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From remote 'outback' beginnings to cultural export phenomenon: A case study of finance and the internationalisation of Indigenous Australian visual art

Introduction

Creative Industries and Development was the theme of a special panel convened by UNCTAD in Sao Paolo in June 2004 prior to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) XI[1]. The occasion brought together academics, policy makers, and business representatives, as well as experts from the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation and the World Intellectual Property Organisation. Speakers canvassed development strategies that utilised creative assets and cultural industries. The focus was on developing productive 'capabilities and competitiveness in developing countries in new growth industries' (UNCTAD 2004: 3). For UNCTAD this was a unique event, a chance to take on some of the cultural policy issues normally the preserve of UNESCO. It also represented an important extension of thinking, beyond narrow definitions of cultural industries and cultural policy, to include industry and economic development with a focus on enterprise dynamics. The increasing value of the creative economy to GDP and the integral role cultural services plays in the knowledge-based economy were important reasons for UNCTAD to position itself in these cultural and industry development debates.

As a prologue to proceedings, the UNCTAD Secretariat (2004) drew attention to the importance of creative inputs as distinct from 'labour and capital, or even traditional technologies.' As creativity is deeply embedded, and as it is a ubiquitous asset present in all countries, then its 'effective nurturing and use can provide new opportunities for developing countries to "leap frog" into new areas of wealth creation, consistent with wider trends in the global economy' (UNCTAD 2004: 2). Furthermore, the Secretariat argued that the economic benefits for developing countries in creative industry sectors[2] would only be achieved through the 'creation of an enabling framework including a propitious economic incentive structure, institutional strengthening and capacity building particularly in the area of skill development and networking and building new creative partnerships' (3).

The sessions were divided into four thematic areas of priority: economic opportunities and challenges in creative industries; appropriate institutional and regulatory

[1] http://www.unctadxi.org/templates/Startpage____21.aspx

[2] The UNCTAD XI High Level Panel on Creative Industries and Development identify the core creative industries as: motion picture industry, the recording industry, music, publishing, books, journal and newspaper publishing, computer software industry, music and theatre production, photography, commercial art and display, radio, television, and cable broadcasting industries.

frameworks shaping desired outcomes for developing countries; overcoming barriers to entry; and creative clusters and local economic development policies. One of the reports in the third section, *Financing Creative Industries in Developing Country Contexts* (Cunningham, Ryan, Keane & Ordonez 2004), examined barriers and modes of financing export-orientated creative industries in developing countries. Using a case study approach that examined three very distinct global regions (the Republic of China, Latin America, and Indigenous Australia), the authors were able to draw some important conclusions.

The report found, *inter alia,* that while the term 'creative industries' has yet to be widely embraced, it is evident that culture is increasingly seen as a resource for development. This in itself is a global trend, and developing countries need to take account of the intangible value accruing to copyright within the creative industries, a point emphasised by John Howkins (2001). In these regions, however, creative industries are still predominantly associated with traditional, official or national culture, a perception that needs to be broadened in order to maximise future diverse economic development. Modes of finance identified in these regions are heterogeneous, often serendipitous and fragmented; in many instances a mix of public, private, and reciprocal relationships. Most modes of finance are aimed at the creation and production stages of the value chain while many of the prevailing barriers are at the distribution and marketing end. Furthermore, there is a lack of large-scale capital investment in the regions and creative industries examined. Public subsidy remains the primary form of finance. While public support mechanisms have an important role to play in the future it is imperative to focus on segments of the value chain where regulatory and distribution barriers were stifling development. New technologies - and in particular partnerships with technology firms (ISPs, telcos, etc) - could provide new avenues to enable creative enterprises to enter global markets and in doing so overcome distribution barriers.

