The Stone Canvas: Appreciating the Rich Existence of Australian Aboriginal Culture through Rock Art

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As a culture dating back over 50,000 years, the society and lifestyle of the Aboriginal people is highly connected to rock art, which can be interpreted through and is directly connected to the mythology and art technique of this ancient race. Analysis of Aboriginal rock art provides great insight into the history and lives of the Aboriginal people because their art was so integrally linked with religion, tradition, and daily life. Aboriginals prodigiously created a wide variety of work, including paintings and carvings with wide variety and unique qualities that allowed them to express themselves and their mythology through visual representations that were often quite sacred to the artist and his tribe. This paper intends to examine the motivations behind Aboriginal art, while focusing on the mythology and techniques surrounding its creation.

Archaeologists estimate that the Australian continent was populated approximately 50,000 years ago by people who ventured south from Southeast Asia. Researchers believe that a small group of people made the short trip across the water by boat or raft during a period of low sea levels such as are experienced during ice ages, and then slowly began increasing in numbers and migrating south, spreading out over Australia (Morwood, 2002). The first sign of cave-dwelling by these Australian Aboriginal people can be dated to around 40,000 years ago, with the earliest discovered rock art on the continent appearing to be about 28,000 years old. During this time, the Aboriginal people were developing their own culture, mythology, and art techniques. As they migrated, expanded across this new land, and broke apart into regional tribes speaking different languages, each tribe devised solutions to life on the Australian continent, and remained virtually static for thousands of years. This culture and lifestyle of the Aboriginal people is highly connected to rock art, which can be interpreted by region as well as through mythology and art technique. Analysis of Aboriginal rock art provides great insight into the history and lives of the Aboriginal people.

No matter where on earth you look, you can find sites of great significance to the indigenous occupants. Whether you choose the deep, moist caves of Europe, or the rocky slabs adorned by the African bushman, rock painting and carving is an ancient and abundant method of expression for early man. Despite a wide variety of both complexity and design, the general purpose of such art is often similar. Besides leaving sign of existence for those coming later, rock art is a way to tell your story in a lasting format, the medium often preserving works for over 40,000 years (Morwood, 2002). Aboriginals prodigiously created a wide variety of work, including paintings using borders, backgrounds, stencils, and a number of colors. Also, rocks were carved with a range of four carving techniques and two techniques for producing intaglios.

Later, a number of such methods are highlighted, but it is important to know the depth and scale of their work from the outset. A key aspect of rock art is its proprietary nature. It is not a stretch to believe that an Aboriginal tribe from Queensland wouldn't understand the symbolism contained in artwork from another state, but what about the tribe 100 kilometers to the south? Yet, it is true. Aboriginal symbolism can be as foreign from tribe to tribe as Chinese characters are to an English speaker. The truth is, without an accurate interpreter, the meaning behind the art may be locked away forever. Already, there is a great deal of unintelligible art tucked away in shelters lacking native interpreters. The current art movement is seeking to reverse this trend, and is allowing Aboriginal groups to express themselves in such a natural way. Although art was repressed following the arrival of Western man, lately Australia has enjoyed resurgence within its art trade. Aboriginal art is now the most popular art form of the nation, with sales greatly exceeding Western-style art. With this, new possibilities have emerged for the Aboriginal people, allowing them to experience greater quality of life and representation within the Australian government.

The beginnings of Aboriginal art date back several thousand years. Within the Aboriginal culture, rock painting was one activity that perpetuated a rich trade between many ancient populations across Australia. The item of trade significance was instrumental in the creation of rock art, and represented more than just a pigment to the Aboriginal lifestyle. This item was ochre, and represented something that was almost universally used, but unequally distributed across the land. In order for tribes living far from a mine to receive their art supplies, a trading system was necessary to connect those in possession with those in need. As an indigenous art supply, ochre was the common variable to art created in almost every locale within Australia. Along with fellow pigments pipe clay or huntite to produce white hues, charcoal for black, and a

variety of other shades, the Australian Aboriginal could paint with a range of colors from yellows to blue-greys, but throughout history ochre was the most widely-used pigment (Godden, 1982). Ochre, often composed of the mineral hematite, is a red clay found naturally occurring at a number of mines throughout Australia that have been used for their mineral resources since historic times (Clarke, 1976). One such mine, Wilgie Mia, has been worked by Aboriginals since the arrival of Western man until the miners' displacement in the 1940's (Clarke, 1976). The ochre is extracted from the main cavern, which encompasses a cavernous space of over 14000 m^3. Nearly all of the extracted material is believed to have been removed over many thousands of years by the work of dedicated Aboriginal miners. Moreover, these miners didn't derive the precious pigments from the earth with the intent to hoard it to themselves. The Aboriginal people had a complex trade network that ensured the ochre would be available to all those needing it for ceremonies and art. Though mines were found in limited numbers across the continent, art was nearly universally practiced. This trade also provided a means for the transfer of knowledge and ideas from tribe to tribe. Though less is known about the exact nature of these interactions, this basic understanding is today used to conduct some telling research into the dynamics of trade between tribes and map the historic trade routes. Through rock art analysis, researchers have isolated unique chemical compositions of ochres both in paintings and mines. With this knowledge, scientists are creating some detailed descriptions of proposed trade routes that may have been used by the Aboriginal people. Often, these routes stretched "hundreds or even thousands of kilometers" from mine to user (Popelka-Filcoff, 2012). Even over such distances, quality ochre is recognized by its users. When researchers took samples of Wilgie Mia ochre to tribesmen from Aboriginal community Wilunal, they were able to immediately identify it as such based on its deep red color, powdery soft texture, and opacity. Wilgie Mia ochre is often

