

COMMENT

The Art of Eddie Burrup adds a new dimension to the fertile spectrum of art from the remote areas of Australia.

. . . the aridified petroglyphs of the Pilbara – fading *Wandjina* of the Kimberley, remnants of old ceremonies and half remembered legends, a microcosm once so undisturbed and immutable is plunged into the ever-accelerating maelstrom of the modern world . . .

. . . the difference between Aboriginal art per se and the art of Eddie Burrup is distinct and can be readily categorised. Both relate to mythology and Aboriginal Community art does so exclusively. Almost without exception all these paintings refer either nostalgically or proprietorially to 'my country', 'my story', 'my dreaming'. The work by and large, is stylised, decorative, diagrammatic – an Antipodean *volk-kunst*. Contemporary Aboriginal art has also become politicised and is often used as a supportive component to land claims.

In contrast, the art of Eddie Burrup is visionary though not necessarily in the sense of prophet or demiurge but rather as a visionary medium that facilitates entry into a recondite domain. Visions do not spring from imagination – they form at a different level of consciousness. Visionary art is not representational yet Eddie Burrup imposes oblique illustrative meanings to his paintings by the use of sometimes long and elaborate titles.

The vision comes first – the epithet follows. Sometimes there can be a conflict between the image and the words for a vision in itself has no space – the artist invents specialised space for it – words and images do not necessarily coincide and yet they are related in much the same way as an echo is related to a voice. A voice can exist without an echo but not the other way around.

Illustration, as commonly understood, is activated by the written or spoken word. Visionary artists however cannot paint at all when the visions cease to appear or when they disappear due to disturbance. (Visionary artists are reclusive by choice). They are wholly dependent upon their visions and the visions themselves depend wholly upon the artist who bestows upon them substance and shape so that they can take on a life that was void before one was found for them.

Burrup's visions are wildly eclectic – unpredictable, often inconsistent, always volatile. They range from classical *Ngarangani* to random incident within historical times, fragments from the lives of the creation ancestors or from the lives of old stockmen – current events, increase ceremonies, devils, even Bible stories! The visions of Eddie Burrup are unified by a coda of their own.

Leon Deutsch

Art critic – *Fein Kunst International* – Munich 1997



Rock Formations – Yule River Pilbara Western Australia