This article represents one of the case studies in the report. It is an atypical example in that Indigenous Australia is not located within a developing country. However, the isolated, impoverished 'third world' environment in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art has been produced since the 70s, (Myers 2002; Altman *et al* 2002) has many correlations to prevailing conditions in developing countries – in some cases arguably worse. Critically acclaimed and highly valued Indigenous Australian 'high art', is predominantly a product of remote localities with limited basic infrastructure. Distribution channels are dominated by vertically integrated structures, piracy (primarily in the tourism market) and exploitation is rife, information asymmetry is endemic, and returns to artists have been miniscule in comparison to final profits made on their works. Indeed, the lessons to be learned from the success of Indigenous Australian art exports have direct relevance to overcoming the hurdles facing micro-financing models and developing specific international niche markets in developing countries.

Notwithstanding the 'third world' conditions in which this art is produced, Indigenous Australian visual art has become an internationally renowned and economically significant Australian cultural export – arguably, one of Australia's most *significant* exports ever. This international success has largely occurred outside of public support and public subsidy frameworks; it has been driven by individual actors and it has drawn upon finance from private, philanthropic, and foundational sources. In the seminal study *Painting Culture*, Myers (2002) illustrates that public subsidy and support mechanisms whilst sustaining production in the 1970s, largely limited the commercial flow of Indigenous Australian art to 'uninterested' domestic markets.

Over the space of three decades, Indigenous Australian art has become an industry reportedly worth between $AUD 100 million and $AUD 300 million (Altman *et al* 2002: 3). Estimates suggest that there are 5000 artists and painters working in the industry, making up between 25 and 50 per cent of total working Australian visual artists. This is a remarkable figure considering that the Indigenous population comprises only 2 per cent of the Australian population. In 1994 an Australia Council funded study found that the income generated from all Indigenous Australian creative activities (not including rural Aboriginal art) was valued at $720 million. Visual artists surveyed in the Council report contributed $129 million to the economy - $66 million from their principal artistic occupation and a further $63 million from "other arts work" (quoted in Langsam 1997). Putting these figures in perspective, the value of Indigenous Australian 'arts and crafts sector' – of which the high-end visual art sector is a valuable segment – is about the same size as the bauxite ($774million in 1992-93, ABS) or copper ($875million) industries and massively more important than uranium mining, valued at $193 million for 1993-94 (Langsam 1997). Despite this contribution to the economy, it is important to note that there is a considerable lack of international fervour for the broader Australian visual arts industry. As observed by the Contemporary Visual Arts and Craft Inquiry (DCITA 2002), 'it is extremely difficult to 'sell' Australian exhibitions to galleries outside of Australia' with the only exception being the sale of Indigenous art (DCITA 2002: 259). However, in flagging the worth of Indigenous visual arts industry, it is important to note that collecting accurate figures for the value of Indigenous Australian art is difficult: much is produced in isolated communities and records are unreliable.

The following case study examines the international profile of Indigenous 'dot' paintings, and 'high-end' visual art more generally, and the relationship between its position within elite markets and finance. This account is not exhaustive, and although it makes historical references, is not an attempt at historical analysis of the developments leading to the establishment of an internationally successful export industry. We highlight primary developments with an emphasis on drawing out the modes of finance involved in ensuring the success of this industry. We begin with a discussion of the structural organisation of contemporary Indigenous Australian visual art production. Following this, we explore the origins of dot paintings, key developments in the early stages of market development and policy programs, and key developments that have led to international critical acclaim and success in elite New York markets.

Indigenous Australia: no longer primitive

Toby Miller provides an important socio-cultural perspective on the export of Indigenous Australian cultural production (1994; 1995). Miller examines the significance of Indigenous Australians in eminent 'northern hemisphere' social and cultural theory that attempts to understand the 'modern' and 'post-modern'. He argues that Indigenous Australians are 'the most important Australian exporters of social theory and cultural production to Europe over the last century' (1995: 76); however, emphasis here is on social theory. Miller's arguments provide an important rationale for understanding how Indigenous Australians have been conceptualised and represented in international intellectual debates and how such debates contributed to the understandings of Indigenous art-forms.