regarded as some of the best ochre continent-wide (Clarke 1976). It is easy to imagine a similar interaction occurring twenty thousand years prior between two Aboriginals, sharing both ochre and kinship. Similarly, charcoal is used to accurately date some of the oldest art known to man. Narwarla Gabarnmang is an art site located in Arnhem Land of Northern Territories. Over 28,000 years old, it was carbon-dated using the black charcoal pigment decorating its expansive spread (Herbert, 2012). Despite the fact that many art sites have been abandoned or unused for tens of thousands of years, the pigments used in their creation have endured time and kept their appearances for many generations. Today, historic Aboriginal pigments still grace the bodies of Aboriginal peoples partaking in traditional ceremonies. Although the revival of traditional art has introduced Aboriginal artists to modern paints such as acrylics and oil paints which commonly grace canvas works, traditional pigments are still in use as the most accurate and persistent method by which to paint rocks and outdoor art. Its enduring nature is evidenced by the currently maintained knowledge of various types and origins of this important material. The lasting legacy left by Aboriginal ochre, its trade, and its use cannot be overshadowed by modern pigments.

As the Aboriginal people spent time developing materials and pigments, religious art and ceremony became an important form of expression within Aboriginal culture. Rock art is closely intertwined with religion through something called the Dreamtime. The Dreamtime is what the Aboriginals refer to as the time that life was created on earth. The word "Dreamtime" is a translation of the Aboriginal term "wongar", and there has been much debate as to whether the word "dreamtime" adequately covers the deep meaning of this creation myth (Layton, 1970). The reason for this etymological debate over the word "Dreamtime" is because the Aboriginal creation myth is dissimilar from the modern European conception of dreams. Rather, the Aboriginal people say the world was asleep, and the Dreamtime started when ancestral spirits,

also called “Wandjina”, came to the earth and created landmarks, animals, and people (Eliade, 1967). Every tribe in Australia has their own variation of what happened during the creation of the world, but almost all believe that the Wandjina spirits took the land from a “shapeless, formless mass” (Bell, 2002) to a world with animals, people, and interesting geographical features. Once the spirits completed their work, the earth woke up, in a sense, and the ancestral spirits became stars, trees, serpents, geckos, and humans. Since these spirits remained on Earth, every day is sacred, according to the Aboriginal people, and although the Dreamtime had a distinct beginning, it has no foreseeable end (Morwood, 2002).

Many times, before becoming a part of the earth as landmarks or animals, the Aboriginal people believed that the Wandjina spirits would find or make a cave, often their supposed birthplace or dwelling, and paint themselves in that cave (Eliade, 1967). One such painting, figure 1, shows several Wandjina paintings. The Aboriginal believed that the Wandjina did this in order to be remembered, to protect a certain area of land, and to give culture and religion to the people of Australia (Edwards, 1979). These rock paintings were the beginnings of the complex network of myths created by the Aboriginals. These places were so sacred that only initiated men could visit them, and anyone else who entered the cave or sacred area was punished by death (Eliade, 1967). The Aboriginals used other, undeniably human-painted rock paintings for several different purposes, to celebrate the Wandjina and educate future generations on the importance of the Dreamtime, or to bring about luck or change to an individual or community. Although some of these myths were fairly common throughout the entire Australian mainland, the 600 different Aboriginal tribes and many different language groups caused a wide variation in mythology (Flood, 1983). This variation and evolution is common not only to mythology reflected in rock art, but in methodology as well.

Although procuring pigments, tools, and other supplies necessary to create art has historically been a practice that has tied artists to their work, many would agree that putting brush to canvas is the most rewarding step in their creative process. In the Aboriginal art process, the only difference lay in the brush itself. Aboriginal artists would chew the end of a stick and separate the fibers to apply their paint (Rosenfeld, 1981). Something alluded to in previous sections are the differences between art styles and mythology throughout the continent. Long before Western man came to Australia, Aboriginal artists had been constantly evolving their style from region to region and as time progressed (Edwards, 1979). In the following sections, these differences will be explained while highlighting an influential or unique style with a large following in each respective locale. Arguably, some of the highest quality artwork with the most detail is located in the Northern Australian region of Arnhem Land.

