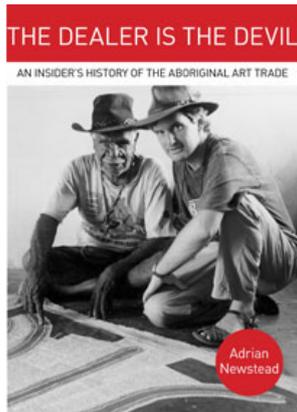


THE DEALER IS THE DEVIL



Follow 4,786 followers G+

The eye-catching cover for Adrian Newstead's book - the young dealer with Abie Jangala in Lajamanu

Posted by **Jeremy Eccles** | 13.02.14

Author: Jeremy Eccles

News source: Review

Adrian Newstead is probably uniquely qualified to write a history of that contentious business, the market for Australian Aboriginal art. He may once have planned to be an agricultural scientist, but then he mutated into a craft shop owner, Aboriginal art and craft dealer, art auctioneer, writer, marketer, promoter and finally Indigenous art politician – his views sought frequently by the media. He's been around the scene since 1981 and says he held his first Tiwi craft exhibition at the gloriously named Coo-ee Emporium in 1982. He's met and argued with most of the players since then, having particularly strong relations with the Tiwi Islands, Lajamanu and one of the few inspiring Southern Aboriginal leaders, Guboo Ted Thomas from the Yuin lands south of Sydney.

His heart is in the right place. And now he's found time over the past 7 years to write a 500 page tome with an alluring cover that introduces the writer as a young Indiana Jones blasting his way through deserts and forests to reach the Holy Grail of Indigenous culture as Warlpiri master Abie Jangala illuminates a canvas/story with his eloquent finger – just as the increasingly mythical Geoffrey Bardon (much to my surprise) is quoted as revealing, "Aboriginal art is derived more from touch than sight", he's quoted as saying, "coming as it does from fingers making marks in the sand". A fascinating insight.

And the book starts thrillingly – a saga of youthful white entrepreneurial ambition in The Kimberley dashed by the realities of Indigenous life out there; Newstead's car full of art prints, hot from the press for signing by the great artists of Warmun, stolen and trashed by petrol-charged hooners in Balgo, the art wilfully dispersed to the four winds and a river-bed; the discipline that had allowed Aboriginal society to survive in the harshest conditions for aeons fatally damaged by the white invaders who didn't even notice a culture all around them as they lived the terra nullius mindset and pushed ever further into Aboriginal Country.

As Newstead notes, it took the elders at Australia's own Auschwitz – Papunya – to reject the final solution, Assimilation, by revealing the visual mnemonics that laid down their law in the form of art that we, the invader could buy and, at last appreciate.

Brought up on demos against the Vietnam War and a fair amount of drug-taking, the young Newstead was all for getting back on the streets to demonstrate for land-rights. But the wise and worldly Guboo Ted Thomas advised differently: "Don't demonstrate; put art on peoples' walls. Art is the new form of ceremony".

Intriguingly, this man of the Southern Forests and lakes was echoed by the wise but less worldly Wandjuk Marika, "the full blood Aboriginal from the top end of Australia", as he puts it himself in his autobiography: "Painting is the new ceremony – and ceremony is always associated with increase. So painting must make money for Aboriginal artists" - which became the creed of the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council in its earliest days when Wandjuk was its Chairman.

This invaluable pre-history (pre-Newstead) is logically linked to the great administrator, 'Nugget' Coombs "grand dream (for remote Australia) of hundreds of small, decentralised homeland communities in which the development of a monetary economy would be based on a combination of small-scale market activities; jobs in cattle or crocodile farming, land management and the production and sale of arts and crafts - all backed by training allowances and welfare payments". "This was never realised", declares Newstead baldly.