In 1994 Miller provocatively wrote: 'when Australia became modern it ceased to be interesting.' His point was that before Australia became a sovereign Nation in 1901, notions of 'Australians' – denoting Indigenous Australians – were of critical importance to academic inquiry seeking to examine questions about origins, authenticity and 'human truths' (Miller 1995). In this sense, Indigenous Australians 'provided Europe with a Photographic negative of itself' (Miller 1994 qtd in Miller 1995: 7). As Durkheim has suggested, the study of Indigenous Australians provided ways to make 'proportions of our past become present again' (Durkheim 1961:22, qtd in Miller 1995: 8). In short, Indigenous Australians were studied in the context of 'human classification, duty and social organisation taken as critical keys to understanding lost truths of humanness' (8). Before the Asia Society Exhibition in New York in 1988 (discussed in more detail below), Indigenous Australian visual art was largely thought of within this broader intellectual purview. It was viewed as ethnographic art, as ancestral motifs and traditions portrayed through cultural forms that shed light on a rare remaining case of primitivism displaced in time.

However, when Australia became a nation (modern), and took away the 'birth right of citizenship from people of colour', it became just another British colony filled with 'white-fellas' and thus became 'dull, boring and obvious' to intellectual debate (Miller 1994: 207). For many academic observers, 'Australians are transformed … from dashing blacks living out of time into dull anglo-celts living out of place' (1995: 7), and notions of 'Australians' ceased to be interesting; disappearing from 'northern hemisphere' social and cultural theorisation.

Culture and knowledge: the beginnings of value

For Indigenous people in Australia, and elsewhere in developing countries, the raw material of content creation is culture and knowledge. Combined with the creative talent of the artist, the performer and the technician (incubation), this becomes a unique and distinctive intellectual property that finds its way into several markets (domestic – Indigenous and non-Indigenous, tourist, and international) of which the most profitable is the elite international art or 'high art' market (Keane & Hartley 2001). The high end sale of Indigenous painting represents the meeting of third world producer and first world art patron and connoisseur. Moreover, a major feature of indigenous visual arts is that the majority of the output is produced in remote parts of northern and central Australia. The production and sale of arts and crafts constitute the only private sector economic activity in some communities.

The circulation and delivery of Indigenous art characterize a value chain where cultural intermediaries play a key role, often drawing huge profits from their activity. Indigenous artists rarely negotiate directly with commercial galleries or retail outlets for the sale of their work. Their work is handled by Indigenous art centres or cooperatives. These organisations are staffed by art coordinators who operate as both commercial and cultural mediators between producers and mainly non-indigenous procurers of indigenous art.

In the report, *Some competition and consumer issues in the indigenous visual arts industry,* Altman *et al* (2002: 4) observe a ‘high degree of variability in the number of functional levels’ in different segments of the industry. From their analysis, we find that art works are retailed directly through community art centres, occasionally through advocacy groups, through retail galleries (specialist or non-specialist), souvenir shops, gift shops, markets, and online sales. The commercial sector of the industry comprises three primary components: specialist outlets that sell only, or primarily Indigenous art works; generalist outlets (including souvenir and gift shops) that sell quantities of Indigenous product among others and enterprises that reproduce and license original artworks for value-added products such as cards and clothing (4). This said, the industry also includes myriad other players involved in the retailing and marketing of Indigenous art. These disparate but integral elements include: self-represented artists, artists directly represented by an agent or commercial gallery; Indigenous artists who are shareholders in an arts marketing company (E.G. Papunya Tula Artists Pty Ltd), and itinerant artists who produce art works for cash-transactions on an informal and causal basis. In addition, individual artists may sell artworks through community-controlled arts centres, private dealers or directly through market stalls (4-5).

