immediate family and other members of the communities who are considered part of an extended family.

At least 110 art centers, like Papunya and Lockhart River, are open in Australia and are typically owned and operated by Aborigines. Alone, artists would have a hard time reaching the world beyond their community, but together, through cooperative work efforts, the art centers facilitate the artists' development as well as the distribution of their art. The centers have also organized into four regional larger bodies: ANKAA, Desert, Ku Arts, and UMI Arts. These four peak bodies are advocacy and support agencies for indigenous artists in the various areas of Australia. Each group strives to improve the livelihood of the aboriginal communities and to promote their cultures.

### **Government and Non-government Organization Involvement – Larger support**

The Australian government has also created programs to foster the aboriginal art movement. The National Arts and Craft Industry Support ("NACIS") is a government program that provides direct funding to indigenous art centers with the objective of building these centers into profitable and sustainable operations that produce and distribute works of artistic excellence. The NACIS assists art centers to (1) strengthen governance and business management practices; (2) provide artists opportunities to develop and extend their professional art practice; and (3) provide art workers opportunities to develop their professional skills and experience<sup>21</sup>. The organization's objectives as detailed in the "Indigenous Art Centers, Strategy and Action Plan" states that the organization will reach its objectives through closer coordination between the

federal and state/territory funding agencies. In 2007-08, the NACIS was petitioned for \$17M (AUD) in funding, but only \$7.4 million (AUD) was available, which required the program to selectively allocate its funds<sup>21</sup>. Besides government programs established to support the aboriginal art movement, the Australian government made amends to Australia's indigenous people for its past wrongdoings when Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister of Australia, issued a formal apology, referred to as the "Sorry" speech, in February 2008.<sup>iv</sup>

In the spirit of moving forward, the Australian government selected Manuel Pulido, a2c Gallery Director, as one of seven representatives from North America to visit local aboriginal communities during the summer of 2008. This special program is only in its second year, and the program is intended to promote aboriginal art beyond the boundaries of Australia. The introduction to local artists and art center management will open the door to a2c to trade with these organizations because art centers prefer to only deal with known counterparts or counterparts referred by the Australian government. Art centers hold one of the keys to its success as ethical sourcing of aboriginal art. One of the most significant discussion points with the other delegates and the Australian government during the visit is to be setting standardized policies on authentic/ethical sourcing. Currently, the aboriginal art market does not have mandatory policies to ensure ethical sourcing, but the market will need to address this issue to ensure continued growth of its value.

### **Gallery Involvement - *Ethical sourcing***

Much of the success of the art centers and aboriginal artists comes from the sale of their art in galleries around the world. Without these galleries, there would be little economic growth in these remote regions. Multinational corporations often can have a bigger impact and wield more power than the government in pulling communities from poverty traps. The Pulido's ultimately decided to funnel their energy into their a2c gallery after speaking to Cecilia Alfonso, who suggested doing so would help educate others about the aboriginal community as well as bolster the communities' economic development.

The Pulido's originally purchased select pieces from the community at Yuendumu as personal collectibles, but as they did research, they were inspired to purchase more pieces due to their

emotional reaction to the art. Once the U.S. gallery was established, the Pulido's began getting contacted by local Australian dealers. However, wanting to directly impact the art communities, and maintaining a strong desire to ensure the ethical sourcing of the artwork, the new gallerists sought to deal directly with the aboriginal communities. Only then could they be sure that both the artwork was authentic and that the artists were fairly compensated. The artwork is also an important form of employment for many in the communities as there are jobs for people who simply package the artwork for transport. Unfortunately, the poverty found in most of the aboriginal communities leaves the artists open to exploitation.

Sourcing directly from the art centers can be difficult as galleries from all over the world are trying to do the same. Other galleries are often larger than a2c and are looking to purchase more pieces, and thus, receive more attention from the art centers. a2c built credibility with the aboriginal communities through emails, phone calls, interviews and positive press received by the gallery. Eventually, a2c was able to establish solid relationships with the Australian Trade Commission ("Austrade") in the Northern Territory. Austrade has helped a2c directly source the artists to avoid the black market in aboriginal art. It is important to a2c that the art they purchased was made to celebrate the aboriginal community and was created in the natural settings amongst the community.