The odd thing is that many another observer of the Aboriginal art world thought that this 'dream' was going pretty well in the early 90s when Coombs's prime agent on the ground was the Aboriginal Cultural Foundation, which Newstead seems to have been too busy to examine. Ceremony was its mainspring, with amazing pan-tribal 'dance' festivals organised on Groote Eylandt right through until 1992. But, by never taking off his dealer's hat, I'd argue that Newstead – who certainly notes the arrival of urban/Blak Aboriginal artists, curators and politicians on his patch to replace the Wandjunks and Billy Stockmans at the Aboriginal Arts Board – fails to report the consequences of this. The Board in 1995, for instance, declared that it could see no link between ceremony and art, and therefore defunded the ACF. Could this dominant urban viewpoint also have been responsible for the failure by curators to organise solo shows of great tribal artists at State art institutions apart from the MCA – regretted by

Newstead - and the reluctance to consider any alternatives to the community art centre system that Newstead the dealer increasingly finds so unpredictably monopolistic?

It's precisely that sort of 'big picture' that's missing from a book that delights when Adrian gets down and personal, but which increasingly frustrates when getting lost in the dirt of dealing. Most frustrating for me was the omnipresence of Neil McLeod – though this may be partly the fault of the book's construction. I'd guess that separate chapters in this chronology were tackled in isolation. Which means that the defence of McLeod crops up at least five times – whereas a single chapter devoted to him might have been justified.

McLeod has a history of direct dealings with artists – Rover Thomas, Anguburra and Jack Dale in The Kimberley, the Nganjmirra Family in Western Arnhemland for instance – which has a matching history of getting up other dealers' and gatekeepers' noses. Newstead clearly likes the guy so much, he's gone through pages of diaries and photo files in order to satisfy himself that when McLeod claims a painting was done for him – in the bush or in Melbourne - it probably was. Perhaps Adrian also identifies with McLeod's freewheeling, personal relationships with remote artists? The odd thing is that McLeod himself is producing a book this year, so Newstead's defence may be generous but unnecessary – unless it's taken as part of a wider statement of his own philosophy. We finally get a feeling for that in Chapter 51: the money is fictional; the secondary art market is malign; the gatekeepers of the Aboriginal bureaucracy are blinkered and the dealers are fatally divided!

Oh, and he hates Resale Royalty which is doing as much in the 21st Century to ruin the game as all the 'problems of authenticity' which made the 1990s “a bloody nightmare”. Funny that he makes the perfect case for it when talking about Johnny Warangkula who made more money out of his “late rubbish paintings” after an early board had sold for squillions at auction than he ever did out of his early 'Water Dreaming' masterpieces.

Sadly, we learn far too little about the glories of the art that is the well-spring of this business – even a brief hurrah about little old ladies crying in Japan as they faced the beauty and infinite variety of Emily Knqwarreye's art is soon sullied by the problems that dealers like Newstead encountered of stories about faking and collaboration.

And a defence of the latter based around the perfectly acceptable activities of Andy Warhol and Damien Hirst is just so irrelevant. Those guys are into post-Modern irony; thank god there's none of that in remote Aboriginal art and Newstead should have said so boldly. He hints at the idea that the vogue for selling Aboriginal art as 'contemporary' (and therefore without story) is doomed to failure, but doesn't take the next step of extolling its unique complexity, its essence in ancient stories and map-making, its tactility as noted by Geoffrey Bardon, its collaborative roots and therefore its splendid difference - which some London art critics found so hard to discern recently.

As I said at the beginning, Newstead's heart is in the right place – but his mind is quite blinkered by the difficulties of trying to make a living from an industry that's almost entirely run by amateurs. “Poor communications and lack of commercial experience at both ends of the chain” is as far as he goes – matching some of the conclusions of my 1990s film, 'Art from the Heart?' - which he interprets differently! What he ignores is the lack of art training by most white participants – which surely leads to the lack of confidence that has caused so many ugly fracas between art centre coordinators, dealers and curators.

Which leads me to think that it's time for someone to research a history of the government sponsored marketing company of the 70s and 80s – Aboriginal Arts Australia, or The Company as Newstead calls it – which employed many of the people who went on to become dealers, curators etc in the industry.

And while Newstead has experienced more of this world than virtually any of them, it has to be concluded from his brief and lively bites into its many episodes that he has rarely found time to stand back and look at the bigger picture. Particularly where it comes to Indigenous history. It's pretty hard to take seriously the claim that “The Tiwi are the last descendants of the first wave of Aboriginal migrants to Australia”! Or his equivocal note on Gwion figures in Kimberley rock art, “not being owned by any of the currently existing clans”. Even his conclusion that there were just “four founding members of the Western Desert art movement” (Kaapa Mbitjana, Tim Leura and Clifford Possum and Long Jack Phillipus) reads more like a marketing play than an historical analysis.

