



Media Release

Embassy of Australia
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Celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures at the Embassy of Australia

The Embassy of Australia presents a new exhibition celebrating Western desert artists titled Yuru- yururla: Women's Painting from Yuendumu. The exhibition comes from Warlukurlangu Artists Aboriginal Association and features 38 paintings by 36 artists.

The exhibition brings together new and recent paintings by Warlpiri women who reproduce stories from their ritual and daily life on vibrant canvases with acrylic paints. The dazzling paintings featured in this exhibition include a core of traditional graphic symbols such as circles, semi circles and lines, meanders and dots, animal and human footprints translated from traditional sand drawings and ritual designs painted on the body or wooden objects.

The Yuru-yururla exhibition will be officially launched by Dr Margo Smith on 9 July 2009 during NAIDOC Week which celebrates the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Dr Margo Smith is Director and Curator of the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection at the University of Virginia and is a leading scholar on Aboriginal art and culture.

The Embassy of Australia, in partnership with the National NAIDOC Committee is offering a free public program during NAIDOC Week. The program includes:

- ☞ Dance performance and talk by internationally renowned Indigenous artist Ken Thaiday (6:00pm, 7 July 2009)
- ☞ Yuru- yururla: Women's Painting from Yuendumu (10:00am – 2:00pm week days, until 28 August, or by appointment 202 797 3383)
- ☞ Introductory Tour of Yuru-yururla by Dr Margo Smith (4:15-5:00pm, 9 July 2009)

The NAIDOC theme for 2009 is 'Honouring Our Elders, Nurturing Our Youth.'

Background Information

Yuru- yururla: Women's Painting from Yuendumu

Yuendumu is a Warlpiri settlement one hundred and eighty miles northwest of Alice Springs in the Tanami Desert.

Women's painting from Yuendumu holds particular significance because until the women from this community started painting, only male artists had been thought to have significant knowledge of the local cosmology know as the 'Dreaming' to paint their stories.

In 1984 when the women of the community wished to buy a new four wheel drive Toyota, they began to paint on canvas. While initially this work was sold to non-Aboriginal friends, it quickly attracted the attention of art professionals and has subsequently attracted widespread acclaim.

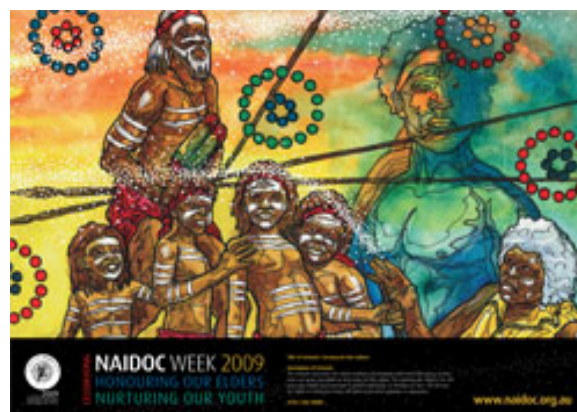
NAIDOC Week

NAIDOC Week will be held from 4-11 July 2009 and strives to raise awareness and celebrate the history, culture and achievements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. NAIDOC originally stood for 'National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee' and was once responsible for organising national activities during NAIDOC Week. Its acronym has since become the name of the week itself.

Today, NAIDOC Week is celebrated by Australians all over the country through cultural festivals, a national poster competition and educational outreach activities.

The week also includes the National NAIDOC Awards which recognise the outstanding contributions that Indigenous Australians make to improve the lives of Indigenous people in their communities and beyond, or to promote Indigenous issues in the wider community, or the excellence they've shown in their chosen field.

For more information about NAIDOC Week, please visit www.naidoc.org.au.



Ken Thaiday

Ken Thaiday is one of the most recognised senior contemporary visual artists and dancers from the Torres Strait Islands, situated off the coast of North Queensland between Australia and Papua New Guinea. A highly respected leader Ken Thaiday is acclaimed for his ability to combine contemporary aesthetics with the cherished traditions of his island culture. The art of dance remains one of the most visible expressions of the dynamic and celebratory cultures of the Torres Strait Islands. Dancers, accompanied by drum beat and song, are elaborately adorned with headdresses, hand-held dance machines and a variety of body ornaments.

A respected leader in his community Ken Thaiday is acclaimed for his ability to combine contemporary aesthetics with the cherished traditions of his island culture. In this sense he is typical of the cultural resilience of Indigenous Australians, who have a long history of ingeniously incorporating diverse ideas, events and materials into their own stories.

Many of Ken Thaiday's dance sculptures have their origins in secret/sacred rituals. The art of dance remains one of the most visible expressions of the dynamic and celebratory cultures of the Torres Strait Islands. Dancers, accompanied by drum beat and song, are elaborately adorned with headdresses, hand-held dance machines and a variety of body ornaments.

Through their dance, the Torres Strait Islander people forge powerful links between material and spiritual worlds. As a member of a professional dance group and as a creator of dance-related objects Ken Thaiday has been able to maintain his cultural identity and at the same time participate fully in the contemporary art scene in Australia.

Ken Thaiday's artistic achievements have been widely celebrated and his work is held in major public collections across Australia and the Pacific region. His successful practice demonstrates how it is possible for active collecting and advocacy by public institutions to occur without compromising the cultural value of traditional objects.

Text courtesy of Queensland Art Gallery