Commercial galleries interact with individual artists in several ways. Some galleries may only deal in art, buying works through centres, wholesalers, and collectives. They may also exhibit works owned by other galleries or agents. Other galleries may deal directly with collectives or individual artists acting as their exclusive agent (with or without contracts) (4). In some cases, commercial galleries work in ways similar to community-controlled arts’ centres acting as an agent but also providing ‘ancillary services such as accommodation, meals, transport and health care’ (Altman *et al* 2002: 4). Artists are paid by retainer; or on performance. In some cases, these relationships can result in the production of much larger quantities of work than would have been produced in normal circumstances of artistic production. These production relationships are ‘heavily promoted by the dealer, who often commands resources unavailable to a community-controlled arts centre’ (Altman *et al* 2002: 4-5). Unfortunately, relationships are not always harmonious and exploitation is often rife.

It is important to stress that whilst private and philanthropic streams of finance have potential for arts and creative industries development more broadly, they also create threats for individual producers. Private collectors, advisors, and agents have been largely responsible for the exploitation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists over the last three decades, with many artists not seeing any revenue from artworks worth thousands and in some cases hundreds of thousands of dollars. One of the more controversial issues is the sale of works through auction houses – a very important avenue for the sale of Indigenous art. While prices for artworks are increasing dramatically, due to a lack of resale royalty statutes in Australia, Indigenous artists receive no percentages on these returns (Altman *et al* 2002: 6). This raises the issue of a need for appropriate copyright laws. A similarly controversial issue ‘is the wrongful appropriation of Indigenous images and designs for use in mass-merchandise’ (DCITA 2002: 153). In a submission to the Contemporary Visual Arts and Craft Inquiry (2002), The National Indigenous Arts Advocacy Association argued that ‘cheap’ mass-produced copies of traditional imagery and motifs were increasingly detrimental to the development of the industry. As the Association state in their submission:

> In the realm of ‘Fine Art’, the breadth and quality of Indigenous Art is acknowledged world-wide, is respected and valued as a unique Australian art form and become prized additions to international art collections. Unfortunately, in the secondary mass-produced tourist market, the local indigenous industry is being devastated by the importation with impunity of cultural artefacts and artwork with the intent of being passed off as Australian (National Indigenous Arts Advocacy Association submission to the visual arts and craft inquiry, qtd in DCITA 2002: 154).

While artists oppose this perceived devaluation and inappropriate use of ancestral motifs, as the report notes, it is difficult to provide legal remedies for cultural defamation ‘particularly where the harm is felt by the community rather that a specific individual’ (DCITA 2002: 154).

The Indigenous creative industries, despite their fragility, resemble mainstream creative industries, insofar as they are generally characterised by an over-supply of content-providers (Caves 2000) and dependent satellite producers clustered around profitable links in the chain, notably distribution.

Indigenous Creative Industries Value Chain

Content creation/origination	Intellectual property: the culture and knowledge of the Indigenous people of Australia and its expression in the form of oral history, Craft, performance, writing, music and song design etc.
Production and incubation	The process by which this intellectual property is transformed into products and services, including support mechanisms and resources, creative spaces, production infrastructure, manufacturing inputs, engineering etc.
Circulation	The means by which products and services are promoted to retailers and advertised to the consuming public. This includes various media, the role of managers, agents, databases, mailing lists, and websites.
Delivery mechanisms	The point of sale or distribution of products and services.
Current and potential markets	The market for indigenous creative practice. This varies across practice. For example, the market (audience) for story tellers and ceremonial performance is limited whereas the market for broadcasting is consistent. The four principal markets are government

	services, international tourism, domestic, and the indigenous market.

Source: Keane and Hartley 2001

Key issues to consider in the context of developing export-orientated creative industries are types and potential markets for export. Dynamism of markets (i.e. demand) impacts directly upon the financial bottom line. The characteristics of markets also provide a barometer to measure export potential. The typology presented below is an attempt to represent the limitations and potential of markets for Indigenous Australian visual art. It can also be applied to creative industries in developing countries:

The uninterested (domestic) market

> Producers of elite forms of traditional culture (e.g. Australian Indigenous culture) often meet with consumer apathy within domestic markets. The problem of disinterest in national cultural treasures is often seen by supporters of such forms to be simply an effect of a lack of finance but could be as much a result of discount due to ready availability and domestic everydayness.