I have nine fullscap pages of notes from reading Adrian Newstead's book – so there was plenty for this fascinated observer of almost 30 years to chew on. As one who regretted the investment tsunami that was wished on the art movement in the Noughties, I loved the irony of auctioneer Newstead (at one stage heading up the company that became Menzies Brands) castigating (in retrospect) “the branded collector buying branded artists from branded galleries and auctioneers”. And I appreciated the author's ability to contextualise the rise of Aboriginal art with the changes occurring in Australian society - though his worship of Gough Whitlam for being “the only PM to bring the arts into an election” suggests that the dealer was elsewhere when Paul Keating lifted his game to win the 1993 election on the back of an performative arts launch.

And I was moved by this insight: “Aboriginal culture is as big as an onion the size of Uluru. You can peel off one layer, but profound insight is the preserve of people of high degree who have earned the right to that knowledge. That's why I find it so depressing to see old people who are vast storehouses of knowledge unable to pass on what amounts to 40,000 years of culture to their children; too often it dies with them”.

But how could a dealer – however devilish – permit himself to conclude, “I agree that most of the great art of the painting movement has already been produced”, even if he does then go on to list five community artists who are carrying the Aboriginal flag for the future....Djirrarra Wunungmurra, Daniel Walbidi, Gunybi Ganambarr, Theresa Baker and Christine Yukenbarri???

[Brandl Publishing](#)

Share this: »  [del.icio.us](#) »  [Digg it](#) »  [reddit](#) »  [Google](#) »  [StumbleUpon](#) »  [Technorati](#) »  [Facebook](#)

Contact Details



The Devil sups with Charlie Perkins, politician and Joe Croft, his business partner for many years



A wonderful image of the centenarian Patsy 'Anguburra' Lulpunda - a discovery of Neil McLeod's

Further Research

Artists: [Billy Stockman](#) | [Bobby Nganjmirra](#) | [Christine Yukenbarri](#) | [Clifford Possum](#) | [Daniel Walbidi](#) | [Djirrarra Wunungmurra](#) | [Emily Kngwarreye](#) | [Gunybi Ganambarr](#) | [Johnny Warangkula](#) | [Kaapa Mbitjana](#) | [Long Jack Phillipus](#) | [Patsy Anguburra Lulpunda](#) | [Rover Thomas](#) | [Theresa Baker](#) | [Tim Leura](#) | [Wandjuk Marika](#)

News Tags: [Aboriginal art trade](#) | [Adrian Newstead](#) | [Coo-ee Emporium](#) | [Gough Whitlam](#) | [Guboo Ted Thomas](#) | [Jeremy Eccles](#) | [Neil McLeod](#) | [Paul Keating](#)

News Categories: [Book](#) | [Feature](#) | [Industry](#) | [News](#)

News Archive

- 14.11.15 | [Delicate Nobby Man Comes Home](#)
- 30.10.15 | [Ethical collecting and Indigenous Art in Melbourne](#)
- 28.10.15 | [OVER-PRODUCTION OF ABORIGINAL ART](#)
- 20.10.15 | [Super Art and Write-Off Measures for SMSFs](#)
- 18.10.15 | [TARNANTHI TRIUMPHANT](#)
- 23.09.15 | [DOWN TO EARTH](#)
- 18.09.15 | [DR J.N.GUMBULA](#)
- 18.09.15 | [PUTUPARRI AND THE RAINMAKERS](#)
- 18.09.15 | [SALTWATER IN ISTANBUL](#)
- 16.09.15 | [A MESSAGE FOR MALCOLM?](#)
- 15.09.15 | [Question of Ethics](#)
- 11.09.15 | [TOO MANY FAIRS?](#)
- 04.09.15 | [HISTORY TO BE MADE THIS WEEKEND](#)
- 04.09.15 | [LOTS HAPPENING](#)
- 25.08.15 | [Details of Exciting New Tarnanthi Festival](#)

Advertising



Join our free mailing list

- view featured artworks for sale from your email inbox
- be informed of Aboriginal art events and exhibitions and
- read our regular Aboriginal art features

Want to see what they're like? Have a look at these from our archive:

- [Pat Corrigan](#)
- [Meeting Emily Kngwarreye](#)
- [The Courage of a Few and the Backing of a Nation](#)

Email:

Sign up now!