Ethical sourcing is necessary to pursue because being impoverished removes the bargaining power that the Aborigines have over their artwork. This market imbalance is often exploited by "Carpetbaggers", exploitative dealers taking advantage of the artists' age, poverty, or medical condition.<sup>v</sup>

Artists have learned to combat the loss of bargaining power by forming communities and, together, through the aboriginal owned art centers, the artists have been able to avoid some of the carpetbaggers. Galleries such as a2c are helping to promote the increasing value of the aboriginal artwork by avoiding the black market and promoting artists appropriately. An artist who sells a painting overseas gains valuable biographical recognition and ultimately a better price for their artwork. A sale at an overseas gallery can be very meaningful, not just in the

direct monetary gain, but also in pride and increased value of the work itself which returns to the community.

**Strategic Considerations** – *suggestions for enhanced value add to local communities*

Art creation and sale has a clear stimulative impact on the aboriginal economy. If nurtured further by outside market participants, this cultural enterprise promises to be a significant economic engine able to lift the community from the cycle of poverty experienced historically. Creating higher levels of income throughout the community, collaboration between the local art centers and their international network of self-interested dealers and collectors promises to create a better life for future generations while preserving indigenous culture.

*Promote Additional Opportunities for Enhanced Quality of Life* - The new currency of the Aborigines is the capture and international distribution of their history in visual form. Galleries such as a2c could increase their contribution to the community's enhanced quality of life by helping to foster the growth of related industry. For example, support of efforts to increase tourism may be an avenue for broader participation among the community in generating revenue. In fact, the Northern Territory reported that in 2001-02, 58% of international and 48% of interstate visitors included aboriginal art or cultural activities as part of their visit, which translates into an estimated \$38 million and \$31 million (AUD) in expenditures on aboriginal art and cultural tours, respectively<sup>6</sup>. By adding additional "jobs", more income is available to the group as a whole and the psychological benefits of work increasingly spread throughout the community to combat many of the social ills.

*Venture Capital* – In this context, venture capital would not simply entail fresh sources of capital, but would also be accompanied by sensitivity to the cultural dynamics of the community. By incenting venture capitalists to the region, who can be true venture capitalists specializing in artwork, or having the Australian government itself acting like one. The Aborigines are in a position where they need the outside assistance, and the venture capitalist would provide the necessary funding for adequate buildings, supplies, support for the artists and educated personnel to utilize their connections to operate the art center until it becomes self-sustainable. Looking at these art centers as potential profit centers may help incent additional funding, and the returns on

aboriginal artwork over the past fifteen years warrants the additional investment. Just as Jeffrey Sachs suggested in his book, “The End of Poverty”, in order for a venture to be profitable, it needs full funding, not partial<sup>22</sup>. Further, as already experienced, facilitating opportunities for foreign investors to “do well” need not be inconsistent with existing governmental efforts to “do good”.

*Focus Governmental Efforts Through Public/Private Partnerships* – Foreign investment married with local government research and policy offers an opportunities for developed countries and large art market participants to further their respective interests while helping close the societal gap between the impoverished Aborigines and mainstream citizens. Currently, the communities are surviving, just barely, on government welfare and the shared profits of the artists. The NACIS will need to find a way to funnel additional money to meet the art centers’ petitioned amounts, and the Australian government itself will have to see this need as well. The growth is evident; it now needs to be fully fostered until the community can stand on its own. As mentioned previously, growth in art sales improves the art center and its community, which improves the well-being of the residents, which improves individual’s health, school attendance, and future outlooks, which will ultimately unlock the poverty trap. Innovative programs and resources from the international marketplace are likely opportunities to combat scarce resources of the local government.

*Enforceable carpetbagger restrictions* – Ethical sourcing of aboriginal artwork is extremely important and has two aspects, stopping the carpetbaggers and incenting the artists not to deal with them. The government acknowledges these aspects provided the topics to be discussed on Mr. Pulido’s delegation trip, but nothing official has been accomplished to date. The question remains is this the gallery or government’s responsibility? Incentives are aligned between the gallery and the government to eliminate carpetbaggers, which should lead to action to prevent the exploitation of artists. The galleries in conjunction with the art centers should establish standardized guidelines for ethical sourcing, and the government should create enforceable laws that will deter carpetbaggers from exploiting artists.

The artists themselves will need to be incented away from the carpetbaggers by being properly funded. The lesser known artists will be the ones that need the additional funding as they are not as well established in the art community. There are discussions of eliminating government welfare, but this tactic should not be done. Instead, there needs to be a better distribution of funds to those without established income. Possibly a government contact within the communities can assist artists with family members in need of medical treatment or other concerns (e.g. addictions) that typically entice the artist to the quick dollar. Educating the artists on what the carpetbaggers can do to the overall value of the communities will also help them understand the impact of their actions over the longer term.