Following European contact with Australia, Europeans quickly discovered the continent's many sources of wealth from ecological and mineralogical resources. Following this, many cultural resources were discovered through expeditions that occurred years later in the 19th and 20th centuries. It was during that time that many rock art sites were "discovered" and documented by ethnologists interested in the culture of indigenous peoples (McCulloch, 1999). Arnhem Land has been a traditional home to Aboriginals since very early times. It is believed that Arnhem Land was one of the first destinations populated by immigrants from mainland Asia after crossing the marine divide more than 50,000 years ago. The culture is so ancient that tools made hundreds of centuries ago have been identified in the area, with one stone axe dating back 35,000 years (ABC News, 2010). Because the society has been in existence for such an extended period of time, the art created in Arnhem Land is highly developed and displays a particular manner and style. One method of art creation popular in the area is called x-

ray. X-ray art, as seen in figure 2, is intellectual art, involving more than simply the visual aspect of the subject matter. Because the artists knew their subject manner in such a thorough way, they were able to paint more than what was visible to the naked eye. Using their knowledge of internal anatomy, Arnhem Land artists would outline a certain animal and then detail structures that lie beneath the skin such as skeletal features, organs, and other body parts necessary for life (Edwards, 1979). Some of the most skilled x-ray artists must have historically lived in Western Arnhem Land, for it is here that the best examples of this art can be found. This region is also unique for its use of beeswax in paintings. It seems that the bees of Australia produce wax that is much more malleable than the wax of European bees. Aboriginal people would take pellets of this wax and mold it to their art, either stand-alone, or in combination with a pigment painting (Edwards, 1979). An example of this specialized method can be viewed in figure 3. While Arnhem Land may have some of the most noteworthy examples of specialized art, to the east of Arnhem Land other artists were creating masterpieces of their own with a special flair unique to the region.

East of Arnhem Land there lays a region known as Queensland. With topography ranging from the prairie on the inland tablelands, to tropical marine climates near the Great Barrier Reef, Queensland is a region with a high amount of diversity. This diversity led to some unique subject matter. Although the kangaroo is frequently observed within paintings by Aboriginal people, the kangaroo is rarely observed in the Queensland region, replaced by other creatures endemic to the area (Davidson, 1936). Interestingly, it is here in Queensland that the only Aboriginal representations of insects can be observed in rock paintings. Bees, moths, and butterflies all appear in the area. These insects represented sources of food for the natives, and thus their painted shape consisted of a large body with underdeveloped wings. It has been

proposed that because the wings are inedible and are thusly unimportant to a subsistence people, they spent little effort painting them (Davidson, 1936). This proposal offers insight into some motives behind Aboriginal art. Although there were many reasons behind their work, oftentimes they would paint to honor a figure or animal. In this case, animals that were sacred or provided tribes with subsistence. This relates to an upcoming discussion of sorcery as it applies to Aboriginal art. When playing to sorcery, artists would paint in hopes of evoking a desired outcome, which could range from larger game populations to an early start to the rainy season. In Queensland, the painting of insects could have been in the hope of more food, or just as homage to an important animal in the lives of the Aborigine.

In another region of the continent, a different style of art accurately captured the shapes of hundreds of body parts, all immortalized in red ochre. This site is called Manja, located in the southern Australian state of Victoria, and its walls provide a background for over 90 stenciled images consisting of the hands, feet, and even tools of traditional visitors to the area (Brambuk). Stencil art, as it is called, is created in a different manner than the usual cave painting. Instead of using a brush to apply pigment, the artist would put his template (hand, foot, or tool) up to the cave wall, take pigment in his mouth, chew the pigment to mix, and blow the material across the canvas, thus creating a perfect stencil leaving a negative of the artists own limb (Grampians National Park, 2006). Either before or after the stencil was created, some artists would paint a solid-color background, which would provide higher contrast than could be achieved with bare stone. Something puzzling about hand stencils is that they commonly show signs of what is usually referred to as “mutilated” digits as seen in figure 4. This moniker signifies a finger that is misshapen or missing. Although a theory of deliberate mutilation has stemmed from a letter drafted by 1788 Governor Arthur Phillip describing joints missing from Aboriginal women and

children, this theory is unfounded apart from this letter (Walsh, 1979). Rejecting this hypothesis, it is proposed that the missing or faint digits are actually the result of hand gestures, and could form a means of communication between visitors to sacred art sites. Perhaps they represent a sort of visitors log or storybook detailing the artwork. While difficult to know with certainty what the hands represent, it is known that they form an important alternative form of pigmented art and are frequently seen across the continent. As we move west, many artists had no use for pigment whatsoever, choosing instead to express themselves in another manner altogether.

As we venture into south-central Australia, in the New South Wales state, rock carving instead of painting becomes a dominant force in artwork of the region. Besides requiring completely different tools, rock carving represented a completely different skillset for an artist. With four distinct methods of creating grooves, and two for producing intaglios, great patience was a must for any artist skilled in carving. For their troubles, the art produced is some of the most compelling and enduring art known to Australian history. The general method requires drilling or grooving the rock face with a second sharp rock, then connecting these holes to form a line. Intagliated designs could be formed through a battering process that involved a rock hammer or plain stone (Davidson, 1936). Through these techniques, artists were able to create a great number and breadth of work. Some of the carvings are over 30 feet long, with one exceptional case of a fish exceeding 42 feet, 6 inches (Davidson, 1936). The thought of creating such a carving with only a stone and axe is astonishing, the scale of which is quite impressive to the eye of a viewer. As in Queensland, many of the subjects are representative of the region, with a great number of marine creatures detailed on the surface of the stone, an example of which can be viewed in figure 5. In some work of the region, action scenes depicting kangaroo hunts with numerous participants accompanied fish and other objects, such as spears and throwing sticks,

highlighting the variety of subject matter. Carvings have benefits over paintings in that they last for thousands of years on exposed rock surfaces. This allows many of the originally created carvings to be present today, but their lack of organic substances makes them notoriously difficult to date. Also distinguishing them from paintings is their lack of creation in modern times (Davidson, 1936). Today, there are few to no Aboriginal rock carvers, while many still painted. With the latest revival, perhaps some intrepid artists will branch out to again produce this unique cave intaglio art form.

