

Alice Springs Beanie Festival beanies



Mavis and Fred by Doris Madden

Photo: Evelyn Whitelaw

In July 2008, the Museum acquired four creative and expressive beanies produced for the 2008 Alice Springs Beanie Festival competition by various Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists from Tjitjikala in the Northern Territory, Ernabella in South Australia, and Allansford in Victoria.

The Alice Springs Beanie Festival was founded in 1997 by Adi Dunlop. It grew from her interaction with Indigenous communities gaining the trust and involvement through teaching the women how to crochet beanies. Beanie making grew in popularity and importance as it evolved from traditional forms of wool-spinning and weaving that already existed in the region. The production of beanies grew until Adi Dunlop and Merran Hughes decided they would hold a beanie party at the Araluen Arts Centre in Alice Springs in 1996. The response was overwhelmingly positive from both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Adi stated, 'The first year we threw a beanie party and it was so popular that it evolved into an annual community festival attracting thousands of visitors. The first weekend in July we sell more than a thousand handmade beanies and have a wonderful time sharing skills, songs and stories'.

The Beanie Festival encourages people to express the way they interact with their local environment and each other in a fun and exciting way. It also provides the opportunity for different communities to interact and develop understandings of each other's cultures. In 2008 the festival has developed an international audience, with entries and audience members from places such as Japan, Sweden, Canada, New Zealand and the United States of America. It has significant tourism and economic benefits for local businesses in Alice Springs. It also supports a growing cottage industry among Indigenous women, which has positive economic outcomes for local communities.

Evelyn Whitelaw, *Curatorial Intern,
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program*

Hollywood Mission tin



The way this tin came to be in the Museum's collection tells something of the history of black/white relations in Yass, New South Wales. The ripple iron sheet was collected from the site of the former Hollywood Mission, Yass, by local, Terry McGann, sometime around 1960. McGann knew many of the Hollywood residents well and had a good relationship with the Aboriginal community of Yass generally. When Hollywood was gradually being vacated and demolished, McGann collected a piece of the distinctive red tin as a 'keepsake'. In April 1999 he passed the piece of tin to Mrs Penny Butt, who was collecting stories for a project she was doing on Hollywood as part of a Cultural Heritage Management unit at the University of Canberra. In 2006, Mrs Butt passed the item on to Eric Bell, a former resident of Hollywood, who also recognised it as having been the material from the houses he grew up in.

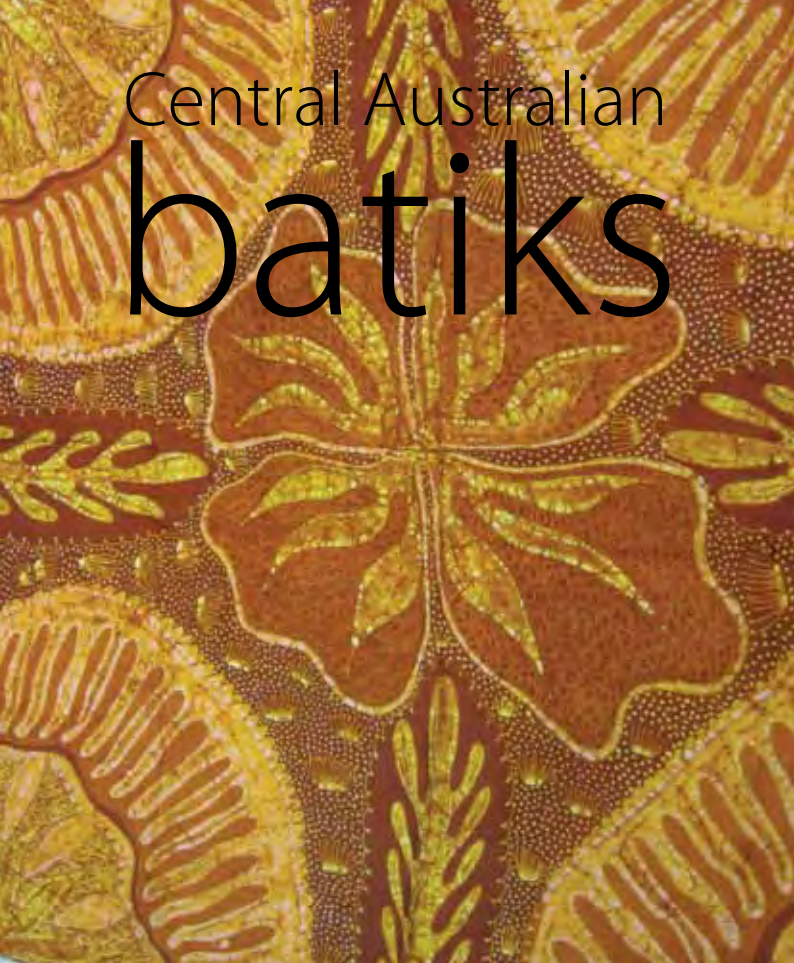
The Hollywood Mission in Yass opened in 1934, and was deserted by 1960. Its status as an Aboriginal reserve was revoked in 1963. The establishment of the mission arose out of pressure by the townspeople to remove the Aboriginal people camped near the proposed site of the town waterworks and, in general, to remove them from town. Hollywood was on the edge of town, out of sight, overlooking the cemetery and the slaughter yard. It was on top of a stony hill, exposed to the westerly winds and remembered as the coldest place in Yass. The mission houses were two-roomed (bedroom and living room) iron structures on concrete stumps, with front and back verandas which, over the years, tended to be filled-in for extra rooms.

