

On the possible role of the Aboriginal Arts Board in the marketing of Art from Yirrkala

An introduction by its author Howard Morphy

I wrote this report in 1975 soon after my return from my initial period of fieldwork at Yirrkala in Northeast Arnhem Land in Northern Australia. The fieldwork was undertaken for my doctorate at the Australian National University and was made possible by a grant from the then named Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. The Deputy Principle of the Institute was Robert Edwards who became the first general manager of the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council. My research was on the art of the Yolngu people in its contemporary context (Morphy 1991). Since the establishment of the mission at Yirrkala in 1935 Yolngu had used their art as a means of engaging with outsiders: as a source of income and a means of persuading others to understand their system of values and respect the nature of their beliefs. The manufacture of art and craft for sale was — and remains — an integral part of their world and is not easily separated from other areas of the life of the community. Bob Edwards suggested that I should write a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Science and the Arts, based on my experience working at Yirrkala. In my submission I drew attention to the very different markets with which Yolngu art production was engaged, ranging from the general tourist market to the emerging market for Aboriginal fine art. I argued that it was important to recognise the differences between these markets and to ensure that a stronger relationship was developed between the context of production and the marketing of the art. I argued that it was important to ensure that those involved in the purchasing of art and craft locally in the mission context were aware of the complex nature of the global art market in order to ensure the long-term growth and development of regional fine art production. I argued that the Aboriginal Arts Board itself might take on the role of acting as artists' agents for remote communities, closing the distance between the artists and the market. Many of the proposals I put forward were in harmony with the direction in which Edwards and the Aboriginal Arts Board were moving. In the following years support was provided for the development of Aboriginal art centres and the employment of support staff, as well as for initiatives in the marketing of art nationally and internationally (Myers 2002). These initiatives played an important role in sustaining the industry during its developmental stage. After writing the report I returned to Yirrkala to undertake a further period of fieldwork. I arrived to find that the mission store, which had been the centre of the local business, had ceased to purchase art and craft. The artists had lost their main source of income. One of my recommendations to the Senate Committee had been that works destined for the fine art market should be purchased at source and then sold through exhibitions in the capital cities at gallery prices, with the difference returned to the artists after costs had been recovered. The demise of the mission enterprise encouraged me to apply to the Aboriginal Arts Board for a grant to purchase artworks in order to sell them at an exhibition to be held on my return to Canberra, both as an experiment to test the feasibility of such a marketing operation and to carry the artists

over a difficult period. The Arts Board supported the project and the venture proved to be a success (Morphy 2009)

Morphy, Howard 1991. *Ancestral Connections: Art and an Aboriginal System of Knowledge*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Morphy, Howard 2009. "It's all got meaning ... its own story" Art from Yirrkala in the Australian National University's collection', In Claudette Chubb and Nancy Sever (eds) *Indigenous Art at the Australian National University*, pp 103-27. Melbourne: Macmillan

Myers, Fred R. 2002. *Painting Culture: The Making of an Aboriginal High Art*. Durham NC: Duke University Press

Based on data obtained by H & F. Morphy

Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Science and the Arts 1975

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Aboriginal Arts Board in the
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The purpose of this submission is to suggest ways in which the Aboriginal Arts Board can assist with the production and marketing of craft from Yirrkala, Northern Territory. Many of the suggestions made will apply equally to the craft industries of other communities along the Arnhem hand coast, though each also faces problems peculiar to its own situation. The information on which this submission is based was obtained by Frances Morphy and myself from Aboriginal artists, mission staff, field staff and members of the Aboriginal Arts Board and other people involved with the marketing of Aboriginal art. Frances Morphy and I spent nine months in Yirrkala during 1974-75 engaged in anthropological research focusing on the traditional and present day artistic systems. I also spent some time at Yirrkala in 1973 when I visited several Arnhem Land settlements with the Rev. Edgar Wells, a former superintendent of Milingimbi and Yirrkala missions.

The submission is structured in the following way: The present production and marketing system 'at Yirrkala is discussed in detail and areas of weakness are pointed out. As

a conclusion certain ways in which the Aboriginal Arts Board could be of assistance to the people of Yirrkala in increasing the profitability of their production are suggested.

Reference will be made after each suggestion to passages in the preceding text which are relevant to it.

