

Larrakia Dance Group—a group of urban Larrakia, young men and women from Darwin, who have been working with Darwin born dancer Gary Lang to reinvigorate Larrakia dance. There was great poignancy in the dance sequence they performed—the crocodile, sitting in the water and watching boats coming in, followed by a wind and wave dance as they travel onto the beach and the hermit crabs scatter—perhaps a subtle metaphor for the dispossession of the Larrakia when their country became the primary site of white settlement in northern Australia.

The prizes were presented by the Galiwinku dancers, and each winner was honoured with a special dance sequence. Banduk Marika introduced the Galiwinku dancers who performed a Smoking Ceremony to ritually cleanse the dance ground outside the Museum and to make the place safe for what was to follow—performance of The Morning Star Dance, a dance of such cultural significance that it has rarely been performed outside the community. Its ritual weight was evident in every aspect of the performance: the dancers' body paint was elaborate, faces were painted in infill designs, legs and arms ochred, and on the chests and torsos the men had paintings of particular totemic animals and plants; they wore trailing white feather head bands and carried morning star poles—painted sticks with ribands of white feathers. The smoke, the smell of the lit green leaves, the drone of the didgeridoo and the throaty calls of the Songman, the stamp of the dancers' feet on the soft sand engaged all our senses—the power of the dance was palpable to everyone privileged to witness it.

**suzanne spinner**

### ***The Art of Dancing Country***

The opening event of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award has, like the exhibition itself, become bigger and flashier over the fourteen years since it began. Aboriginal dancing has always been part of it, but in its first decade, dancing appeared to be an interesting entertainment for the audience.

The place of dance in the event has changed significantly in recent years to assume a foreground position. The Land Claim process has reiterated the central role of dance in Aboriginal culture; dancing for country is accepted as primary evidence of ownership and affiliation to land. Since the appointment of Jackie Healy as Director of the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory and the securing of sponsorship from Telstra the event has been opened by a Larrakia Elder (the Museum is on Larrakia land) and in recent years the prizes have been presented to the winners in a ceremonial format by Aboriginal dancers.

Richard Barnes Koolpinyah, a Larrakia artist and Elder opened the 1997 Award and introduced the newly formed