Heading northwest from New South Wales leads us again to the Northern Territories. Further south than Arnhem Land is a cluster of art sites very important to the nomadic peoples of central Australia. Artists of this area adorned their subjects with unique features. These features related to religion, and some of the most religiously motivated works appear within this region. For the Aboriginal people, many figures, topics, and ceremonies hold special significance as religious symbols directly connected to the culture of the people. Wandjina art is a great example of this motivation. The artwork here contains many figures with over-dramatized sexual features that often are not realistic, as seen in figure 6. Although easy to remark that the reasons for these features may be related to boasting or competition between painters, ethnologists have proposed alternate, more worthwhile theories behind these additions. Due to the sacred nature of this work, its representation must be presented in a reverent manner. Many art sites were not to be viewed by women, and vice versa for the opposite sex. In order to leave no doubt of the sex of the subject, artists would overdramatize the genitalia of their subjects. This may have ensured their compliance with the strict gender rules imposed by religious rulers on the Aboriginal society (Davidson, 1936). Without such highlight, an artist could be accused of painting subversive

subject matter and sentenced to punishment within their tribe. What is interesting is how these types of art have perpetuated even until recent times.

Despite the fact that many Aboriginal artists today reach for oil or acrylic paints to adorn their canvas, they continue to value the process that must be taken by an artist in order to create a new work. While the process of creation has been simplified by the introduction of modern pigments and tools, the mental process of choosing both subject matter and method of depiction has changed little since the time of early the Australians. This process requires a great deal of deliberation as artists choose who or what to honor in their work. In addition, ochre's usefulness lives on in the adornment of the bodies of those partaking in ceremonies and other cultural events. Ochre has been used in this manner since long before paintings, and today remains a valuable material for the Australian Aboriginal.

Throughout different regions of Australia, using varied techniques, the Aboriginal people have painted or engraved many myths depicting the creation or explanation of specific aspects of the world. Nearly all of these myths vary from region to region, depending as different tribes in different regions valued different features (Finley, 1999). Two such myths are the story of Nurunderi and Wildu the Eagle (Mountford, 1969). Nurunderi was a powerful man who created the life and the landmarks around the River Murray. He had two wives, and one day the wives ran away from him. Nurunderi was upset and went looking for them. When Nurunderi became angry he couldn't find them easily, he cast three spears into the mouth of the River Murray, and each of his spears formed islands (Mountford, 1969). Although this is not the full myth of Nurunderi, this partial summary is enough to exemplify the sort of creation myth the Aboriginal people have. This myth is centered around the islands found on the Murray River, in the south of Australia, and the version related above is common only in the southern regions of Victoria and

New South Wales. The story of Wildu the Eagle is slightly different, as it explains why something is a certain way, instead of explaining how it was created. In one story about Wildu the Eagle, Wildu is angered by his nephews the crow and the magpie because they betrayed him. At the time of this betrayal, both the crow and the magpie were white, but in revenge, Wildu scorched the feathers of the birds, making them black (Mountford, 1969). The rock painting in figure 7 depicts Wildu the Eagle as the large outline of a bird, while the two smaller outlines to his right represent the crow and the magpie.

Oral tradition and storytelling was not the only way the Dreamtime myths were spread and maintained over the millennia in Aboriginal culture. One example of a Dreamtime myth depicted in painting for the purpose of educating younger tribal members is the story of Bunjil, illustrated in the painting "Bunjil's Shelter". The spirit, named Bunjil, was believed to supply all things necessary for life. Aboriginals believed that Bunjil had two dingoes that followed him around, as shown in the picture (figure 8). This painting is important because it educates people that Bunjil is a good spirit, and that they need to be thankful to him (Grampians National Park, 2006). The mythology behind this painting clearly shows how important rock art is to the passing down of beliefs generation after generation.

Another example of an educational rock painting is of Namanjolg and Namarrgon (figure 9). Namanjolg was an Ancestral Spirit being who created many things, but broke the laws of incest and had to be punished. This task was delegated to Namarrgon the Lightning Man, who could control thunder and lightning (Khong, 2011). Namarrgon decided to turn Namanjolg into a crocodile as punishment after the latter had an incestuous relationship with his sister. This myth is relevant mostly only to the Northern section of the country, Arnhem Land, because of the region's abundance of crocodiles, and is the source of the belief in Arnhem Land that crocodiles

are sacred. This painting is used to remind people that crocodiles are considered to have near-human intelligence since the original crocodile was originally in human form. In addition to being an educational myth and painting, it exemplifies how the region's features influence the mythology: the abundance of crocodiles in Arnhem Land is represented by Namanjolg being turned into one. This painting also exemplifies variation in mythology among different regional tribes. The lighting man depicted in the painting, Namarrgon, varies significantly from tribe to tribe, and in some regions, the spirit of the Lightning Man is actually broken into two individual spirits, Yagjabula and Jabaring the Lightning Brothers (Davidson, 1936). It is not surprising that certain stories have differences from region to region, considering that much of the Aboriginal mythology was developed over 10,000 years ago (Morwood, 2002).

