

FRANCES KEEVIL GALLERY

UNDERSTANDING COUNTRY

24 FEBRUARY – 14 MARCH 2011

This inaugural exhibition brings together a wide selection of artists whose works reflect the varied and distinct painting styles of Aboriginal communities spanning Central Australia.

Each work is unique in painting technique, palette and tjukurpa (dreaming), and when viewed together, this kaleidoscope of colour and line is arresting, even confronting for the Aboriginal art novice. What is this art about?

In attempting to understand the art of the desert, it is important to know what underlies its production. Put precisely by Tim Rollason, in his Directors Foreword for Desert Mob 2010, "making artwork is having country in mind, where the importance of keeping country strong is the fundamental mantra underlying the production of art".

These works are about country. From the bush medicine leaves of Utopia, 270km northwest of Alice Springs, represented by Patricia Kamara to Matthew Milton's Cotton Creek, in Tjukurla land on the Western Australian and Northern Territory border- preserving the stories and history of their land is the central theme which runs through all these artists' works.

For those unfamiliar with the lands of the traditional owners of this country, the sheer vastness of country is difficult to comprehend. Utopia (Alyawarre) alone covers some 3500 square kilometres and is the homeland of the Alyawarr and Anmatyerr people, who live in a score of outstations or clan sites, each with a traditional claim to the place.

By the late 1980's the women of Utopia had made a remarkable transition. By transferring traditional body paint to batik then to acrylic on canvas, "Utopian Art" was launched onto the international stage. Today home to some of the most notable artists of the Desert Art movement, the highly acclaimed Emily Kame Kngwarreye was also a founding member of this group.

It is in this place that Gabrielle Pool has chosen to begin her new artistic journey. Renowned for her oeuvre, which documents the world's vanishing tribes, Gabrielle's current focus is on producing innovative bodies of work which record and celebrate the culture and country of Aboriginal peoples.

The works in this exhibition are the result of Gabrielle's first experience in country; spending time with Anmatyerr women and children, watching and sketching artists at work, painting their country with cultural sensitivity and passion. A recent field trip to Lyentye (Mosquito Bore), saw her working en plein air producing imagery of the surrounding landscape, campsite and its people. These studies and drawings are included alongside major oils on linen.

In this extraordinary and unusual hybrid exhibition, Gabrielle Pool provides us with a bridge. In her first tentative steps towards imaging and paying tribute to this ancient living culture, she has produced honest, undemanding, yet sensitive works of great beauty, with no strings attached. A fresh perspective, which when viewed alongside these astonishing Aboriginal works, takes us a step closer to understanding both artist and country.

We hope you enjoy!

Brenda Colahan, 2011

Bay Village, 28 – 34 Cross Street Double Bay NSW 2028

02 9327 2475 frances@franceskeevilart.com.au www.franceskeevilart.com.au

Gallery hours: Mon to Fri 10 - 5 Sat 10 - 4 Sun 11 - 4