The grants 'market'

> This is where cultural producers compete for a limited supply of government and foundation funds for approved activities and projects, including those that enhance national or regional identity, and increasingly multiculturalism. Culture that is beholden to government for support is often unable to sustain itself commercially. This is one of the standard rationales for subsidy. Alternatively, straight subsidy has come under increasing attack as it often leads to dependency and stymies entrepreneurial spirit in the creative industries.

The tourist market

> Tourists seeking to purchase authentic cultural relics and experiences represent an important market for local creators. Cultural theme parks provide outlets for sale of Indigenous and national cultural goods. Tourist markets act as outlets for the work of creative producers, often independent producers or micro-businesses. Little product differentiation is required because tourists often seek artefacts identifiable with their tourist destination. The darker side of this trade is the high incidence of opportunistic copying and cloning, with value not being returned to the producer.

Breakthrough markets

> International elite markets such as Sotheby's auctions are an example of breakthrough markets. Product from the developing world finds itself occasionally celebrated as unique and valued. The market for Indigenous art represents a breakthrough into this narrow but lucrative market. Similarly, where the creative product or service from a marginal location is unique and distinctive it can inspire or kick-start a new mainstream fad, for example reggae in the 1970s; hip-hop in the 1980s; and world music in the 1980-1990s.

The internationalisation of Indigenous Australian 'dot' painting

The beginnings
Until 40 years ago the Indigenous people known as the Pintupi lived in Australia's Western Desert without any involvement in the 'cash economy'. The Pintupi people, like many other Aboriginal tribal groups, were brought in from the desert by the government during the 1950s and 1960s and settled on a government reserve at Papunya[3], Northwest of Alice Springs (Allan 2001). It was here, as one commentator has noted, in the 'oppressive, desolate and poverty-stricken conditions … with one sixth of residents dying of treatable disease between 1961-1966' (Allan 2001) that the Papunya Tula Art movement emerged during the1970s giving birth to contemporary Indigenous Australian 'high art'[4], part of an industry that is now valued at least $AUD100 million. The cruel realities and oppression at Papunya are most vividly captured in Geoffrey Bardon's (1991:11) moving account of conditions at the settlement in 1971:

> I had come to a community of several tribal groups apparently dispossessed of their lands and quite systematically humiliated by the European authorities. It was a brutal place, with a feeling of oppressive and dangerous racism in the air. Although the culture of these people is based on journeys or tracks, and all their Dreamings refer to movement over great distance, the authorities had denied them their right to travel. They were frustrated to the point of hopelessness.

A school teacher posted at Papunya, Bardon, was an important figure in the early development of Aboriginal art. Before his arrival, Western Desert art was largely confined to Aboriginal ceremonial practices and some small-scale tourist sales (Allan 2001). Bardon was responsible for encouraging Indigenous Australians to express their traditional motifs and dreamtime stories through painting. In 1971 he submitted several acrylic works to the Alice Springs Caltex Art competition. The competition resulted in $1,300 in cash sales. Bardon later established an artist's cooperative at Papunya and in 1972 he helped form the Papunya Tula Artists limited liability company. After this initial success, over 600 paintings and 300 smaller works were produced over the next 18 months (Allan 2001).

Policy and the development of a market
From 1973-1975, Papunya Tula art production increased. The cash market, however, was still small-scale and largely informal. Arts advisers visited painting communities periodically to pay artists for completed paintings and to commission new works. There were small scale exhibitions and modest sales to museums and art galleries in the Northern Territory but the survival of the Papunya Tula art collective was largely the result of government action.

The principal backers of Aboriginal 'high-art' throughout the 1970s were two government bodies: the Aboriginal Arts Board and Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Pty

[3] Established in 1960 the settlement consisted of five primary tribal groups: Aranda, Anmatjira Aranda, Wailpri, Loritja and Pintupi.
[4] Papunya Tula art is most famously known for the portrayal of traditional motifs in the form of acrylic 'dot' paintings.