The characteristic ripple or corrugated iron used for the walls of the houses affected the quality of people's lives. In the Yass climate the tin mission houses were freezing cold in winter and baking hot in summer. Residents used newspaper or hessian to line the tin walls to keep out the cold. The red paint on the exterior iron walls is a colour that has remained in the memory of many people who lived in Hollywood. The collection of this sheet of iron is particularly important because little of the Hollywood site remains.

Eric Bells, a Wallabaloa (Ngunnawal) elder of Yass, New South Wales, obtained the tin and later offered it to the Museum not only through his interest in his own history, but in his concern that this history be told to the wider community. So the survival of this piece of tin comes out of an Indigenous and a non-Indigenous effort to preserve the history of an Indigenous community

Jay Arthur, *Curator, ATSIP*

Central Australian batiks



The Museum has recently acquired four batiks produced at Fregon and Ernabella, South Australia, by Kunmunyara Ken, Atipalku and Yilpi Michael. *Yam Dreaming*, by Yilpi Michael (above) was one of the four acquired from a private collector.

Batik-making originated in Indonesia. It was introduced to the Ernabella community in South Australia in 1971 and spread quickly to Fregon, an outstation of Ernabella, during the early 1970s. The technique is a form of resist dyeing that Indigenous artists have perfected. It is suited to being produced in communities as it does not require the use of complicated equipment. A design is painted or drawn onto the cloth using hot wax and an instrument called a canting or tjanting — a small metal receptacle with one or more spouts attached to a wooden handle. The cloth is then dipped in dyes. This process is repeated a number of times depending on the complexity of the design and number of colours being used. The wax is then removed. This technique was quickly adopted by Indigenous women at Ernabella and Fregon. The practice of batik-making was encouraged by non-Indigenous art advisors and coordinators who believed in and promoted the artists and their work.

The batiks being produced at Ernabella integrated repeated symmetrical patterns using bright, bold colours. The artists at Fregon developed their own distinctive style, which included depictions of flora and fauna, along with representations of the topography of the local area. Artists from Ernabella participated in a cross-cultural program in Indonesia in 1975 that enhanced and showcased their extensive skills. Because there was a limited market for batiks, the practice became commercially unviable and soon gave way to painting as it was cheaper to produce and less labour-intensive. The major interest of the art market in Western Desert art focused on painting genres, allowing batik artists to take risks and experiment with colours and styles. This resulted in the production of unique and beautiful objects such as these.

Evelyn Whitelaw, Curatorial Intern,
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Repatriation of a secret/sacred object

A handshake between Director Craddock Morton and Dr Pamela McClusky, Curator of African and Oceanic Art at the Seattle Art Museum, symbolised a historic moment in repatriation history. On Monday 29 June the Seattle Art Museum repatriated an important Central Australian secret/sacred object to Australia. The return is particularly important as it marks the first time an American collecting institution has decided to repatriate a secret/sacred object of its own accord.

The elaborately crated object sparked significant interest from local, national and international media. The Public Affairs team received several requests for images of the object. It was an unusual situation to find ourselves in; advising the media of the story of the object while declining requests to view or photograph it.

Head of the National Museum's Repatriation Program Dr Michael Pickering said that according to custom, Central Australian men's secret/sacred objects are not allowed to be viewed by uninitiated men, women or children. 'Their public display is a cause of great distress to Aboriginal elders, who have been seeking their return for many years', he said. 'Secret/sacred objects of the type returned are typically used in religious ceremonies by Central Australian Aboriginal men and are considered to be physical manifestations of sacred ancestral beings and as such have great spiritual power', Michael said.

The object, known as a Tjuringa, was first collected in 1970 and has been in the Seattle Art Museum's collections since 1971. It has never been on public display. Pamela McClusky said that early misgivings about the object prompted her to ask visiting Australians for their views. 'It quickly became apparent that it was collected under circumstances that were not the best', Pamela told the *Australian*. 'In fact, throughout Australia, museums were taking them off display ... we wanted to follow suit and honour that effort'.

The object will be housed in a restricted store while the National Museum's Repatriation team consults with Central Australian elders and their representatives to determine the culturally appropriate management and return of the object.

Caroline Vero, Public Affairs