

FORSCHUNG IM ERGEBNIS / RESEARCH REPORT

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In the Absence of an Art Centre – Utopia, Central Australia

Abstract

Indigenous-owned and -run Art Centres are an important cultural hub in remote Indigenous communities. They fulfil a variety of social and cultural tasks together with providing economic opportunities to their members. The function, role and scope of an art centre are particularly highlighted in its absence. Thus, through comparison of a region with an art centre and a region without an art centre it becomes possible to understand the unique role of an art centre in a remote Indigenous community. Indigenous art centres are grass-root level organisations across Indigenous Australia, yet not present in all remote Indigenous communities. In this article I draw, on the one hand, on my doctoral research on the 40-year history of art-making in the Central Australian community of Utopia (2008–2012), and, on the other hand, on my experience as art centre manager at *Ikuntji Artists*, Haasts Bluff (ongoing since 2012). Both regions have a long history of art making and engagement with the Indigenous art world.

This article sheds light on a variety of interconnected questions, including the role, function and scope of art centres in Indigenous communities. It asks: ‘what happens in the absence of this intermediary or brokering organisation?’ ‘Who takes on the responsibility and role of an agent?’ Throughout my doctoral research, which I conducted from 2008–2012, I investigated the question of agency of Indigenous artists from the Utopia region in its 40-year history of art making. This was the first research in Indigenous Australian art to look into a region without an art centre, without an archive and without any form of ongoing organisation within the community. In addition to this, it deals with one of the

most successful and most renowned Indigenous art movements nationally and internationally.

What is an Indigenous art centre?

In the context of Indigenous Australia an art centre is a community-owned and -run Indigenous incorporation, which is incorporated under *Office for the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC)* and is obliged to report to *ORIC* on an annual basis. It is not only a non-government-organisation and not-for-profit, but often as well registered as a *Public Benevolent Institution (PBI)*, which means a charity¹ and thus reports to the *Australian Charity Association*. Art centres are grass-root level organisations in mostly remote Indigenous Australia² and run by a board of directors or committee of local members. Art centres are member-based organisations and funding is contingent upon the existing member base and participation in activities at the art centre. Operations at the art centre are always run in accordance with the rule book or the constitution of the art centre.

Literature about the significance of art centres in communities, their roles and their particular governing systems is very rare. In fact, each art centre has its particularities in terms of its governance, incorporation status and funding levels. An industry standard for Indigenous art centres across Australia does not exist, which is partly due to the fact that there is such variation across the board. The first review of the Indigenous arts industry was conducted from 1988-89 by Jon Altman. The only broad survey of art centres was undertaken by Felicity Wright and Frances Morphy for *DesartInc*³ from 1996 (Wright and Morphy 1999). Since then there has been an

¹ Not every art centre has *PBI* status and is registered as a charity in Australia. Art Centres vary significantly across Australia, some being charities, some being incorporated businesses and some being part of larger councils and not-for-profit but not a charity.

² A very small percentage of non-remote art centres exists across Australia, however, I will not discuss their particularities further here.

³ *DesartInc* is the umbrella organisation for Central and Western Desert based Indigenous art centres in Central Australia. Its current member base entails 45 art centres.

upsurge in the establishing of art centres across Australia and a Senate Inquiry into the entire Indigenous Arts Sector in 2007. In the original survey 39 art centres were considered, but latest figures from *Ninti One – Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation* show that at least 85 art centres exist currently across remote Australia.⁴ *Ninti One* focuses particularly on the economic aspects of art centres. All other functions and roles taken on by art centres are less frequently discussed.⁵ However, as I highlight in the next part, art centres play an integral part in the everyday life of remote Indigenous communities.

What is the role of the art centre in a community?