The development of the marketing of craft at Yirrkala up to 1970 has been summarised by Nancy Williams (1975). In this paper she shows that although earlier attempts were made by missionaries to develop a craft industry, the industry was not put on a systematic basis until the arrival of Doug Tuffin in the early 1950's. The earlier attempts notably that by Chaseling in the late 1930's were important in leading to the establishment of a market. The majority of paintings sold by Chaseling were purchased by museums in the Southern States. Shortly after their arrival in the Australian Museum some of these early Yirrkala bark paintings were reproduced in a museum publication: *Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art* (McCarthy). This was the first widely read popular publication on Aboriginal Art. The importance of this step in leading to the initial acceptance of, and ultimately to the demand for Aboriginal art by purchasers in the Southern States should not be underestimated.

Williams (1975) publishes figures which show the increase in the sale of art during the period 1954-1970. In 1954 the gross income from craft was \$260, of which approximately \$173 was paid to the artists. By 1970 these figures had risen to \$22,217 and \$16,662 respectively. According to Williams the increase in demand for the art began in 1964. Subsequent to 1970 a further increase has occurred both in the demand for craft and in the prices charged by the mission store. In the period 1970-74 the income derived from art by the Yirrkala community was in the region of \$30,000 per annum, and on figures given me by the craft store manager it is possible that the present return to the community is closer to \$100,000. The recent increase is due on the one hand to an increased demand from the Southern States and the establishment of a strong local market associated with the growth of Nhulunbuy, and on the other hand to an increase in the production of craft associated with the development of outstation economies. Outstation communities consist of people who have moved away from Yirrkala to establish villages in their own clan territories 60-200 miles away from the mission.

The continuing development of a strong craft industry is vital to the future of the Yirrkala community. As was the case in the past much of the income derived from craft is used for subsistence purposes: for the purchase of food and clothing from the mission store and from Nhulunbuy. However, the development of Nhulunbuy and the growth of outstation communities have both led to an increased demand for goods and services. Nhulunbuy by providing access to a wide range of goods not previously available, many of which (e.g.

radios, refrigerators) are considered essentials by Europeans living in the area, has in effect changed the definition of subsistence. Outstations, because they are so far away from the mission and the mining town, require at least one operational four-wheel drive vehicle, in order to develop their economies fully and to cater-for emergencies (e.g. illness). The purchase of vehicles is one of the main reasons given for saving a portion of the income derived from craft production. (The purchase of a vehicle because of the expense involved is likely to be a co-operative venture in which members of a number of families participate).

A craft industry is of particular importance because it capitalises on skills which are already present in the community, requires virtually no capital outlay, enables all members of the community to participate in the production system and perhaps most important of all because the production is already largely controlled by the Aboriginal people. These factors are even more relevant in the outstation context than they are in the mission. At present the outstations offer no paid employment opportunities other than craft production. As the people wish to develop industries over which they have as much control as possible, craft is clearly the best industry to begin with.

The Production System.

The majority of craft produced at Yirrkala is the result, of co-operative effort. Rarely will one person complete all stages of-the production of an artefact from the collection of the raw material to the adding of the finishing touches without the assistance at some stage of a friend or relative.

The majority of craft produced at Yirrkala is manufactured by women and with a few exceptions all women above the age of fifteen participate in the craft industry some time during the week. Even women with full-time jobs in the school, mission shop or mining town tend to do craft work in their spare time. Men also play an important role in the craft industry, especially married middle-aged men who produce the bulk of the large high valued bark paintings and carvings. Some younger married men also work full-time producing arts and crafts, the majority, however, play only a minor role in the industry.

The art and craft produced at Yirrkala can be divided into three main categories according to artefact type and the medium employed:

- (1) bark paintings
- (2) carvings
- (3) traditional women's craft.

A second division will be suggested later which relates to the value of the object produce and which cross-cuts these categories.

(1) Bark paintings - Bark paintings produced in Yirrkala vary in size between 36 square inches to 20 square feet and show equal variation in their content and technical competence. Until the early sixties bark painting was an exclusively male activity. Since then women have played an increasingly significant role in bark painting production until at the present day the majority of bark paintings produced are at certain times of the year painted partly or entirely by women. Bark paintings can be divided into two main types disregarding for the time being the attributes of size and technical competence.