There are several different kinds of rituals that were performed by the Aboriginal people including sorcerous rituals and Dreaming Ceremonies. Dreaming ceremonies are important religious ceremonies celebrating creation, life, and spirits. Their purposes varied, from paying tribute to spirits, celebrating the feats of spirits during and after Dreamtime, and asking for change. Again, the use of the word Dreaming does not indicate sleep, but rather is a reference to the Dreamtime since many ceremonies celebrate spirits that were present in the Dreamtime, or the creations that occurred during the Dreamtime. Important components of Dreaming ceremonies include music, paintings (mostly sand paintings), dance, special attire, and body art. These aspects are all a part of art, further supporting the idea that art and culture is deeply connected. Sand paintings were often used in Dreaming Ceremonies because, in many cases, the art produced for a ceremony had to be erased after the ceremony. The Aboriginal people believed that the art used in a ceremony was sacred, and any viewing of art after the Dreaming Ceremony

was completed was disrespectful. Sand paintings were easily created before ceremonies, and easily wiped away and destroyed after a ceremony.

Still, rock art had a place in religious ceremonies in several different ways. First, rock art often illustrated the important parts of a dreaming ceremony without exposing the sacred rituals. Since the art from the actual ceremony had to be destroyed, rock paintings often depicted the animals or spirits featured in Dreaming Ceremonies instead of an actual ceremonial symbol. These paintings would often be named by the spirit's name, followed by the word "dreaming". Some examples of famous paintings named this way are "Honey Ant Dreaming" (figure 10) and "Yam Dreaming". As can be seen by these two examples, although the spirits were not always in animal form, they represented something important in the lives of the Aboriginal people. For this reason Dreaming ceremonies and Dreaming art differed from region to region. The Honey Ant was considered a delicacy in the eyes of many Aboriginals, who ate the large, sometimes grape-sized ants and relied on them for nutrients, and this Dreaming was most common in the northern and western regions of Australia, since honey ants were primarily found there (Lubertazzi, 2010). The Yam was important because it was an easily grown staple food all over the continent, and has been an important aspect of life for thousands of years (Berndt, 1974). For this reason the Yam Dreaming is common to many different tribes throughout Australia, rather than just a particular region. The education about these spirits and the knowledge and celebration of these Dreaming Ceremonies were depicted in the art.

Secondly, rock art played an important role in the other, non-Dreaming rituals. For example, before hunting or fishing trips a man would draw a picture of himself successfully spearing a fish or killing an animal. Creating this picture of success was supposed to increase the chances of a successful trip (Edwards, 1979). An example of such a rock painting is figure 11,

which depicts a hunter killing a kangaroo and pursuing another. The human was included in this painting because it was believed that this helped keep the people in touch with the animals and bring them luck on a hunt. This particular painting represents the purpose of both encouraging reproduction of the kangaroos by getting in touch with the animal, and ensuring a successful outcome for a hunt (Khong, 2011). Other paintings of hunting referred to old epic hunts, expressed the desire to be successful in a hunt, or instructed how to hunt (David, Lourdanos, 1998). Sometimes, for hunting ceremonies, old paintings of hunts were repainted or touched, or a new rock painting was created. Another example of creating a rock painting for a ritual is to increase fertility. If a man was trying to have a child with his partner, he could create a rock painting in which the woman was pregnant or giving birth, and this increased the couple's chances of conceiving (Edwards, 1979).

Rock art was also valuable because certain individuals could enter a cave and touch a rock painting to converse with a particular spirit (Layton, 1992). Because the Wandjina were sacred, they were able to assist the tribe in various paths. The spirits that were summoned during this variety of conjuring were not always the Wandjina spirits that took part in the creation of the world; some were more modern spirits, such as the Spirit Children, while others were ancient creation beings still on earth, such as the Rainbow Serpent. Both of these spirits were commonly painted in rock art, and are significant because they are two of the only spirits primarily dealing with women (Layton, 1992). Spirit Children were an explanation for human reproduction. The Aboriginals believed that Spirit Children were spirits that lived in the woods, and could come in contact with women through ingestion of food gathered in the woods, or by picking up sticks (Bell, 2002). One last way a woman could come into contact with a Spirit Child was through spending time with a man, because sometimes Spirit Children lived within men (Bell, 2002).

Once a Spirit Child came into contact with a woman, it then lived and grew inside a woman, eventually becoming a child. The Spirit Children were summoned by women when there were fertility or pregnancy issues. The Rainbow Serpent myth was unique because many Aboriginal tribes believed the powerful serpent was a female. The myth tells of a giant serpent, up to forty miles long, that gave birth to all other animals on earth (Eliade, 1967). Depending on the geographical region, the Rainbow Serpent is believed to represent birth and the wet season, or miscarriage and the end of the wet season (Radcliffe-Brown, 1926). The Rainbow Serpent is often called upon when sorcery is involved, but also when there are reproductive troubles with either humans or animals (Eliade, 1967). In addition to touching the painting of a Rainbow Serpent, one could seek her out in some of Australia's deepest waterholes, where many tribes believed she lived. Depending on the mythology of the Rainbow Serpent, the paintings depicting her were sometimes fierce and intimidating, and sometimes slightly more colorful.

