

MR TIMMS (1946-2017): A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

Mr Timms was born in 1946 at Police Hole near Foal Creek, an outstation of Bedford Downs, south west of Turkey Creek in the East Kimberley. His parents, Harry and Leanna Timms gave him his Gija name Ngarrmaliny and he spent his childhood on nearby Bow River station, which was established after the war around the time Timms was born by Sam and Maggie Lilley. On the Bow, his uncle Timmy Timms was both the pre-eminent Lawman and Sam Lilly's head stockman. In 1956 the Timms' family moved to nearby Lisadell Station where his father, Harry Timms worked as a stockman and later on his teens Timms began his working life as a stockman. At the age of twenty Timms left Lisadell and worked on many other stations in the region including Texas Downs, as a stockman, fencer and mechanic, returning to Lisadell in 1976 as head stockman. In 1985 with his wife Berylene Mung and their young children, Timms moved to Warmun as the Turkey Creek community was now known, and briefly worked as a gardener at the Argyle diamond mine. In 1986 Timms moved his family to Frog Hollow, an outstation of Warmun established in 1982 by his brother-in law Jack Britten, where Timms worked under the CDEP programme as an environmental health worker and was responsible for general maintenance in the community.

Living at Warmun and then Frog Hollow, Timms was intensely exposed to the events, the ceremony and the painting activity associated with the beginning of the East Kimberley Art Movement. He had worked with Rover Thomas on Texas Downs and George Mung Mung was his father-in-law so he was close to "that Jamanji Mob"; the first painters of the Gurrir Gurrir - Paddy Jamanji, Hector Jandany, George Mung Mung and Rover Thomas.

Waringarri Arts in Kununurra was established in 1986 and the art co-ordinator Joel Smoker visited Frog Hollow regularly to collect paintings from Rover Thomas and Paddy Jamanji, who had begun painting in the early eighties for Mary Macha and Mimi Arts in Katherine. In 1987 Jack Britten began painting at Frog Hollow for Waringarri Arts with Rover Thomas and Paddy Jamanji . In 1988 Waringarri Arts put up a major group exhibition at Hogarth Galleries in Sydney curated by Ace Bourke and Timms, now a man in his early forties with a young family to support was quick to see an opportunity. He asked Smoker to bring him some paints too.

Timms first works on canvas board were completed in July 1989. Smoker thought them "distinctive and well-painted" and because he saw "great potential" gave Timms his first canvases and included him in the next Waringarri group exhibition at the newly opened

contemporary art gallery in Melbourne, Deutscher Gertrude Street. That exhibition 'Turkey Creek: Recent work' in October 1989 was Timms debut, he exhibited two canvases - alongside fifteen works by Rover Thomas, seven by George Mung Mung and ten by Jack Britten. Significantly Paddy Jamanji who was already ill from trachoma only showed one work.

In this way Timms was the last of the first group of Warmun painters and began his painting career as the first artist, Paddy Jamanji was at the end of his. 'Turkey Creek Recent Work' signaled the emergence of the East Kimberley School and Timms was part of it, although he was a generation younger than the other artists.

Timms continued to paint for Waringarri Arts, and they oversaw his participation in group shows in Sydney, Perth and Darwin, and in 1993, his inclusion in 'Images of Power' at the NGV and the major international exhibition, 'Aratajara: Art of the First Australians'. By then Timms had honed his distinctive, elegant, refined and spacious style.

Ever independent, Timms soon branched out and was also painting for Kimberley Art through Warmun Traditional Arts, the private enterprise so-called "art centre" they set up in Turkey Creek. The following year, 1994 Timms had his first solo exhibition with Kimberley Art in Melbourne in their Flinders Lane gallery. Through Kimberley Art, Timms was shown in Chicago and Paris.

In 1995, Timms showed at William Mora Gallery in a Waringarri group show and Kimberley Art brought him to Melbourne to paint and support an ailing Rover Thomas during a painting camp in the Dandenongs with Neil McLeod. Timms was invariably the first to seize on a new opportunity but also the first to detach himself and speak up, whenever he sensed exploitation or experienced unreasonable demands.

In 1994 in Melbourne at Kimberley Art he met artist, gallerist and man about town Tony Oliver who had previously run his own gallery in Fitzroy and had recently returned from the New York art scene, where he had met Andy Warhol. Timms confided in Oliver his frustrations at being paid a pittance - 300 hundred dollars and a second-hand suit - for a months work in Melbourne. They became friends and Oliver undertook to find Timms a better arrangement.

Oliver introduced him to the doyen of Sydney gallerists, Frank Watters. Oliver and Timms shared a studio at Woollahong and Timms expanded his palette to include acrylic paint in primary colours, however he did not diverge from his signature planar

perspective and his finely wrought cartographic style of cryptic notation. Timms was treated in the same way as any contemporary Australian artist and Watters showed him in a solo exhibition in 1997 and alongside Ken Whisson in 1998.