*Education* –The most obvious educational need is that of the aboriginal artist who has little to no formal art training and often lacks formal education of any sort. Educating the indigenous artists about the art market and its movement will benefit them in the art trade as they can begin to refine their art technique and experiment with additional advances.

In addition to educating the artists, the people working at the local art centers also need education. The art centers are the conduit between the aboriginal communities and the outside world, so the individuals representing the Aborigines need to understand the community history as well as how the art market works. Education of this sort will strengthen the art center's sustainability and profitability as well as curtailing the activities of unscrupulous art dealers. One in four jobs in aboriginal communities relies on export as a means of revenue, so an increase in the exportation of aboriginal art would also increase other ancillary job revenue, such as packing/shipping, which in turn generates more wealth to the community.

*Classification of the art* –Bernadette Eggington believes the most crucial form of education is that needing to be provided to the mainstream art world<sup>2</sup>. Most US and international museums label aboriginal art as ethnographic or oceanic as opposed to contemporary, and very few permanently exhibit aboriginal pieces. Ms. Eggington notes that it was disappointing that such a prominent museum as the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC, does not exhibit aboriginal art.<sup>vi</sup>

*Organize with other indigenous communities* - The aboriginal art movement is also directly impacting other industries by transcending art mediums. In 1996, Better World Arts, an Australian company that produces and sources high quality art and handcrafts, created a cross-cultural collaboration between certain aboriginal artists from South Australia and fine hand-knotted rug makers in the Himalayan region of Kashmir. In this business model, the aboriginal artist commissions the production of their artwork onto rugs hand made in Kashmir. This endeavor provides a steady income to the both sets of artists involved, and income is derived from work that is culturally enhancing, which gives strength to traditional ways of life and creativity in both communities. Partnerships such as these will help pull communities out of poverty together. The Aborigines could partner with communities in China who have factory capabilities, and together create tourism products such as mugs with the likeness of aboriginal art that is then sold back to the Australian government. Other avenues such as incorporating the aboriginal art into quilts or wall hanging could be explored. There is a power in numbers and having parties benefit each other will provide increased respect and world exposure.

In summary, the international art world has had a significant impact on the aboriginal art communities and has the potential to continue to pull the communities out of their poverty traps with the support of the Australian government. Given the appropriate resources to abate the issues plaguing the communities such as poor general health, lack of education and general lack of pride in oneself, the aboriginal communities can start to build towards a better quality of life for future generations while maintaining the communities' culture. In the process, the world outside of the communities can begin to learn about and respect what the Aborigines have to offer in terms of culture through art.

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## **Appendix 1: The Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (“HREOC”)**

The HREOC was established in 1986 by the Australian Parliament to lead the promotion and protection of human rights in Australia. HREOC has responsibility for administering federal anti-discrimination and human rights laws; its major functions and powers include:

- investigating and conciliating complaints of discrimination or breaches of human rights
- holding public inquiries into human rights issues of national importance and making recommendations to address discrimination and breaches of human rights
- developing human rights education programs and resources for schools, workplaces and the community
- providing independent legal advice to assist courts in cases that involve human rights principles
- providing advice and submissions to parliaments and governments to develop laws, policies and programs consistent with existing national laws and international human rights agreements
- undertaking and coordinating research into human rights and discrimination issues.

The following statistics are excerpts from HREOC’s 2007 report titled “A statistical overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia”.

### **Where Indigenous peoples live**

	Location of Indigenous peoples by remoteness	
	<b>Indigenous peoples</b>	<b>Non-Indigenous population</b>
Major cities	30.2%	67.2%
Inner regional	20.3%	20.7%
Outer regional	23.1%	10.1%
Remote	8.8%	1.5%
Very remote	17.7%	0.5%

### **Health**

Indigenous peoples' rates of death from chronic diseases expressed as a multiple of the rates in the non-Indigenous population (2000 - 2002)

<b>Chronic disease group</b>	<b>Indigenous women</b>	<b>Indigenous men</b>
Cardiovascular diseases (heart diseases, strokes)	2.2 times the rate of non-Indigenous women	3.0 times the rate of non-Indigenous men
Diseases of respiratory system	3.6 times the rate of non-Indigenous women	3.9 times the rate of non-Indigenous men
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases (inc. diabetes)	10.1 times the rate of non-Indigenous women	7.3 times the rate of non-Indigenous men
Diseases of the digestive system	3.4 times the rate of non-Indigenous women	4.6 times the rate of non-Indigenous men

