

Yangupala Tjuta Waakarinyi, Many Young People Working

Anne Thompson, 11 July 2015

Speaking up at Ceramics Triennale 2015, ANU

Stepping Up: Your role in the future – Social responsibility

In conjunction with Ernabella Arts represented by Sabbia Gallery, exhibiting Yangupala Tjuta Waakarinyi, Many Young People Working at Sabbia Gallery, Paddington (25 June - 11 July) and touring to the Australian National Botanic Gardens, Canberra (4 - 12 July)

Hello and thank you for having us here today. I am Anne Thompson, my first language is Pitjantjatjara, but I will talk today in English, about Pukatja Community, Ernabella Arts and the ceramic studio, which is now known as Pukatja Pottery. I am here with Lynette Lewis, Rhoda Tjitayi and Tjimpuna Williams - we all work in the ceramics studio at Ernabella Arts.

Ernabella Arts is on the APY Lands – Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands. This is, the Land that belongs to Anangu, the people who speak Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara. Under the Land Rights Act of 1981, this land belongs to Anangu. My father was one of the people who fought for our Land Rights. I have four sisters, and we were grown up on our homeland. We went to Kenmore Park School, and Ernabella Anangu School, and we learnt to read and write in English there. From our parents, and also other family, like my aunty, my father's sister, we learnt about our country and we spent a lot of time out bush.

I love the Lands. Anangu are connected to the land, the sky, the trees, the ground. My sisters and I grew up knowing that we owned our land Anangu way. But this year has not been a good year for remote Indigenous communities, and it is important that people know about the strong work we are making in our art centres, and the role of art centres in maintaining culture and community.

Ernabella Arts is an Indigenous owned and run art centre where people work in many ways such as ceramics, painting, punu (timber) and tjanpi (natural fibre weaving). The art centre was founded in 1948 and is the oldest Indigenous Art Centre in Australia. The building the art centre is in was once the mission kitchen. Our elder women like Niningka Lewis and Tjunkaya Tapaya worked in the building in those days and still work in the building now that it is an art centre. The building has been part of their lives for decades, through all its changes.

One of the most recent changes was that in 2003, the long room which had been used for screen printing, was turned into a ceramic studio. This was done with the three main aims – creation of beautiful artworks, passing down of cultural knowledge through art, and employment for young people. The ceramic studio was made for every artist to work in, from 12 years old to 70.

The first works done, before we had our own studio, were on blank plates made and fired at the Jam Factory in Adelaide. It is like when artworkers make the canvas for people to paint on, but instead of canvas, they were plates. We have kept working in a similar way – people at Ernabella Arts are not pottery people in the way a lot of people here today are. For us, the number one thing, the most important part, is the story and the drawing. The history – ara iritja, old stories, tjukurpa – law and culture, walka – designs, that is the number one thing for us. The pots are like canvas kutjipa – a different canvas, a 3D canvas.

Pukatja Community is unique on the APY Lands, in that both the school and art centre have well equipped ceramic studios, with kilns, pottery wheels, slab rollers and extruders. After school and in school holidays, Pukatja Pottery is filled with young children wanting to learn how to throw on the wheel, and to draw on tiles and cups in the ceramic studio. They are looking at their parents and grandparents, aunties and uncles, and they are wanting to be part of what happens in the pottery

studio. Children of all ages are wanting to learn to throw pots on the wheel themselves.

We see that school age children love coming into the ceramic studio. Art centre staff organise school holiday programs for kids. We have had work experience visits by graduate students from ANU, who work with children in classes at the Art Centre.

At the direction of the Board, staff also work to encourage young people to come into the art centre when they have finished their education. There are not many jobs in our community, there are not enough jobs for everyone finishing school each year, and the art centre is important for this. The art centre has 5 Anangu staff and 2 piranpa – whitefellas – on staff. We are the only place in community which employs more Anangu than whitefellas, and the art centre is also the only place which is Anangu owned and run. The art centre is incorporated, and staff work to the all-Indigenous board.

The board and all the members are looking around and seeing there is not much for young people to do in community when they have finished school. This is why it makes older people happy to see children coming into the ceramic studio and working with the adults. Although our exhibitions are successful, our business is a not for profit. Money is spent on things which are important to the board and members, but don't make income, such as staff spending time teaching children pottery.

In 2011 Tjimpuna and Ruth started doing one morning a week with the senior girls class, teaching them ceramics. Most of the class had only done tiles before, so while doing very basic coil built forms they made some lovely work. This program has two aims – cultural maintenance and creation of a pathway from the school to the art centre. As the school has a ceramic studio this means clay is the first medium many young people are working in. Marceena Jack is the granddaughter of Ernabella Arts chair, Rupert Jack. She was in Tjimpuna's pottery class at school and

has work in our exhibition with Sabbia Gallery at the Botanic Gardens in Canberra.

