



Media Release

Embassy of Australia
Office of Public Affairs
Washington DC

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
10 June 2008

Contact: Megan Doughty
(202) 797-3237

Unique Indigenous Australian Batiks on Show

A collection of silk batiks by Indigenous Australian artists from the Utopia region will be on display at the Embassy of Australia from 10 June until 29 August 2008.

UTOPIA – A Picture Story showcases a unique body of work drawn from the Holmes à Court collection of art in Perth, Western Australia. These works stand as both a major cultural document, as well as an outstanding group of individual works of art, and they have never previously been exhibited in the United States.

Utopia is a community located approximately 3 hours drive north-east of Alice Springs in Northern Australia. The community is best known for the works produced by its senior women artists, in particular Ada Bird Petyarre, Kathleen Petyarre and Gloria Tamerre Petyarre - all of whose works are featured in this exhibition.

“The women in the Utopia community were introduced to the art of batik in 1977 by educator Suzie Bryce and a Pitjantjatara woman, Yipati Williams. The women developed a distinctive, spontaneous style in which they depicted images of daily camp-life, symbols of ceremony, body painting, personal totems, and stories from the Dreaming,” Embassy of Australia Cultural Director, Jane Scott, said.

While the men of central Australia had become well known for their dot-paintings by the late 1970s, the women artists of Utopia were producing a unique visual imagery that promoted different aspects of traditional Aboriginal culture. In the late 1980s the Utopia women began painting with acrylic on canvas, their techniques and sensibility naturally evolved through painting, yet their style owes much to the initial period of working with batik.

The artwork produced by these women and many other Indigenous Australian artists has become an international art phenomenon. The batiks in this exhibition represent some of the earliest works produced by Australian indigenous artists.

“These works show the origins of Indigenous women’s paintings, story telling, symbols and the connection with their environment that has shaped the indigenous art movement. Their unique vision, technique and skills allow us to view the world from another perspective,” Ms Scott said.

Batik is a method of decorating cloth by applying hot wax to the surface of the fabric as a resistance to dyes. The process is repeated several times, depending on the intricacy of the design and number of colours. The wax is finally removed in boiling water.

The exhibition will be open to the public from 11 June until 29 August 2008, and will be officially opened by the director of the Textile Museum, Mr Dan Walker.

UTOPIA – A Picture Story has been coordinated by the Embassy of Australia Washington D.C. with the assistance of The Holmes à Court Collection, Heytesbury.

For more information, or to arrange a preview of the exhibition, please contact Megan Doughty on 202 797 3237

