

Desert Lake: The Paruku Project Collection CAE1302

Introduction/Abstract

The Paruku Project was a 2-year multi-team effort that included scientists, artists, and writers working in one of Australia's most remote Aboriginal desert communities to assess its environmental and cultural conditions, and then to design cross-cultural and transformational responses. Materials include Aboriginal paintings, works by white artists who worked alongside their Aboriginal counterparts, and a set of 11 collaborative screenprints, correspondence, manuscripts, journals, and printed ephemera.

Biographical Note: Mandy Martin

Mandy Martin was born in Adelaide in 1952, and completed a Diploma of Fine Art at the South Australian School of Art in 1975. She has had solo exhibitions in Brisbane, Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne, at the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane; Newcastle Regional Art Gallery, NSW; the Drill Hall at the Australian National University, Canberra and internationally at the Austral Gallery, St Louis in the United States. Her work has been included in group exhibitions at the National Gallery of Australia, the National Gallery of Victoria, Art Gallery of New South Wales, and the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Martin was awarded the John McCaughey Prize by the National Gallery of Victoria in 1983, the Hugh Williamson Art Prize by the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery in 1985, and the Alice Prize in 1990. She was awarded fellowships from the Arts ACT Creative Arts in 2001 and the Land and Water Community in 2002. Martin has lectured at the Canberra School of Art at the Australian National University since 1978, where she serves as an adjunct professor. Her work is held by the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; Artbank, Sydney; Parliament House, Canberra; the Australian War Memorial, Canberra; several regional and university collections and internationally by the Guggenheim Museum, New York. Along with her husband Guy Fitzhardinge, she has run several art-and-science projects in the field, including ones at the Cadia Gold Mine in New South Wales, in the Desert Channel country of Queensland, and the Paruku Project in Western Australia.

Biographical Note: Dr. Guy Fitzhardinge

Dr. Guy Fitzhardinge is a pastoralist (rancher) who manages several properties in New South Wales and Queensland. He has been involved in various projects to develop sustainable ranching techniques and to improve the ecology of the semiarid regions while simultaneously nurturing sustainable rural communities. Since its inception, he has participated in the Australian Landcare movement, a program to develop more sustainable land management practices. Fitzhardinge has also served on the board of Bush Heritage Australia, a conservation organization that grew during his tenure from a staff of nine and about seven small properties to a staff of nearly 70 and 34 properties totaling almost two million hectares. He is chairman of a trust set up by the PEW Environmental Trust and The Nature Conservancy to fund land-management work by a number of indigenous communities in remote Arnhem Land in far northern Australia. He is also a governor of World Wildlife Fund Australia. In addition to these conservation activities, Fitzhardinge has also played major roles in the red meat/beef industry in Australia. He is currently the chairman of the Beef Genetics Cooperative Research Centre, an organization with 17 partners that works with the USDA, several U.S. universities, and various Canadian institutions to carry out all the genetic research for the beef industry in Australia. His Ph.D. dissertation done at Australian National University examined the role of landscape art in the development of environmental values among pastoralists in New South Wales.

Scope and Content

Paruku is the region surrounding what white people call Lake Gregory, a terminal desert lake in remote Western Australia. The ancient shoreline of Lake Gregory contains what may be the oldest sites of continuous human cultural production in the world (50,000 years+). Its cultural and environmental values have led to the declaration of Paruku as an Indigenous Protected Area.

The Paruku Project was a 2-year multi-team effort that included scientists, artists, and writers working in one of Australia's most remote and poorest Aboriginal desert communities to assess its environmental and cultural conditions, and then to design cross-cultural and transformational responses. The project was conceived of by Australian painter Mandy Martin and conservationist Guy Fitzhardinge, and aided by scientist Steve Morton, artist Faye Alexander, and artist/writer Kim Mahood, and funded by Australia's national science agency. The archive and artworks produced fit within in the Museum's rubric for the Art of the Greater West, with obvious links to Native American, art and science, and art + environment.

The project produced more than 100 artworks in 2012, of which 37 works were curated by CA+E Research Fellow John Carty for the Archive Collections. The materials were first exhibited at the Araluen Art Centre in Alice Springs in March 2013.

Materials include 20 paintings by Aboriginal artists, a set of 11 collaborative screenprints, and 6 works by white artists who worked alongside their Aboriginal counterparts. The archive also includes correspondence, manuscripts, journals, and printed ephemera.

This archive is currently in process.