As a signatory to the Indigenous Art Code we are committed to ethical and transparent business dealings with Indigenous visual artists and abide by the standards set out in the Code.

NEWS CATEGORIES

- [Event](#)
- [Art Fair](#)
- [Auction](#)
- [Conference](#)
- [Festival](#)
- [Lecture](#)
- [Other Event](#)
- [Reception](#)
- [Exhibition](#)
- [Asia](#)
- [Australia](#)
- [Europe](#)
- [North America](#)
- [Online](#)
- [What's on?](#)
- [Industry](#)
- [Art Prize](#)
- [Feature](#)
- [Newsletter](#)
- [OBIT](#)
- [Posts](#)
- [Top 200](#)
- [Videos](#)
- [News](#)
- [Blog](#)
- [Book](#)
- [Magazine](#)
- [Media](#)
- [Newspaper](#)
- [Writers](#)

News Tags

- [abie loy kemarre](#)
- [aboriginal art at auction](#)
- [aboriginal art market](#)
- [adam hill](#)
- [albert namatjira](#)
- [alice springs](#)
- [auction](#)
- [auction market](#)
- [barbara weir](#)
- [clifford possum](#)
- [clifford possum tjapaltjarri](#)
- [danie mellor](#)
- [daniel walbidi](#)
- [darwin](#)
- [darwin art awards](#)

- [dennis nona](#)
- [dorothy napangardi](#)
- [emily kame kngwarreye](#)
- [emily kngwarreye](#)
- [eubena nampitjin](#)
- [fiona omeenyo](#)
- [freddie timms](#)
- [george tjungurrayi](#)
- [george ward tjungurrayi](#)
- [gloria petyarre](#)
- [gulumbu yunupingu](#)
- [helicopter tjungurrayi](#)
- [indigenous art at auction](#)
- [indigenous art market](#)
- [indigenous artists royalties](#)
- [jean baptiste apuatimi](#)
- [Jeremy Eccles](#)
- [john mawurndjul](#)
- [johnny warangkula tjupurrula](#)
- [judy napangardi watson](#)
- [judy watson](#)
- [julie dowling](#)
- [kathleen petyarre](#)
- [kitty kantilla](#)
- [kudditji kngwarreye](#)
- [lockhart river](#)
- [lofty bardayal nadjamerrek](#)
- [makinti napanangka](#)
- [minnie pwerle](#)
- [naata nungurrayi](#)
- [ningura napurrula](#)
- [paddy bedford](#)
- [papunya tula](#)
- [queenie mckenzie](#)
- [regina wilson](#)
- [resale](#)
- [resale royalty rights](#)
- [richard bell](#)
- [ronnie tjampitjinpa](#)
- [rosella namok](#)
- [rover thomas](#)
- [royalty rights](#)
- [sally gabori](#)
- [samantha hobson](#)
- [secondary aboriginal art market](#)
- [secondary art market](#)
- [telstra](#)
- [telstra art awards](#)
- [telstra national aboriginal and torres strait islander art awards](#)
- [tommy watson](#)
- [turkey tolson tjupurrula](#)
- [walangkura napanangka](#)
- [warlimpirrnga tjapaltjarri](#)

- [Home](#)
- [Gallery Sales](#)
- [News](#)
- [Valuations](#)
- [Ethics](#)
- [Authenticity](#)
- [Copyright](#)
- [About](#)
- [Contact](#)

 Like 4.9K people like this. Be the first of your friends.

[News Home](#) [Search](#) [News exhibitions events](#) [Industry Corner](#) [Writer Profiles](#) [Go to Gallery](#) [AAD Home](#)
[Art Prize](#)[Feature](#)[Newsletter](#)[OBIT](#)[Posts](#)[Top 200](#)[Videos](#)

[Suggest News Story](#) [Feedback](#) [Advertising](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Disclaimer](#) [Copyright © Aboriginal Art Directory News 2016](#)