### **Education**

Highest non-school qualification, percentage of persons aged 18 years and over, 2002

<b>Level obtained</b>	<b>Indigenous peoples (%)</b>	<b>Non-Indigenous population (%)</b>
Bachelor degree	3.7	16.9
Certificate or Diploma	24.1	32.7
Total with non-school qualification	29.0	50.1

## **Appendix 2: Land Rights History**

The pride and profits gained from the artwork has been a stimulus in the aboriginal community in fighting to regain the land that was originally theirs. In 1963, prior to the art movement, the Bark Petition was filed to recognize the land rights of the Yolngu people in the Northern Territory. This was an important first example of the aboriginal community beginning their quest for equal rights and respect in Australia's government. This document was typed on paper but glued to bark with a boarder of traditionally painted motifs. This also shows how the indigenous art was truly a part of everything they did and their self identification.

The aboriginal land rights were finally recognized by the Australian government in The Aboriginal Land Rights Act of 1976, five years after the beginning of the art movement. This Act set up four Land Councils who represented the aboriginal people and organized the financial and sacred land management. The Act has specific procedures for four different aspects of management: mining agreements and laws, funding of Land Councils, entry (road) into aboriginal land and sacred site protection, lastly application of Northern Territory laws and legislation. The aboriginal community has won back almost half of their land in the Northern territory and almost all of their land along the coastline. This has allowed the aboriginal communities to regain their cultural identity while peacefully re-developing the land.

Lastly, in 1992, the landmark Mabo Case made the declaration of terra nullius ("empty land") irrelevant. This provided a recognition of the indigenous pre-existing system of law and recognition of native titles. Although equality in land rights is a work in progress, this decision was a major point in the rights of the aboriginal community. Like the Native Americans in the US, land rights had been a basic right finally returned. The aboriginal art was their land and their land was their art and again it was one.

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Endnotes:

<sup>i</sup> We define “poverty trap” as a chronic situation or condition where a very poor community cannot attain a quality of life beyond mere subsistence without outside intervention.

<sup>ii</sup> Financial Times, July 6, 2007, Tribal Landscapes, Clive Aslet.

<sup>iii</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, this is not the case in the United States. This is a very interesting phenomenon given the U.S. dominance as an international art center. Unfortunately, the matter is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>iv</sup> The speech acknowledged past governmental wrongdoings directed at Aborigines, and the Prime Minister trusts the speech to be the foundation of reconciliation between the indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. The Sorry speech was a result of the “Bringing them Home” report issued by the Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission (“HREOC”) in 1997 that details the government’s participation in the Stolen Generation. The word “sorry” was purposely used throughout Prime Minister Rudd’s speech because the word holds a special meaning in aboriginal cultures. The Prime Minister was quoted “...saying that you’re sorry is such a powerful symbol...powerful simply because it restores respect”<sup>11</sup>. Individuals consulted for this report believe that the growing popularity of the aboriginal art movement forced the Australian populous and government to acknowledge and even respect the aboriginal culture. This led to the desire for reconciliation within Australia, and thus, the government needed to acknowledge its treatment of Aborigines in order for the country to move forward together.

<sup>v</sup> Artists who paint for carpetbaggers do so because they don’t understand the overall market dynamics which give value to their work. They primarily focus on the short-term benefit of upfront cash, which is typically provided in amounts well below fair market value. These dealers will have the artists create many works in a short amount of time (similar to a sweat shop) and then offer a meager price, needed healthcare, or some other token payment. This art is then often sold through online websites with a picture of the artist to show purported authenticity. However, the art created under these duress situations is not considered authentic. True aboriginal art is created amongst the community, often with children around who are listening to the story of the dreaming as the artist paints.

<sup>vi</sup> As the education and gallery collections increase, other advancements can be made to aid in the art critic world. One major element of criticism which keeps the artwork from gallery collections is the use of acrylic paint. This paint is used in the communities because of the harsh environments and lack of adequate storage of the artwork. If there were better buildings with temperature controlled storage abilities, then advanced forms of paint could be used, which would catapult the critique of the art further and increase the gallery involvement in the art. Again, with the creation of this value in art, pride and funds will come as well as general community advances.