Another, less sorcerous variation on the Rainbow Serpent myth can be found in Southern Australia. It is significantly different than nearly all other Rainbow Serpent stories, and even most other religious artwork in three ways: first, because the Rainbow Serpent is depicted as a whale instead of a snake, second, because it does not involve dark sorcery, and third, because it is represented as a rock engraving rather than a painting. This interesting myth is the story of the Whale Woman Numbadda (figure 5). The connection between the whale and the serpent is not a physical similarity, but rather a functional one. In the creation myth of Numbadda, the whale gave birth to all animals on earth, provided the earth with water, and helps women with fertility, all aspects which resemble the Rainbow Serpent myth. The reason that Southern Australia uses a whale is because the southern coastal waters are a breeding ground for Southern Right Whales, and because there are two geysers in the region, which are explained as Numbadda's blowholes.

In addition to the Wandjina and Spirit Children that have already been discussed, there were also Animal Spirits (several of which were also Wandjina before taking on their permanent form) and Totemic Spirits. Animal Spirits were commonly painted and engraved on rocks throughout all of Australia, as many Aboriginals believed that the animals deserved respect due to their great power. This was also expressed in the hunting and fishing rituals described above, but the idea of animal spirits extends further by applying a certain characteristic to each animal of the same kind as the Animal Spirit, and as seen with the story of Namanjolg the Crocodile-Man, animal spirits were highly valued and often contributed to holding a particular species of animal in high esteem, sometimes even personifying the animal. Namanjolg was an example of a Wandjina who later became an Animal Spirit. Another example of the personification of animals due to Animal Spirits is the Giant Kangaroo. In this myth, a giant black kangaroo was well-known for killing men and wreaking havoc on villages (Mountford, 1969). Because of this story, the kangaroo is represented as a reckless, dangerous animal in many parts of Australia. The Kangaroo Spirit is different from the Crocodile Spirit because it never was a Wandjina, but rather simply a spirit in the form of an animal who never participated in creation of the landscape (Mountford, 1969). A rock painting of the Kangaroo Animal Spirit can be seen in figure 12. The Animal Spirit paintings were sometimes the same paintings used in ceremonies to help animals reproduce (Layton, 1992). Clearly, rock art was integral to the expression and purpose of the Animal Spirits by allowing people to worship or pay respects to an animal or its spirit, bringing about reproduction for the animals of a particular Animal Spirit, or facilitating a hunting or fishing trip by through an Animal Spirit.

Totemic Spirits varied from tribe to tribe, but they were spirits that were given to a specific individual or tribe. These spirits were considered sacred, and in most cases they were

represented by an animal, although there have been records of totemic yams (Berndt, 1974). Totemic Spirits are believed to be an animal or object in its original form. This is different from an Animal Spirit, which represents an animal in its current, present-day form, and is different from a Wandjina because it was not necessarily involved in any sort of creation. Totem Spirits were significant because they represented the animal or object that a person or tribe used to be in a previous life. For this reason, it was considered cannibalism for a person to eat an animal that represented their Totem Spirit (Berndt, 1974). These totem spirits were represented in many ways, most commonly through rock engravings and paintings (Berndt, 1974).

Most of the myths and ceremonies in Aboriginal Australia remained fairly static over the thousands of years of Aboriginal culture. However, things changed approximately 400 years ago when Europeans first came to the Australian continent and began colonization. Upon the arrival of Western man in Australia, a clash of cultures ensued, a clash of cultures that almost caused Aboriginal art to sink forever into the annals of history. This sort of loss would have been, and was for a period of time, disastrous to the Aboriginal people because their art is so closely connected to their culture. During the years between the early 1700's and late 1900's, Aboriginal art was in a period of significant decline. This slow, painful separation of the Aboriginal people from their art and religion lasted until the 1960's, when the Revival finally began (McCulloch, 1999). At the start of the Revival, knowledge about the creation myths was greatly depleted, although Aboriginals kept their beliefs in spirits strong (Clarke, 2007). This began to change in the Region of Papunya, where schoolteacher Geoffrey Bardon noticed that many of his young students were not showing interest in their cultural heritage. In order to reverse this trend, Bardon decided to encourage the children to draw common Dreamtime symbols. When the rest of the community saw what Barden was doing at the school, they became inspired and a group of

elders painted a mural of the Honey Ant Dreaming (aforementioned, figure 10) on the wall of the school (Bardon, 1991). Not only is this a modern example of Aboriginal rock art, but it marked the beginning of the Aboriginal revival.

As Aboriginals have begun regaining their heritage, new questions have arisen about the role of Aboriginal people in relation to their historic works. The stages of Aboriginal existence after colonization can be described as resistance, persistence, and now renewal (Brambuk). Out of this ordeal, a strong distinction between the meanings of art for Aboriginal people vs. Western man has emerged. This distinction is one described in greater detail in the following paragraphs. It distills a debate between leaving paintings in their "virgin" state and allowing them to be subject to the weathering effects of time, or choosing to employ Aboriginal artists trained in the art of their culture to repaint the scenes depicted at art sites across the continent, thus perpetuating the art long into the foreseeable future.