There was no pottery at the school when I went there. Everyone thinks the school kids are lucky now, to have the pottery. There they are learning to make as well. We did not learn that at school. For older people we have workshops, visitors like Janet DeBoos, make the forms for tjilpis and pampa – older men and older women - to draw on.

Our drawings are inside us, they are part of us in the same way we are part of this country. Everyone works differently but we are all putting down our country and our stories.

The art centre is important to the community, as a place of cultural maintenance, employment, and income. There are people in government who don't know remote communities well, or haven't been to one, and want them to close. The way we live isn't a lifestyle choice it is our way of life. If you take it away from us we will be lost - imagine where would we go and what would we do? I think the government needs to think very carefully because I couldn't live anywhere else. Anangu need to live on their own country. My cousin Derek can draw his country from his mind. He doesn't need a photo or to be there, it is part of him. When he was in China, people would come to watch him drawing on pots in the blue Chinese colour. He drew Atila (which is Mt Connor near Uluru, where my father was born) from his mind. The people at the big pot factory were impressed that he could put down landscape without using any photos or images. But this is not strange to Anangu. We are following the steps of our grandparents, they left the mark for us to follow. What we are doing now is what they taught us. So we need to do the same thing for the generations coming behind us. This is our responsibility.

With each generation, life should be improving. People growing up now are learning two ways, living two ways. In Pukatja we have mobile phone reception, wi-fi, digital television, ipads, all

the technology and Anangu children are using these and learning more about the rest of the world than we have known before. Everyone has Facebook and we use it to connect up and keep in touch with families and friends. We put photos of our work on Instagram. But we also want to keep some of the old ways, and this is where the art centre is important to us.

We have strong law and culture, and this tells Anangu how to live. Our ways still remain the same, it never changes. Our law, our culture and the way we live – we would never want any of this to change. It keeps us strong.

Anangu responsibility is to maintain our land and our culture, to keep them strong and pass them down to the next generations. The art centre is a place belonging to and run by Anangu, and it enables us to do this.

Anangu have had mentoring in place for thousands of years. Our traditional way of learning is different, it doesn't involve writing and reading but watching and observing. To learn how to do pottery, we invite different people every year to come and teach us something new. Since Ernabella Arts first started working in ceramics, we have always worked together with people from outside community, and for this reason we often talk about *Tjungu Warkarintja* – working together.

We have worked a lot with people from outside the Lands - Kirk Winter, Simon Reece, Joey Burns and Ben Carter have done men's workshops. We have worked with people from Canberra – Janet and Greg at ANU, and some of their students like Lucas and Gabs. Everyone has taught us something about ceramics – Janet showed us how to get the red earth – the terra sigilatta that we have used on our pots.

But how we work together, is that these people are helping us make our ideas work in clay. They give Ernabella artists practical, technical help, especially the young people with their making. They are generous with their technical skills and knowledge.

Anangu have social responsibility, and Piranpa who come to visit us at the art centre have social responsibility too. We have lots of people wanting to work in ceramics at Ernabella Arts, wanting to come and see the art centre. Piranpa have a responsibility to respect that things are Anangu way on Anangu Land. We can't share everything. People who come to visit can help with the technical side but they can't touch the tjukurpa side.

When we are making artworks, and getting help with making pots, the story is not a collaboration. I could only share the telling of my story with other Anangu women who hold that story. Anangu can work along family lines – the story being put down is a shared one, and this is a good way for culture to be passed on to generations. It is our responsibility to keep that story going, and everyone's responsibility to respect that the story is sacred and not for sharing with all the outside world.

Ernabella is well known for the 'Ernabella Walka' – a word meaning design, marking or pattern. Tjukurpa is a word which can translate as story, or maybe law. At the beginning of the craft room, Ernabella women, who worked first on weaving rugs, and later silk screening and batik, would do patterns. No-one would do law, because it was not for travelling to other places. When canvas was first introduced at Ernabella, people put down walka. Slowly, in the late 1990's and into this century, Anangu have put down a small part of their tjukurpa, realizing that non-Anangu cannot 'read' these artworks in the way Anangu can.

Artists working in ceramics do a mix of stories, tjukurpa, walka and landscape. Each family holds different stories which they are passing down. People have to 'own' a story to tell it, and, I am putting this very simply, ownership also relates to where you and your ancestors were born.

Living in a remote community is not a lifestyle choice. Thanks for coming and listening to me talk about Anangu way and the importance of the way we live. Our art is everywhere in the land and we work in the art centre to keep this strong. Once again thank you for coming and listening. Palya.