Art centres provide a space, in which its members can create art that is subsequently sold for them on a commission basis through the art centre (in most cases it is 50% for the artist and 50% for the art centre; often it may also be 60% for the artist and 40% for the art centre). The board negotiates the commission percentages with the manager. Thus, the main role of the art centre is to generate an independent income source through art-making for the local Indigenous population. However, an art centre provides much more than that for a community: it functions as the heart of the community (everyone gathers at the art centre and visitors often come here first in order to ask some general questions), and as a cultural centre (ritual paraphernalia are often kept in safe custody here, but also trips to country are organised by the art centre, reconnecting artists to country through the art centre). It is in many cases the only or one of two businesses in the community, and thus provides a welfare-independent income to mainly welfare-dependent residents in the community.⁶ Beyond that, the art centre gives

⁴ See <http://www.nintione.com.au/>.

⁵ Most recently a doctoral study about the importance of art centres for the health sector has been conducted, yet the results have not been published (<http://caama.com.au/community-art-centre-looks-at-good-health-for-aboriginal-people>, last sighted 26/07/2015).

⁶ In 1973 MacKay already stated: "Most of the arts and crafts produced for sale come from communities with limited opportunities for earning money apart from community associated work and training allowances. In some communities, it is

anyone from the community an opportunity to engage and create artworks for a national and international art market. The art centre is open to any Indigenous person residing in the community.

According to field studies, such engagement can prevent inadvertently a range of chronic health as well as mental health problems, including boredom and many problems arising through boredom, such as alcoholism, substance abuse, and domestic violence to name a few accompanying effects of boredom (Schmidt 2005; Musharbash 2009). The very existence of an art centre means a drop in alcoholism, violence and domestic violence – a long-term survey was recently completed in Mt Magnet in Western Australia, which documented the changes to the community through the establishment of an art and culture centre (Cooper et al. 2012). Furthermore, a study about the importance and influence of Indigenous art centres on the health state of the local population is currently being conducted by Alex Craig.⁷

In recent decades government funding has had increasingly given an impetus to economic outcomes and self-sustainability of art centres (Healy 2005:3). However, in the majority of art centres other more social and community-oriented tasks dominate the everyday functioning of the art centre, which was particularly highlighted by Felicity Wright (Wright et al. 1999). For example, art centres assist at funerals, art centre vehicles are used to drive artists and family members to ceremonies. Other organisations that have no permanent representation in the community often use the art centre to convene meetings. Some art centres provide lunches to their members and run dog programs (see: Warlukurlangu Art Centre's dog program⁸) or help in other aspects of the daily living in a remote

the only source of income outside social security payments" (MacKay 1973:2); and as Healy notices this is still a characteristic of the industry (Healy 2005:29).

⁷ Tim Acker, Lisa Stefanoff and Jess Booth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Economies project. Exchange/meeting for researchers working in the ATSI arts/cultural area, Canberra 2012. Also: <http://caama.com.au/community-art-centre-looks-at-good-health-for-aboriginal-people>, last sighted 26/07/2015.

⁸ See the website of the art centre: <http://warlu.com/about/special-projects/dog-program/>, last sighted 26/07/2015.

community.⁹

The role of the art centre manager includes the everyday financial operations of the art centre, the sales of art, the maintenance of vehicles and buildings, and most importantly the individual development of each member artist's style and oeuvre. This includes the promotion of the artist's works and marketing through group and solo exhibitions, but also the introduction of new media or techniques through a series of workshops offered throughout the year. If the art centre is medium sized or even large, this role might be the one of a studio manager or arts coordinator (Pascoe 1981:31). Often the studio manager comes to the art centre with a fine art background and applies his/her skills and knowledge about art, mixing paint and colour theory to the studio situation. Studio managers particularly focus on prolific artists with an often established career, since through their solo shows and sales the majority of income is generated for the art centre. This group of high-end artists is fairly limited per art centre (generally not more than five) and consists of a group of elderly artists.¹⁰

This art centre structure, including staff, means that art from the communities is distributed across Australia and overseas on an even level. Art centre managers ensure that the market is not 'saturated' with art from one art centre or one artist in order to keep the demand and supply in balance.¹¹ Furthermore, they build the profiles of the artists and choose the appropriate galleries (depending on the market and the price bracket the artworks are sold in). Thus, art centre managers work with a variety of audiences, markets and galleries to successfully sell artworks from each member of the art centre. The art centre is the direct agent for the artists and liaises

⁹ It is fair to note in this context that Indigenous communities in Australia receive funding through a variety of aid programs, such as *World Vision*, the *Fred Hollows Foundation*. Indigenous Australians living in remote communities are considered living below the poverty line in Australia and in most cases the only ways out of this poverty are through sport and arts.