The first type of bark painting to be discussed are those done by initiated men who are recognised as leading artists by the Southern States Art market. These paintings are either derived from traditional designs employed in semi-sacred or sacred religious contexts or are representations of cultural or mythological themes particularly associated with the artist and his clan. The second type of paintings are those done by women and young men who are not recognised as named artists by the art market. These paintings are not likely to represent designs used in religious contexts, though their content is constrained to a considerable extent by the totemic system. The paintings usually consist of representations of animals which belong to the artist's clan or to his mother's clan. The distinctive clan designs belonging to each clan are usually absent and the background to the paintings is uniformly infilled with cross-hatching.

The situation is obviously not as clear-cut as I have characterised it above. A few women sometimes produce paintings in the first category, and young men as they gain in status within their own culture obtain rights to painting increasingly more sacred/semi-sacred paintings and eventually gain recognition as individual artists in the wider art market. Moreover, the major artists frequently produce small paintings which would fall into the second category. However, although there is a great deal of flexibility and artists paint different kinds of paintings at different times two things remain constant. One is that the vast majority of art produced at Yirrkala is anonymous: only a handful of artists, are recognised as named individuals by the Southern market and none of these are women. The second is that the two broad types of art defined above would be recognised as distinct by the people of Yirrkala and are valued differentially.

Sacred designs are the property of the patrilineal clans or segments of those clans. An individual does not have the right to paint all the designs of his clan, and to paint any of them a young man must first of all have permission from older members of the clan. Each clan decides which of its paintings it will allow to be released for sale as commercial bark paintings and no clan has released more than a small proportion of its total corpus of art. Clan designs are seen as being directly linked with land ownership and are in themselves intrinsically valuable. The designs are in a sense the most valuable property belonging to a

clan, and artists expect bark paintings which represent these designs to fetch considerably more money than those which do not.

Paintings of type two are often called store paintings or 'rubbish paintings' by the artists. These terms are no reflection on their aesthetic or technical merit, but simply refer to the fact that the paintings are produced for sale at the store and that the designs do not in themselves possess any intrinsic value. The particular composition may be the invention of the artist and he will be quite happy to say so. In the case of the paintings, containing clan designs, the designs were determined a long way back in the history of the clan.

(2) Carvings - The majority of carvings (well over 90%) are done by women. In the majority of cases women produce a large number of carvings at the same time, often working in groups with individuals within the group specialising in different aspects of the production process. On the whole women produce carvings that are less well formed and smaller than the men's carvings. These carvings are described by the storekeeper as bread and butter carvings which reflects both a qualitative judgement and is at the same time a reflection on the way in which the money obtained for-them is used. Some men also produce carvings which fall into this category, others produce carvings that fetch considerably more money. These men are usually recognised as good carvers (e.g. Motitjpuy, Watjinbuy and Markarakara). The carvings produced by these individuals are larger, more elaborate and more varied in subject matter than women's carvings. The most common subjects include carvings of crocodiles, human figures, hollow log coffins and birds. Although on the whole neither men nor women produce sacred carvings for sale, the right to produce carvings of certain animals is restricted to members of particular groups or rather individuals with particular clan affiliations. Certain objects, for example, carved and painted didgeridoos, do not fit into this classification. The didgeridoos are produced in all sizes from one foot to six foot by both men and women. They are one of the most popular artefacts and a ready market exists for them. Although the majority of large highly priced didgeridoos are produced by men, this is not exclusively the case and the division between men's and women's work is not nearly as well-defined as is the case with other carvings.

(3) Traditional Women's Craft - Traditional women's craft as represented by artefacts offered for sale in the Yirrkala store consists almost exclusively of woven objects. The main artefacts produced include women pandanus mats, string and pandanus bags and European style coil baskets made from pandanus. The baskets are an introduced item of material culture, the technique and style of manufacture being taught to the people in the early days of mission contact. They are included in this category because the technique of preparing and dyeing the pandanus is traditional and because they were one of the first artefact types produced for sale.

Weaving mats and making dilly bags is an extremely time-consuming task. The collection, preparation and dyeing of the raw material has to be accomplished before weaving begins. A large mat will take longer to make than a large bark painting and twenty or thirty small carvings could be completed in the same length of time. Today woven work is produced by a few middle-aged and old women. Young women usually say that they do not know how to make the mats and dilly bags, though traditionally, this was a task performed by women of all ages. There has been a recent increase in the production of mats and bags as a consequence of the outstation movement. The raw materials are readily available at the outstations and less time has to be spent collecting them before work can commence.