Ltd. Whilst these two bodies had initial success in developing a market for Aboriginal art, according to Myers (2002: 134), 'there was a tremendous problem in maintaining a viable stream of circulation between artists desire to paint and scarce demand.'

A major policy problem that emerged was the purchasing procedure of Aboriginal Arts and Crafts. The company was developed to stabilise an income flow, foster production, increase employment and increase economic returns for artists. The company purchased paintings from artists, and acted as a wholesaler selling artworks to metropolitan retail outlets. The company paid for art-work at the point-of-sale, with the respective artist receiving payment immediately, not on consignment as was the procedure of most commercial galleries. The company failed to match sales with production rate, resulting in stock saturation, and the exhaustion of the company's funds. Consequently, no new paintings could be purchased leading to prolonged delays between the sale of artworks and cash flow back into art collectives. Additionally, without start-up capital arts advisers – who are important intermediaries between artists and the market – were unable to buy collections for potential exhibitions.

In response, Aboriginal Arts and Crafts developed a 60-day system, where the art work would be held for 60 days, allowing time for artwork to be sold before a payment was made to the artist. However, this system also failed with artists wanting immediate payment in exchange for their work. Soon artists and advisers began selling artwork to sources outside of the company. Private collectors were later to become important buyers. Grants from the Aboriginal Arts Board largely kept the Papunya Tula cooperative operational during the 1970s with its funds purchasing stockpiled paintings for museums and international 'cultural preservation' exhibitions (Myers 2002: 143). In addition, it was the policies of the Arts Board that lead to the establishment of many arts and crafts centres in the Northern Territory during the 1970s and 1980s which has been described as 'absolutely vital to the Indigenous arts infrastructure and industry and a positive focal point for the community' (DCITA 2002: 198). There are now in excess of 106 art and craft centres across Australia.

The early stages of this market can be categorised as a *grants market*. Papunya Tula and other art collectives all competed for and became reliant upon limited funds from Aboriginal Arts and Crafts and the Aboriginal Arts Board. At the same time the government was attempting to develop the domestic 'uninterested market', namely, the broad population who had little interest in Aboriginal art. As Myers (2002) has argued, public support for the development of a market during this period can be characterised as a 'welfare' approach (135). Financial support was directed at the market without support directly going to producers in the form of fellowships or income support schemes, and was viewed as a 'culturally appropriate strategy for Aboriginal producers' (135). In the words of Altman *et al* (2002: 2), recognition that Indigenous arts and crafts policy 'might provide a means to combine cultural maintenance and economic activity for both Indigenous and National benefit' was linked to increases in Indigenous visual art production and 'in part growth in domestic and inbound tourism and a demand for 'authentic' indigenous cultural product'.

During the early 1980s government policy shifted from a focus on cultural preservation to an emphasis on the development of an Aboriginal 'arts and crafts' industry: a broad term generally encompassing all visual arts, souvenirs, crafts and performing arts. With this policy shift a more structured ‘art world’ emerged, generating increased journalistic attention, a growth in institutional recognition and acquisition and an expansion of retail galleries, collecting and curatorship (Myers 2002: 186). This policy rearticulation with a focus on ‘economic enterprise’ marked a concerted shift away from public subsidy (137). Later in the 1990s, ATSIC [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission] launched the National Arts and Crafts Industry Support Strategy (NACISS) which effectively wound down government-supported wholesaling and retailing operations and invested in fostering ‘more substantial and consistent support of about 40 community-based art centres’ Altman *el at* (2002: 2). It was during the late 1980s period of policy restructuring and industry development that the international success and development of international markets for Aboriginal ‘high art’ began to materialise, largely outside of public funding mechanisms.

The 1988 Dreamings exhibition in New York

The 1988 Asia Society exhibition, *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia,* held in New York from 6 October to 31 December, was instrumental in the achievement of international critical acclaim, and recognition and the initiation of export markets for Indigenous dot-art. The exhibition drew an attendance of 27, 000 people, becoming the most successful event ever to be held at the Asia Society. It elevated Aboriginal art from being ‘ethnographic art’ (anthropological artefacts) to internationally renowned ‘high art’ sought after by elite up-scale galleries and collectors.