¹⁰ Personal conversations with a variety of art centre managers since 2012.

¹¹ Tim Acker and Alice Woodhead, 2015: *The Economy of Place - A Place in the Economy: A Value Chain Study of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Sector - Summary Report*. Alice Springs: Ninti One Limited.

for the artists on all levels of the business. Therefore, artists can focus on art-making at the art centre and are not involved in any aspect of sales, marketing, promotion or even record-keeping of the art. This 'alienation' of the creative process and the sales process can lead to a variety of problems in the art centre, such as constant queries by artists about their artworks and any sales thereof, which Myers clearly identified as "considerable cultural gulfs" (Myers 2002:165). Thus, it positions the art centre coordinator or manager at the "interface between the artists and the market" (Healy 2005:45), in which she/he constantly has to negotiate with the artists and the market.

In the following, I examine how the situation differs if there is no continuous art centre or arts coordinator in a region. What influence does such a lack have on artists, the art production and the sales of it?

The Utopia case

Utopia is situated about 230 kilometres north-west of Alice Springs, along the Sandover Highway, which used to run along the Sandover/Urapuntja¹² River. The Utopia homelands consist of 21 outstations, of which 16 were inhabited during my doctoral field research (from 2009-2012). Larger family groups live in outstations, thus populations vary from as low as ten to up to 50 people in an outstation at any time. Distances between the outstations differ as the Utopia homelands stretch for more than 80 kilometres along the Sandover Highway. Throughout my field research I spent considerable amounts of time with a variety of artists in the Utopia homelands. I observed their art-making processes and interactions with several art dealers. Furthermore, I interviewed them and went on a number of bush trips with them to experience the country that was subject of their art. In this article, I discuss the circumstances

¹² *Central & Eastern Anmatyerr to English Dictionary* (2010) is the guideline to which I adhere in this article for the spelling of any Central & Eastern Anmatyerr words. However, names of some artists may be spelled in accordance to how they are commonly used.

that artists from Utopia find themselves in the absence of an art centre and how they have developed skills and mechanisms to effectively be their own agents.

The Utopia art movement has been spanning over four decades and started off as adult education classes, in which batik-making was taught along with driving lessons and literacy and numeracy skills (Green 1981, 1998; Murray 1998). Throughout the four decades of art-making in Utopia there have been many attempts to establish a form of art centre: the various models included an arts coordinator living in one of the outstations (Julia Murray 1978-1982), a roving arts coordinator (Rodney Gooch 1986-1990), an art centre focused on batik-making (1992-1997), and the attempt to have a combined art centre for Utopia and Ampilatwatja (1999-2002). All of these models and various structures depended on the coordinator or manager at the time and their interests as well as the governing and funding bodies involved. Despite this history being so fractured and showing a great deal of change and inconsistency over the four decades, one thing never changed throughout it all: members of the Utopia community created art; art which received recognition on an international level, in particular through the celebrated Emily Kame Kngwarreye. Art was created in all of these outstations throughout my research. It was sold to a variety of dealers as well as anyone who was interested in it, drove by, worked temporarily in the community or visited someone in the homelands.

Creating art and distributing it from a remote community in Central Australia to the rest of the world is challenging if an art centre represents the artists (Morphy 2005), however, without an organisation like that it is almost impossible. The variety of tasks fulfilled by an art centre is very difficult for many art centre managers to maintain.¹³ Yet how can artists who often lack literacy and numeracy as well as English language skills negotiate the local, national and international art scene, and how do they create artworks for these various markets?

¹³ See Geoff Bardon's personal accounts about his time in Papunya.

What happens in the absence of an art centre?

