

NT VENICE BIENNALE

An immodest Proposal for the 2005 Venice BIENNALE

Marnnyula Munungurr/ MM
Therese Ritchie/TR
Franck Gohier / FG
Gabriel Maralngurra/ GM
or Brian Nywaninga ???

Four artists from the Top End, 2 white, 2 black, 2 men, 2 women.

Born between 1961 and 1968 ie they were under 15 when Land Rights NT 76 came in and now they are 35-to 43 They are saying something new and challenging which they can because there is a certain confidence - in their tradition and their knowledge of contemporary issues.

Two are indigenous, two are #Others born outside the NT, FG and TR live in suburban Darwin and are graduates of the Fine Arts School at NTU , while MM lives at Yirrakala in NE Arnhemland and GM lives at Gunbulunya in the region of Arnhemland closest to Kakadu.

BILLABONG

Connection is the billabong a meeting point benign or tragic everyone needs wants water, how is it shared, negotiated

Therese has remade the famous alluring billabong aboriginal dusky maidens as exotique image putting the white girls into the picture, MM does traditional iconography relating to freshwater and Billabongs. GM lives at Oepelli a traditional camp under a an outcrop beside a beautiful billabong where the original postcard photo might have been taken, FG is looking at relationships in the Kimberley between pastoralists and Aborigines cf Phyllis Thomas, 'Escape' series where the water is refuge cf Waltzing Matilda which is another version of Aboriginal escaping men on horseback who were riding them down, either jump into the billabong and drown, or jump in and swim underwater breathing with a reed to outwit the pursuers.

Billabong is more Top End than waterhole which is more a desert thing and it suggests smaller less permanent body of water- and it feels right with Venice as its on water- need a good catchy name that's easy to say, distinctive, distinctively Australia, time for it to be re appropriated and reattached to its ordinary meaning, Good if it can't be translated into Italian - must stand alone - it refers to the concept of the show rather than the content.

Relations between B and W artists since landrights - both MM and GM are younger artists versed in tradition who have adapted it to contemporary and reflective subjects while still maintaining a traditional practice. Both TR and FG while not born in the NT both did their art training in Darwin and are closely engaged with aboriginal arts business - their own work gets more and more explicit about relationships between and within the society.

Franck and Gabriel are fascinated with contact history, FG says so this is how it all began and who might I have been in this drama, what role would I have played- I can see myself as a redcoat - the uniform's cool and I'm really from somewhere very far away, in the Kimberley series, it is more I would have been a stockman and I could have had Aboriginal mates, but what if I had power been a pastoralist and what if I knew where the bones are piled and what if I'd put them there?? Gabriel is saying I could have been there I could have sold my paintings to those clever people - the Berndts and I would have been amazed to see them both and tell them all about it, and I would have been shocked by their car and did I get to ride in it? What if I had been the clever man who told his stories to Baldwin Spencer- I would have been somebody. Should he have told that Other clever man his stories? What happened because of that? Did he do right to give them away?

While Therese and Marrnyula are looking at contemporary relations where categories are sliding and slipping over each other and stereotypes particularly those constructed for tourism will not hold. Marrnyula shows aboriginal people living as modern citizens - at computer terminals, while in the art making it shows a form of traditional behaviour but it is all art making as business kaltja for sale to tourists and collectors.

No one else is picturing themselves doing it as an industry - the maintenance of the exotic cannot show how its produced en masses for consumption. Aboriginal people engaged in work not on walkabout or mysteriously absent, and the image dominated by the flora, the fauna, the country.

Absence - white artists have tended to paint themselves out of the picture - as if to indicate they have no place or are out of place or they own the place like a deus ex machina. Franck and Therese put themselves in the picture and implicate themselves They take on blame by Franck picturing himself as a redcoat of the garrison that served on Bathurst Island, in other works he sees himself as the White stockman in the Kimberly, part of the scene that included massacres of Aboriginal people.

MM and GM are traditionally trained bark painters fully inducted into the repertoire of stories of their clans and moieties, qualified to paint stories given them by their fathers.

All four artists are working artists who live from their work - TR is a graphic artist and photographer with her own design business , FG runs Redhand, a poster and printing business and works as printmaker editioning art prints by other artists all over the NT, MM runs the Print Workshop at Yirrakala and prints much of the community's output of linoprints. GM has been president of Injalak Art Centre and works producing a range of work sold to tourists. And all of the four artist maintain their own art practice separate from daily work and exhibit regularly when opportunities present. However it is only recently that Gohier and Munungurr have had solo shows, and outside the NT their work is relatively unknown.

NOTE *Rather than say Non-Indigenous, I use the term "Other" to describe these artists, to draw attention to the unique situation in the NT which reverses the anthropological Us and Them. We are the Other and the Indigenous is ubiquitous.

THERESE RITCHIE was born in Newcastle, New South Wales in 1961, came to Darwin in 1981 on the way to somewhere else but stayed on, and graduated BA Fine Arts NTU in 1985 .

FRANCK GOHIER was born in 1968, St Nazaire, Brittany , France and arrived in Darwin aged seven in 1975, graduated BA Fine Arts NTU in 1991

MARRNYULA MUNUNGGURR was born in 1964 at Wandawuy near Yirrkala in North East Arnhem Land. She is a Djapu ,Balamumu woman belonging to the Dhuwa moiety. She is the granddaughter of the great Yolgnu leader, Wonggu and was brought up in one of the most artistically prolific camps at Yirrkala. Her artwork includes bark paintings and ceremonial poles using natural ochres, wood carving, and lino and screen prints. She assisted her father, Djutjadjutja(1935-99) in his sacred bark paintings and since his death she has been painting her own sacred Djapu barks. She trained with printmaker Basil Hall from Northern Editions and is now the printshop manager and the printmaker for the linocut images at Buku Larngay Mulka, the art Centre at Yirrkala, Since her first exhibition in Darwin in 1990 of a suite of bark paintings depicting daily life past and present which was acquired by the ANG, Marrnyula has developed her own secular narrative style which she employs in both barks and prints.

SLIDES

1. Therese Ritchie - Billabong -little white girls among the waterlillies
2. TR - Naked painted white woman
- 3 TR - a skin name with that?
- 4 TR - tourist season shoot
4. Marrnyula Munungurr - Jobs in remote communities
5. MM - How we live today
6. Franck Gohier - Self portrait as redcoat
7. FG - Bathurst Island warning
- 8 FG - White King?? Thunder/Lightning /Rain
9. Gabriel Maralngurra - The Berndts buying a painting
10. G M - Baldwin Spencer and a clever man

more works to come to be commissioned

CURATOR:

SUZANNE SPUNNER is an established playwright (Not Still Lives, Running Up A dress, Dragged Screaming to Paradise, The Inkgata's Wife) and writer on visual and performing arts (Art Monthly, Eyeline, Real Time). She lived in Darwin between 1987 and 1996 and was on the Board of 24 HR ART; the NT Centre for Contemporary Art. Since returning to Melbourne in 1997 she has made twice yearly forays back to the NT, and maintained a watching brief on Contemporary Territory Art both by Indigenous and *Other artists. In 2002/3 she received a VAB New Work Grant to research and commence writing a book, LOOKING BOTH WAYS: Art since Land Rights (NT) 1976.