A large number of artefacts that were traditionally made by women, for example, stringy bark and paper bark containers and baskets, are no longer manufactured for sale.

The Production Cycle.

Bark painting and carving are complementary seasonal activities. Bark paintings can only be produced in significant numbers at the time of the year when bark can be easily removed from the tree. This period lasts from the middle of the wet season until two or three months into the dry. At other times of the year it is possible to remove small sheets of bark from some trees, especially from trees growing in a damp environment, it is not, however, considered desirable to do so as the amount of wastage involved is considerable. Carving wood can be obtained throughout the year. It is, however, much harder to obtain it during the wet season as major sources become inaccessible due to the flooding which occurs at the time of the year. Carvings produced during the wet season are more likely to crack than those produced in the dry. Moreover, the artists prefer working with dry wood as it is easier to carve.

The Store's Concept of the Production Cycle and the Product.

The store's marketing policy is directly related to the annual production cycle, specifically to the seasonal nature of variations in types of artefacts produced. By the end of the bark painting season the store has a surplus of 5-800 barks which is almost sufficient to last until the next season begins. Similarly by the beginning of the wet season the stock of carvings has grown to such an extent, that it is necessary to slow down production so that stocks can be reduced. The store, however, does more than accept this pattern of production and actively tries to reinforce it. Thus when it was suggested that in the middle, of the dry season an attempt should be made to collect a supply of barks for the remainder of the dry season, the Store Manager, Malcolm Thomas was strongly against the idea. Similarly at the beginning of the bark painting season the Store Manager asked women to produce fewer carvings and to go over to producing small sized bark paintings. At the same time X brought

large supplies of carving wood for sale in the store, as he had done at the same time in previous years and was paid a lower price for it in order to discourage carvings. It can be argued that this is simply an example of the effect of factors of supply and demand on the production system.

The store keeper also influences the nature of production in more minor ways through the year either by requesting the people to produce a certain type of artefact or by varying the price paid for a particular product even to the extent of refusing to buy it. Thus on one occasion there was an over-production of large didgeridoos. The Store Manager drew attention to the fact and said that they were difficult to sell, as tourists were reluctant to purchase them because of their size. He suggested that smaller artefacts should be produced and immediately people began to produce 'suit-case size didgeridoos', and even went so far as to cut previously manufactured artefacts in half. The same thing happened with bark paintings, though in the case, the Store Manager had the idea proposed to him by a man at an outstation, who had noted the difficulty of transporting large paintings in the M.A.F. plane.

The store can also influence production in subtler ways, X produced a large sacred bark painting for the store, for which he expected to be paid at least \$60. He was paid \$20 for this and was furious, though he did not complain the store keeper or ask for an explanation. The reason that the store keeper paid so little for it was almost certainly because it contained few figures, was largely geometric and for these reasons not a marketable commodity at least as far as the local market is concerned. X had spent considerable time on the painting and because of its sacred nature, considered it to be far more valuable than the paintings he usually did. Because of the poor return for it he decided that, in future, if he got a large bark he would cut it into smaller sections and paint his own invented paintings (derived partly from the art he was taught at school) as he would-get more money for less effort this way.

All of the cases cited alone are examples of the way in which the Store Manager quite legitimately interprets market conditions to the producers. This action on his part, may have unforeseen consequences which as in the last example are not always desirable.

The Marketing of Craft at Yirrkala

The marketing of craft at Yirrkala falls into two distinct components; the sale of craft by the producers, usually to the mission store and the resale and marketing of craft by the mission store. The sale of craft to the mission store is the main option available to the artists of Yirrkala. If they do not wish to sell their craft to the store a few options are available to the Aborigines. The first option is to sell craft direct to Europeans working at Yirrkala.

Europeans working at Yirrkala are advised not to purchase craft directly from the Aborigines because they are unlikely to know the correct price to pay for an artefact and are

likely to pay too much or too little to the producer. People do occasionally disregard this dictum but it is extremely rare.

The second option is to sell paintings direct to the people in the neighbouring mining town of Nhulunbuy. There are problems involved here as in order to sell craft people have first to transport it to Nhulunbuy. The mission discourages shops in Nhulunbuy from purchasing and selling craft therefore, any sales that do take place, take place on an individual basis. Certain people have established close ties with people from Nhulunbuy whom they trust and who will either purchase the craft themselves or act as intermediaries in any sale.

Sales of craft which do not involve the mission store only account for a tiny proportion of the craft produced at Yirrkala.