A museum curator takes a painting by Raphael down from his museum's wall, brings it into his office, and proceeds to touch-up a mark left on the face of the oil painting damaged over 400 years ago. He has no qualms painting over the work created by a master artist during the Renaissance as he mixes paints to try to match the color, hoping not to leave marks on the canvas. Would this be a scene ever encountered in a modern museum? Most likely not, since such an action would fly in the face of all commonly accepted modern art restoration. Art restorers would see this as sacrilege, and when Western man came to the Australian continent, they brought along with them their beliefs on art, its treatment, and accepted practices regarding it. These practices, however, had fundamental differences with those of the Aboriginal. For the Aboriginal, rock art was an art form always changing. One day, a painting would be constructed, and the next a rainstorm would wash it away. The next time the tribe passed through the region,

the artist might retouch the painting to restore it to its original beauty (Spencer, 1988). Also, many paintings were deliberately retouched in the hopes of invoking a particular action or event to occur. Wandjina art is a great example of this. Before the rainy season, an artist might repaint the figure of the spirit responsible for bringing wet weather to the region in the hopes of invoking an early start to the rainy season. Similar patterns ensued for many events, from fertility and abundance of wildlife to the conjuring of natural resources. While not all rock art was retouched, such repainting was a very natural process for the Aboriginal, who would partake in such action many times each year for certain sites. With the decline in Aboriginal art skills following the discouragement of such practices by colonial influence, the practice of repainting all but subsided. If painting was a rarity during these times, repainting was rarer still. Today, there are Aboriginal artists interested in restoring examples of rock art to its former glory (Bowdler, 1988). The debate between the two sides rages on, with one side wishing to preserve rock art as much as possible without ever repainting, and the other viewing repainting as a natural progression and part of the culture. Many Aboriginals are under the opinion that retouching the work of their ancestors should be allowed, but a rift exists between those inside the culture and those looking upon Aboriginal art through a Western lens. Until the Aboriginal people are better represented on committees overseeing indigenous art, progress in a direction favoring ancient traditions is, and will continue to be, slow. In the meantime, efforts to preserve existing art have never been stronger.

For those wishing to preserve rock art without repainting, the technology behind restoration techniques and prevention of damage has never been so advanced. Popularity of Aboriginal art has reached an all-time high, and many tourists find themselves at significant art sites within Australia for the sole reason of seeing this ancient art firsthand. With this rise in

popularity, a concurrent rise in damage and vandalism, both purposely and by accident, has occurred. To combat this, the Australian government has invested in fencing, cages, and walkways to keep onlookers from coming in contact with painted or carved surfaces (Stanbury, 1990). These physical barriers allow the art to be in full view, yet still protected from both people and animals who may try to use the art shelters as climbing walls or scratching posts. Changing weather patterns or drainage sources also represent sources of destructive nature. If a once dry wall becomes drainage for rainwater seepage into a cave, ancient paintings can be destroyed within years. Also, greater moisture levels can cause lichen and mosses to grow over a work, fading pigments until invisible. Restorers have developed sprays that kill such organisms while leaving the art below unaffected. Also, those involved with earthmoving must be careful to not disturb drainage patterns that keep shelters dry (Clarke, 1976). These efforts have protected numerous art sites from short-term damage. However, one source of damage still persists that is not easily addressed. This source of damage is time itself. Although many paintings have endured the span of thousands of years, none are becoming less faded as time goes on. The only way to solve this final problem is to allow new artists trained in the cultural techniques to rise to the challenge, creating new sites and artwork for all to enjoy far into the future.

From Papunya, export of a valuable commodity has begun. This commodity is Aboriginal art, and it has proved to be a valuable and strongly desired commodity as it connects intellectual, spiritual, and material, aspects of Aboriginal culture. This commodity has taken hold of the minds of Aboriginals across the continent, better connecting them to their beloved heritage. As it is distributed across the world, many individuals feel the strong desire to obtain art from Australia. In fact, within Australia Aboriginal art currently outsells western art three-to-one (McCulloch, 1999). From all this success comes economic benefits for the Aboriginal people,

who are able to experience higher quality of life and opportunities previously not available to them. Better appreciation for Aboriginal art has allowed more protections over native and sacred lands, and sometimes has prevented industry from exploiting areas of historic significance. With this exposure, Aboriginals have also faced a new challenge. This challenge involves safeguarding their religion, mythology, and culture. To solve this challenge, Aboriginals devised a solution that could be the envy of even those involved in espionage. To protect sacred symbols of cultural significance while still allowing the art to be seen by the rest of the world, Aboriginals devised a system of dots that obscure the symbolism lying beneath (McCulloch, 1999). In this manner, material of cultural value can be identified by those who have learned to see it, but remain indistinguishable to others. This is an ingenious solution to a difficult problem, one that safeguards the sacred while beautifying the art itself, and one that overcame an important drawback to exposure of their culture.