The *Dreamings* exhibition is important within the context of this study. First, the exhibition exemplifies how culture can be produced for a *specific targeted audience*. The organisers of this exhibition carefully selected the venue. At the time, the Asia Society galleries were important in the mediation of culture and commerce relations between the US and Asia; the art was displayed in ways that were new according to ‘high art’ styles, and was displayed in renowned galleries rather than in museums as it had been in the past (Myers 2002). As Myers notes the organisers of the exhibition ‘constructed an Aboriginal art that … was always understood partly as being directed to an American audience’ (244).

The financing of this event is indicative of the move towards new private partnerships and illustrative of the successful utilization of informal networks of people and institutions. The organisers sought to raise private and corporate finance through the Asia Society’s numerous networks and connections. Exploitation of the Asia Society’s organisational structure was critical as it possessed an extensive business network, trustees and other ancillary connections ‘including ‘hired consultants who could make connections to corporations’ (Myers 2002: 243). Indeed, the very nature of the organisation’s structure provided a form of triangulation between the US, Asia and Australia, effectively bringing together three potential spectrums of interest and potential financial support. In addition, attempts were made to secure finance through Australian corporations working in the United States and via wealthy expatriates with reputed appreciation for the arts. The strategy was directed at mobilising informal people connections and elite networks (that is, the connections exhibition organisers had with various elites) and through the utilisation of the Asia society’s private consultants.

While financial support for the event failed to arrive from intended Australian and corporate funding sources – with the only financial support from Australia coming from the museum community – finance eventuated from a range of relatively unexpected sources. It could be argued that the exhibition was the discovery of US financial interest in Aboriginal art, with considerable funding coming from the National Endowment for the Humanities[5] and the New York based non-profit funding organisations the Andrew Mellon and Starr Foundation[s]. Other corporate/private financial support came from the Westpac Banking Corporation and associates of the Asia Society galleries network.

The New York market, private collectors and philanthropy

While there is now a large number of public funding and grant schemes available for Aboriginal artists and arts enterprises through the Australia Council for the Arts[6], international enthusiasm and most notably the New York market, are significant forces driving demand, production and the development of the *high-end* of the Indigenous Australian visual arts industry.

In July 2003, Sotheby's in New York sold 560 Aboriginal art works at a total of $AUD 7.5 million (Cho 2004). Sotheby's percentage of international Indigenous Australian art sales has risen from 20 per cent in 1996 to 70 per cent in 2003 (Reid 2003). This market and the international markets for Indigenous Australian art more generally is characterised by a growing number of very serious collectors and a large number of occasional buyers (Reid 2003). The top-end of the New York market is characterised by lower demand but higher returns for artists while the lower end is characterised by higher demand but lower value.

New York art Galleries are important purchasers of Indigenous Australian art. Since the *Dreamings* exhibition in 1988 there has been a remarkable rise in the number of up-market galleries specialising in Indigenous Australian art, as well as general galleries that have substantial sections dedicated to Indigenous Australian art. There are now direct linkages between up-scale galleries and 'talented artists' and cooperatives. Galleries are reported to foster and encourage artists to produce works either specifically for their galleries or to be auctioned at Sotheby's, New York (*Doncaster Templestowe News* 3 December 2003, 'Struck by the beauty of Aboriginal art').

Private collectors and philanthropy have become significant purchasers, and in some cases, sources of finance for the production of Indigenous Australian art. An example is the private collection of Florida billionaire, John W. Kluge. Kluge has amassed one of the largest collections of Indigenous Australian art outside of Australia worth $USD 5 million in 1997 (and is now estimated to be worth twice as much) containing 1,600 works from between the 1940s and 1990s. Kluge reportedly 'fell in love with Australian Aboriginal art' after seeing the *Dreamings* exhibition in New York in 1988 (Genocchio 2004). He brought his first selection of Indigenous Australian art in 1988 –a total of 130 paintings for $500, 000. The money from this sale was reportedly used by the 'impoverished reservation style community of some 700 people' to build an