Timms' grandmother had told him the story of Major the Aboriginal bushranger who operated in the Kimberley. After Timms saw Sidney Nolans iconic representation of Ned Kelly's armour, he created his own Ned Kelly works referencing Major in 1996.

Timms important political painting- 'Whitefella- Blackfella' (1999) an embodied sociogram depicting his unvarnished view of where the blackfella stood - at the bottom of the pile - painted at this time shows Timms persistent pragmatism:

"It doesn't matter where you - Fitzroy Crossing, Derby, Broome- all those Aboriginal artists, they don't get much money ... They don't know how much their painting is worth, but I found out."

During this period, at Timms' invitation Tony Oliver made trips to the Kimberley and met other Gija artists and a group began painting together at Crocodile Hole/ Rukan and Bow River/ Juwurlinji. Meanwhile Timms and Oliver promulgated a plan, a dream, to set up their own art centre independent of Waringarri or Warmun Art Centres and free of the exploitation that Timms had experienced first hand from certain private dealers.

Jirrawun Aboriginal Art was incorporated in September 1998 and named by Hector Jandany from the Gija word meaning us together or "all is one at the one place" according to linguist Frances Kofod. Timms was the chairperson and his uncle Timmy Timms, the Gija lawman, the guiding Elder and eminence grise. Jirrawun began a great phase of creativity and empowerment for Timms and many others, including Paddy Bedford and Rusty Peters.

Timmy Timms and Paddy Bedford woke up the story of the massacre on Bedford Downs station, and the Neminuwarlin Performance Group was formed to bring out the tragic saga as a theatrical joonba, 'Fire Fire Burning Bright' in 2000. Jirrawun addressed what Timms called "the hard stories" of the massacre history of the East Kimberley, in a series of major exhibitions 'Blood on the Spinifex', in Melbourne at the Ian Potter Museum and 'True Stories: Art of the East Kimberley' at the AGNSW in 2002/2003. For the massacre stories project, Timms' made a monumental six-panel painting 'Blackfella Creek' which mapped the landscape of Lisadell station and told his grandmother's story and Timms own story:

"White people should know what they did to black people, shot them down. Some believe it, some don't. Some people might understand what happened ... I hope that people will learn to respect our culture not just walk past."

During his Jirrawun association, Timms was part of four important group shows at Raft Artspace - their inaugural show in 2001, 'Four men Four paintings', alongside Paddy Bedford, Rusty Peters and Rammey Ramsay, where again Timms was the bridge between the generations; 'Jirrawun Jazz' in 2003 where Dallas Gold described him as "at once cool and passionate, a sleeping volcano"; Jirrawun Colour in 2008, new work by Timms and Rammey Ramsay and the Jirrawun swansong, 'Last Tango in Wyndham' featuring Timms, Ramsey, Rusty Peters, Phyllis Thomas, Peggy Patrick and Goody Barrett.

The proud Jirrawun model proved brittle and could not survive a three-part attack on its heart - the death of Paddy Bedford, the departure of Tony Oliver and the fallout from the GFC. Timms kept on painting on and off, even returning for a while to Red Rock gallery in Kununurra and his old boss from Waringarri, Kevin Kelly and he contributed to the major art centres combined exhibition 'In the Saddle- On the Wall' in 2015 celebrating the role of Aboriginal stockmen and women in the Kimberley cattle in industry, which toured the country.

Timms was an innovator as an artist who quickly found his own style and stuck with it. He was up for trying new subjects and forging relationships across cultures, but he resolutely remained his own man and never really changed his painting style under what must have been at times powerful influences.

Timms was fearless in warning his artist friends about carpetbaggers and advocating for them: he spoke at the Garma festival and was active in ANKKAA. He drew attention to a fair go for Aboriginal art, present injustices and historical issues. Throughout his almost thirty year painting career he remained a free agent who never stopped painting his country:

"I think about the country where I was walking and camping, all the main waterholes all the camping area. I remember the places where I used to go mustering and I follow them up with my painting"

This solo show, 'Works from the Jirrawun Studio', is an elegy for a lost time and Mr Timms fifth show with Raft and completes an arc of friendship with Dallas Gold began two decades ago during the Crocodile Hole Residency at NTU, now Charles Darwin University in Darwin, before Jirrawun was formed or Raft had begun. It is fitting too, the completion of a promise. In late 2016, not long before he died, Timms rang Gold asking if he could have a show with him, of course Gold said. He understood Timms to mean, I want to come and paint in your gallery and then you can show them. To the last, Timms knew where the main and the best chance was.

Dr Suzanne Spinner_____

Commissioned by Dallas Gold of Raft artspace, Alice Springs for an exhibition, 'Works from the Jirrawun Studio', which Dallas saw as a eulogy for his friend.