Sales Procedure at the Mission Store.

Craft is normally taken to the mission store by women whether or not it has been produced by a woman or a male relative. Two members of the mission staff, both European, are allowed to purchase craft on behalf of the store. One of these, the Store Manager was the only one able to determine the price of larger and more valuable artefacts, though the other is being trained by him to do so. In return for his craft the artist receives a piece of paper with the purchase price written on it - this is not as a rule itemised and without asking the Store Manager there is no way of knowing what the price paid for each individual item of craft was. The paper is then taken to the check-out till and cashed. Usually women will do their shopping with the money obtained for craft. This procedure is presumably adopted for administrative simplicity and though it may in some way be undesirable, I have not heard anyone complain about it.

Until recently the mark-up on craft sold by the store was 30% of the purchase price. Recently this mark-up has been reduced to 15%. The sale price of the craft has remained the same and the artist now gets an additional 15% for his painting or carving. The 15%, in fact, represents the average mark-up, as the Store Manager finds it impossible to apply the same procedure across the board, for a number of reasons. The Store Manager gave two main reasons for this. Certain artefacts could only be sold for a low price and often to give the producers a reasonable return on their labour he had to accept the fact that he would make a loss on these objects. In order to maintain the overall margin of 15%, he therefore, had to increase the profit margin on some of the more desirable artefacts, notably bark paintings. A second important factor he had to consider when determining the price of saleable artefacts, was the loss of stock due to borer, mould and the not infrequent cracking of artefacts.

Store - The Marketing Operation.

According to Malcolm Thomas the store prices are determined by what the people in Nhulunbuy are prepared to pay. Nhulunbuy is the local market and it is the supply and demand factors relating to this market that are the ones that determine the price paid to the artists. The prices he charges for orders from other parts of Australia are the same as the ones he charges in the store. If he sells the paintings for a higher price to outlets in the Southern markets he fears that this may lead to exploitation of the artists by encouraging increasingly high mark-ups. He is also afraid that any increase in prices will affect the turnover and lead to a greater loss of stock through damage in storage. He has been asked on many occasions to provide artefacts for sale at the Walkabout Hotel and the Arnhem Club in Nhulunbuy on terms beneficial to the mission store. He has refused to do so as he would have to sell craft to them at retail price and on resale in Nhulunbuy the prices would look astronomical, especially as the clients of the Walkabout would be prepared to pay higher prices. The artist would notice the difference between prices charged by the hotel and the amount paid to the producer, which would lead to dissatisfaction and create the illusion of exploitation.

There is a further reason for not encouraging other outlets in the area, this is the desire to create a monopoly of craft sales, which is a major attraction point of the mission store as far as the inhabitants of Nhulunbuy are concerned. Craft is seen partly as a means of attracting people to the store where they will then buy their fruit and vegetables and also make purchases from the ladies shop. This was the main reason Malcolm Thomas stopped an earlier experiment of selling craft in Nhulunbuy. This was a highly successful venture and in 1 ½ hours he would sell \$1,000 worth of craft. He stopped this to make the Yirrkala store more viable. The rationale behind this is that the mission store does not aim to make a profit on craft sales, but can make a profit on other aspects of its trade; the artists lose nothing by restricting the sale of craft to Yirrkala itself and the store gains considerably.

The mission store sells a considerable portion of its stock to outlets in the Southern States - orders for up to 600 items are received and filled by the Yirrkala store. The mission relies on 'faithful customers and the grapevine' as far as the Southern market is concerned. An attempt was made by U.C.N.A. to establish further retail outlets by sending an employee on a tour of the Southern States. This venture was not successful. Occasionally, dealers from the Southern States visit Yirrkala and purchase several thousand dollars worth of artefacts from the store which are resold in Sydney and Melbourne. At least one dealer makes an annual journey to Yirrkala for this purpose.

The Aboriginal Arts Board has itself recently entered the market as a major purchaser of Yirrkala craft work. Although many of the Arts Board purchases are used to build up the stock of exhibition material and museum collections, it is proposed that works which are not suitable for these purposes be distributed and sold through Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Limited.

The Two Markets

So far the marketing of craft has been discussed in terms of the main outlets used in its sale and distribution. It is important to consider now the fact that as far as determining the price of artefacts is concerned the market itself can be divided into two: the souvenir market and the collector's market. The two markets are competing for qualitatively different artefacts. The collectors are interested in more expensive carvings and paintings produced by recognised artists, the souvenir buyers want reasonably priced 'authentically aboriginal looking' artefacts.