[5] NEH is an independent grant-making agency of the United States government dedicated to supporting research, education, preservation, and public programs in the humanities.
[6] See http://www.ozco.gov.au/boards/atsia/

arts centre to contribute to the development of the region's art communities (Genocchio 2004). He also commissioned many pieces from individual artists and art collectives providing them with sources of income and investment. In 1996, Arts agents hired by Mr. Kluge reportedly injected $AUD 500, 000 into several Aboriginal arts communities in Northern and Western Australia over a period of two years.

Conclusion

This case study exemplifies that a high-growth, high-economic value, export orientated industry *can* emerge from an impoverished, isolated, and an initially undeveloped context. Several key issues emerge from this case study with direct relevance to the development of niche international markets and the raising of new private financial sources. Individual actors can successfully adapt 'traditional elite' cultural forms (without sacrificing cultural uniqueness or integrity) to appeal to the tastes of a specific *targeted* international audience and market. The mobilisation and utilisation of informal people networks can be a successful method of establishing an international network with linkages to important financial sources. The leverage of institutional networks with formal (business partnerships and international offices) or informal international networks (specialist consultants or informal people networks) can be an important means of obtaining finance and establishing financial streams. Finally, Philanthropic, foundational and private investment can be important financial sources for the production and distribution of 'traditional elite' art; establishing international finance streams and seeding international ventures.

The Indigenous art case study provides important lessons. While it shows how an international export presence can be established, it also provides a point of reference for many who have followed in the Indigenous creative industries targeting domestic markets. Not wanting to suffer exploitation, savvy Indigenous entrepreneurs have attempted to break the cycle of dependency on grants and philanthropy. Successful management and governance structures, along with a sound business plan based on unique cultural assets and partnerships with non-indigenous business have been the foundations for the success of Cyberdreaming.com[7], Goolarri Media Enterprises, and Bangarra Dance Theatre. Cyberdreaming is an innovative multimedia and web-design company located in Brisbane. It is a purely commercial operation managed by Brett Leavy, an Indigenous person from South-West Queensland. Cyberdreaming has diversified into news media (publishing Murri Views) and low cost internet connections for remote areas (Bilby.com). Goolarri Media is distinctly 'outback Australia', a cluster of integrated media enterprises – radio, television, film and television production services, recording facilities, events management and technical services[8]. Goolarri links 16 indigenous media groups and community organisations throughout Northwest Australia. Goolarri can be characterised as an entrepreneurial management team utilising local knowledge to create a commercialisable media brand and generating local content that embraces respect for tradition. Bangarra Dance Theatre is an internationally successful dance and performance company that combines Indigenous Australian tradition with popular contemporary dance styles[9].

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[7] **Cyber Dreaming:** Based in Brisbane.
Website: http://www.cyberdreaming.com/
[8] **Goolarri Media Enterprises:** Based in Broome,
Website: http://www.gme.com.au/
[9] **Bangarra Dance Theatre:** Situated in New South Wales,

The company has now toured approximately 18 countries, undertaken extensive domestic tours and released a multimedia CD-Rom in collaboration with Australia's largest Telco, Telstra.

The development of sustainable Indigenous Australian visual art export markets from remote 'outback' beginnings is a truly remarkable achievement considering the obstacles. However, the success of the 'industry' also demonstrates the fragile nature of the Indigenous Australian cultural economy as well as the intrinsic value of visual art to the Indigenous people. It has alerted Indigenous people to the monetary value of their culture and encouraged the use of their culture as a resource. Contemporary Indigenous creative ventures, still largely require public funding during early stages of development but there is an increasing trend towards entrepreneurial flair, innovative business models and investment drawn from private partnerships and collaborative ventures. In general, the future is looking good for Indigenous creative producers. Where there were limited inroads of any description beforehand, a pathway was created and as people followed, this became a road then an arterial, and now that pathway has evolved into a burgeoning trade route.

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