

HISTORIC BARKS PART II

Barks, sculpture, mimih spirits, Yawk Yawks, etchings

OPENING: 13 September 2023, 6.30 – 8.30 pm

Exhibition dates: 13 September 14 October

Following our exhibition *Historic Barks* in June 2021, Annandale Galleries are pleased to present *Historic Barks Part II*. Featuring over seventy bark paintings and sculpture, the works have been drawn from the personal collection of Bill & Anne Gregory, the Directors/Owners of Annandale Galleries.

These exhibitions chronicle the experience Bill & Anne Gregory entered into when they began exhibiting Aboriginal barks and sculptures from Arnhem Land in 1995. The relationship with the arts centre *Buku-Larrngay Mulka Arts* continues to this day, starting in 1995 with the exhibition *Big Bark*. The first show with Maningrida Arts & Culture was in 1996 featuring two solo exhibitions of paintings by John Bulunbulun and John Mawurdndjul. Every year from 1995 – 2015 there was an exhibition from each arts centre. At the beginning, there were virtually no galleries in Sydney showing this kind of work as solo exhibitions with comprehensive catalogues. In addition, as Annandale Galleries were never an exclusively Aboriginal Gallery, also specializing in International modern and contemporary art as well as mainstream museum quality Australian art, it was a great opportunity to understand Aboriginal art in the context of its interplay with the mainstream. Many overseas exhibitions were organized by Annandale, particularly in London and Paris as well as art fairs in Madrid and Paris to promote Aboriginal art to a wider audience.

The personal collection was almost exclusively acquired from exhibitions at Annandale Galleries. Most years Bill & Anne Gregory visited NE Arnhem Land both to confirm upcoming exhibitions and to plan for the future. Bill & Anne became friends with many the artists they were representing. An understanding and feel for the country and the stories that inspired this art followed. The collection therefore reflected the exhibition schedule and the artists they promoted at Annandale Galleries. Especially in the early days, many contemporary collectors who did not even buy Western Desert art were converted to these magnificent works and gained a keen enthusiasm, some of them building extraordinary collections over the years.

The criteria for this collection were works that caught the eye or appeared to be innovative. Artists who demonstrated potential, works that were unusual, or works that simply resonated due to an atmosphere of demonstrating something new and different were prioritized. 'Down the road' commercial success was never the aim but rather marking the sea changes that occurred in this kind of art over the years.

Works that evoked passion and excitement were acquired over typical works thought to perhaps have long-term commercial success. Many of the most important artists to come out of Arnhem Land had their first exposure in solo format in Sydney at Annandale Galleries. These include John Mawurndjul, Lofty Bardayal Nadjamerreck, Owen Yalandja, Djambawa Marawili, Galuma Maymuru, and Gunybi Ganambarr. John Mawurndjul is considered the most high profile bark painter ever and in the last fifteen years Gunybi Ganambarr, a two time overall Telstra winner is widely considered as the most innovative artist of his generation. Roughly half of the works exhibited at the retrospective of Lofty Bardayal Nadjamerreck at the MCA originated at Annandale. The retrospective of John Mawurndjul, also at the MCA had over forty works from Annandale exhibitions. Dozens and dozens of works by the above artists now hang in Museum collections in Australia including the National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery NSW, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney and all other State galleries. Museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, The Seattle Art Museum, the Kluge Collection in Pennsylvania and the Levi/Kaplan collection in Seattle regularly acquired work from the outset, and other notable public and private collections around the world have works with Annandale Galleries Provenance.

While it is difficult to part with so many 'old friends' it is the right time to begin the process of de-acquisition of the collection. Bill & Anne Gregory feel that it is time to send these paintings and the stories and culture they depict out into the world. Despite rotating various pieces on a regular basis in their home many have necessarily been mostly in storage for up to three decades. *Historic Barks II & I* consist of nearly one hundred and fifty pieces. It is time to continue sharing the collection with others and see the artworks continue on their way to new homes where others may learn from and enjoy them.

Do not miss this opportunity to view both the chronology and the quality of this art through the unique lenses of passion and experience acquired by Bill & Anne Gregory over nearly three decades.