Numerically, the majority of artefacts (probably in the region of (90% or more) are produced for and purchased by the souvenir market. The population of Nhulunbuy and visitors to the town represent the largest market for this type of art and they buy the products direct from the mission store. The other major market is tourist shops in the Southern States and shops specialising in the sale of Aboriginal artefacts. In the South the sale price of souvenir art is in the region of three to four times the amount paid to the artist. The mark-up on souvenir bark paintings is greater than that on carvings as they are a more marketable commodity. The collector's market can be divided into two sectors: the private collectors and the corporate collectors. There are a number of individuals in Australia and overseas who have built up large private collections of bark paintings. The collector is concerned to purchase paintings by artists who are well-known as individuals, whose works have been reproduced in books and whose paintings are represented in major museum collections. Documentation is important to the collector, partly because it adds to the interest of the painting, partly because good documentation in the absence of the artist's signature helps to authenticate the painting and finally because it adds to the resale price of the painting. The private collector of bark paintings must be seen in the same light as the private collector of modern European art, his specialisation is different, but his concerns are similar, both are making a financial as well as an aesthetic investment.

Collectors buy their paintings either through dealers (who are themselves invariably collectors) or direct from the mission by writing to the store visiting Yirrkala.

The corporate market includes museums, art galleries, universities, government departments, international corporations, etc. Museums and art galleries have not in the past been major purchasers of bark paintings from dealers. They have since the second world war

depended on gifts from the Australian Government and private bequests for building up these collections. Recently some museums have begun to purchase private collections of particular national importance.

Perhaps the most significant thing, as far as the submission is concerned, about the market for high priced bark paintings, is the small return to the artist in relation to the final sale price of the painting. Bark paintings in this category have been sold for over \$1,000, and in general are sold from four to five times the amount that would be paid to the artist for a similar painting produced today. In many cases the paintings will have been purchased five or more years ago when prices at source were much lower than they are now and are being resold for anything up to 50 times the original price. A painting by X for example, was bought from a Sydney dealer by an Australian Museum in 1972 for \$400. A similar painting by the same artist was sold by the same dealer in 1973 for \$600. The price paid to the artist today for a painting of a similar size and quality would be in the region of \$100-150. Thus bark paintings by aboriginal artists are fetching an extremely high price on the collectors market, yet the return for the artist is still relatively low.

The low price received by leading artists for their work is likely to lead to a reduction in the number of artists producing bark paintings of top quality. This is despite the fact that the artists are now receiving more money for their art than at any time previously. The main reason is that through the efforts of the mission store and the demands of the souvenir market the women of a family can earn sufficient money for the basic needs of a family by producing souvenir art and small bark paintings. Many of the leading bark painters feel that they should be getting more money for their paintings and many hear of or see for themselves the prices charged for paintings in Sydney and Melbourne; and feel that someone is making money out of them. Because they perceive their sacred art to be intrinsically more valuable than the women's and young men's art, they expect to be paid very much more money for their output of art than the women are for theirs. Although they are paid more money for each painting than women, because it takes longer to produce larger top quality bark paintings, the difference in weekly return for male and female artists is nothing like the difference in price paid for their respective works might suggest. If this trend continues, and unless the leading artists get a larger proportion of the final sale price of their works, then, within a few years it is probable that only souvenir art will be produced at Yirrkala.

Another important factor in the present situation is the lack of incentive for young men to learn to produce the finer quality bark paintings. Young men can often earn more money by producing a large number of fine carvings and good quality small souvenir bark paintings than they can by producing sacred paintings. The example of X (page 10*) shows exactly how this process can operate.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that the trend from collectors' art to souvenir art is accelerating. Of the twenty-nine Yirrkala bark painters whose paintings are represented in the comprehensive collection of bark paintings made by Helen Worm (1973) for the National Ethnographic Collection between 1967-69 eighteen of them had either died or stopped painting by 1974 and only eight were regularly producing bark paintings for sale. Very few young artists have developed in the interim to take the place of those who died.

The major reason why Yirrkala has been unable to capitalise fully on the price of bark painting in the Southern States and abroad is its isolation from the market and the fact that the artists themselves have few direct links with the market. Nhulunbuy is not the best market for determining the price of the 'collector's' bark paintings as the market that can support the highest prices is elsewhere.