Currently, Aboriginal artists are struggling to meet demands for paintings and other forms of artwork. The revival has been very valuable in the retention and revival of Aboriginal culture and painting techniques, but there is always a need to balance concern over commercialization of the culture. Such concerns are addressed by keeping private many sacred dreamtime pictures, engravings, and paintings, and by withholding details of the Dreaming Ceremonies (National Gallery of Victoria, 2013). Although Aboriginal art may never fetch the prices of the masterwork artists of Europe, its impact will forever influence Oceania and beyond. This opinion is reinforced by the current revival and rekindling of the Aboriginal creative spirit. Now that another generation has been exposed to the magic of creation and their history, it would be difficult to stop the progress that has been made. Aboriginal art and culture has a future full of memories and possibilities. More than providing the people with a source of income and a

job, art ties Aboriginals to their past and culture, and provides a means of support to a people who have the potential to do great things. Whether on the rock canvas of old, or the cloth canvas of modern times, Aboriginal artists will continue to prove themselves painting for their people, their heritage, and their ultimate success as a race of ancient and persistent heritage.

Figure 1
Depiction of Wandjina
Australia
(The History Channel, 2013)

Figure 2
Dick Nguleingulei Murrumurru, artist
Kunwinjku Djukerre, Australia
c.1975
Ochre Pigments on Bark
58.5 x 91.5 cm
(Bahr, 2012)

Figure 3
Beeswax Art depicting kangaroo
Arnhem Land, Northern Territories, Australia
(Davidson, 1936)

Figure 4
Hand Stencil art
Manja Shelter, Victoria, Australia
(Museum Victoria, 2010)

Figure 5
Rock Carving of Whale
New South Wales, Australia
(Norris, 2008)

Figure 6
Hand-drawn depiction of the Lightning Brothers
(Davidson, 1936)

Figure 7
Depiction of Wildu the Eagle
Nepabunna, Australia
(Nepabunna Tourism)

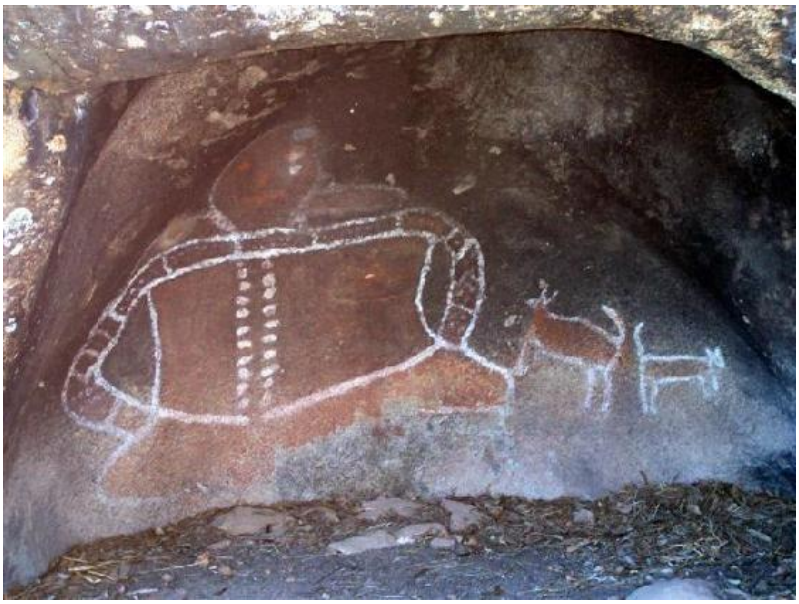

Figure 8
"Bunjil's Shelter"
Victoria, Australia
(Grampians National Park, 2006)

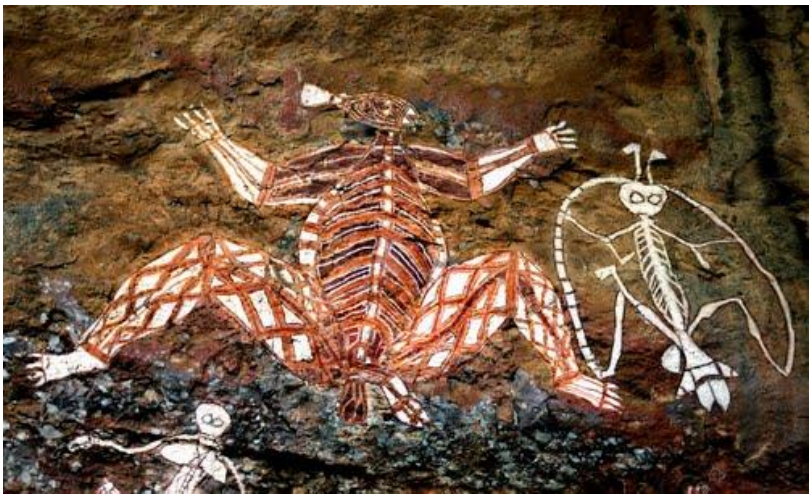

Figure 9
Depiction of the X-Ray style
Nourlangie, Arnhem Land, Australia
(Squidoo, 2013)

Figure 10
1971
"Honey Ant Mural"
Papunya, Australia
(National Gallery of Victoria, 2013)

Figure 11
Depiction of kangaroo hunting
Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory, Australia
(Khong, 2011)

Figure 12
Depiction of Kangaroo Animal Spirit
Australia
(Squidoo, 2013)

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