Collectors' art and souvenir art cannot be marketed on the same basis. The mission store has done an excellent job as far as the marketing of souvenir art is concerned. I suspect that in many ways the mission store has seen the development of souvenir art as the priority industry. There is some justification for adopting this viewpoint as far more people are involved in the production of souvenir art and the market for it is much larger. However, because of the high price collectors are prepared to pay for finer works of art, the return to the community from this category of art could be nearly as great as it is for the souvenir art even though the latter represents 90% of the production. The money for souvenir art is used mainly for everyday subsistence purposes, whereas the community would like to utilise the money from collectors' art on projects requiring considerable capital (e.g. vehicle purchase).

The more valuable works of art should be marketed in the same way as fine arts produced by other Australians, through exhibitions and through dealers who operate on the basis of defined percentages and have a direct personal relationship with the artists. Probably because it has been unable to finance the initial capital outlay necessary to set up a marketing operation on the scale required, the mission has been unable to obtain as great a return on top quality bark paintings as would seem desirable.

SUMMARY CONCLUSION

Yirrkala art can be divided for marketing purposes into two categories, souvenir art which is a recent innovation and collectors' art on fine art, which is basically traditional in character. It is vital, for the future of all art and craft production at Yirrkala, that the fine artists get the optimum return for their labour. If they do not, then there will be no incentive for people to continue producing traditional art of quality and no incentive for young men to go through the arduous process of training to be artists. Although as I have suggested, the two categories of art cater for different markets, experience from other parts of the world suggests that the cessation of production of high quality traditional art will lead to a

deterioration in the quality of souvenir art. It is of fundamental importance that the Aboriginal Arts Board and the mission co-operate together and with the people of Yirrkala to ensure that this process does not occur in Arnhem Land.

Proposals

In conclusion, I intend to suggest a number of ways in which I believe the Aboriginal Arts Board could help with the marketing of craft from Yirrkala. The implementation of any of these suggestions should depend on their acceptance by the Yirrkala people and should be implemented through co-operation with the Yirrkala store.

1. The Arts Board should help to facilitate the sale of Yirrkala art by exhibition both in Australia and abroad. I would suggest that this can initially best be done by purchasing the paintings direct from the artist at a price determined by the Store Manager (there being at present no better system for purchasing the painting at source). Exhibitions could then be organised of works by individual artists and groups of artists and any additional money made returned direct to them. (4-7, 12-18).
2. The Aboriginal Arts Board should help the Store Manager determine the current price for arts and crafts of all quality, by regularly sending a check-list of prices for comparable items in the Southern States (12 and 17).
3. The Aboriginal Arts Board should act as an agent throughout the year for Yirrkala artists, selling the paintings for an optimum price and returning profits direct to the artists. This must clearly be done in such a way that the Arts Board does not have a monopoly of the art produced, as this could in the long-term have an adverse effect on prices by destroying the free market. (13-18)
4. The Aboriginal Arts Board should encourage the production of traditional women's' crafts, while the skills still exist, by ensuring that markets are found for them that bring a return for the labour invested in their production comparable to the return for souvenir art (7-8).
5. The Aboriginal Arts Board should help in developing more outlets for souvenir art and especially help to develop an export market for this category of craft. As this is the area of greatest production, markets for it are continually in need of expansion.
6. The Aboriginal Arts Board could also usefully provide assistance in finding ways to improve the production system. It may be considered desirable to provide storage facilities for bark that would enable leading bark painters to produce paintings throughout the year. (Storage facilities would also be useful in cutting down on the loss rate of completed artefacts which is at present accentuated by inadequate storage facilities). Thought could also be given to the desirability of introducing an alternative medium for producing paintings in the dry season. Carvings and paintings are not substitutable, as some of the finest bark painters are unable to carve, and anyway the prices for carvings are on the whole lower than those for paintings (8-10).

7. The Aboriginal Arts Board should help the Aboriginal people of Yirrkala in becoming involved in all aspects of the craft industry at Yirrkala; this includes the marketing of craft as well as its production. This could be done by financing the training of Aborigines to operate as dealers and sellers of art in the Southern and local markets, so that ultimately Aborigines will control all aspects of their industry. This is already the aim of the mission (U.C.N.A) and the Arts Board, and its implementation should be given high priority. (17)