The art centre acts as the direct agent for an artist as well as the supplier of all materials, including canvas, paint and brushes. At the same time, Indigenous artists in remote communities have to become their own agents for their art.

As outlined, Utopia artists have not experienced the continuity of an art centre within their homelands, instead they have been exposed to a variety of art centre models and to a great diversity of art dealers. Since 1988 and the introduction of painting with acrylic paint on canvas and linen through 'A Summer Project' convened by Rodney Gooch, a large number of art dealers have slowly but incessantly made their way into the Utopia homelands (Schmidt 2012). This arguably peaked through the demand for Emily Kame Kngwarreye's artworks in the mid-1990s. However, the stream of art dealers travelling to Utopia, setting up art camps for a week or a fortnight, has never ceased. It has only weakened since the Global Financial Crisis and the downturn in the art market from 2009 onwards. During my research there would have been at least 20 dealers working with artists from various Utopia outstations at any one week. Some art dealers only worked with one artist from one outstation, others bought art directly from entire families across the homelands, and others again bought from anyone who offered them artworks. Some art dealers supplied the artists with materials, including paints, linen and canvas, and marked it with their business or gallery names, others did not provide anything but just came in to buy it directly from the artist. As the Utopia homelands are surrounded by various cattle stations, each of which having its own store, sometimes artists went shopping there and paid with an artwork. All of these stores stocked and sold art supplies, including the store at Ahalper (the service centre of the Utopia homelands). Some of these cattle stations had studios in another part of the station, where artists could paint at any time and get paid instantly after completion of the artwork.

The overarching similarity in all the transactions described is the fact

that artists would finish an artwork and sell it more or less immediately, getting an instant financial return for the work. Most art centres in Central Australia do not operate on this business model (exceptions being large operations such as *Papunya Tula Artists Pty Ltd*) but on a commission basis: the artist only gets paid when the artwork has been sold.¹⁴ This leads to a circle quite common across the non-Indigenous arts sector, in which artists wait for cash-out until the end of the exhibition, having to save the income for up to a year or even longer until the next exhibition.

However, when artists are paid upfront for each painting, rather than after the painting is sold to a customer, another kind of operation emerges: one that is more similar to art-making being as contractual work. The contractor receives payment after completion of the work and based on its 'quality'. The artist gets paid at the end of the day for the work produced and when the finished artwork is delivered the remaining amount is paid at once. If the artworks are sold together and no upfront or advance payments are issued the entire amount is paid at once to the artist. Throughout my field research some dealers drove in on a weekly basis, others much less frequently, indicating some financial resources were reliable for the artists (others much less so). Dealers ranged at the one end from the type 'fine art market gallery owner' with a discerning eye¹⁵ in urban Australia, who only operates through an agent or wholesaler. At the other end of the spectrum the occasional customer existed. Their interest was to make some quick money by buying Utopia art cheaply and often selling it on for a great profit privately or online for example.¹⁶

¹⁴ In 2005 Healy still noted that art centres paid upfront for artworks (Healy 2005:71), this has changed significantly through the Global Financial Crisis and the lack of cash flow that art centres now experience. They need to minimise their risks, which they do by paying upon receipt of payment for a sale.

¹⁵ Morphy described this discerning eye as follows: "Because Aboriginal fine art is not precisely defined, those who promote it must have the imagination and skill to recognise new works and new categories of work that may properly be described as fine art" (Morphy 1983:40).

¹⁶ These profits varied from 50% up to 200% mark-up. Such mark-ups are often found in galleries operated by dealers that are commonly coined 'carpet baggers' in the Indigenous arts industry. The investigative television program *4Corners*

A typical example of this situation that I experienced in 2010 occurred at Rocket Range outstation: a utility van drove up and stopped in the middle of the outstation. The driver did not get out of the car, but instead called one of the women sitting next to me to him. They had a chat and she went into her house, followed by her sisters. All of them came out with rolls of paintings. None of the rolls were marked by a dealer, stating that they were not the property of a particular dealer. The driver was not interested in seeing any of the works, not judging their quality or giving any statement about the works, but had in the beginning offered a price. He was given all the rolls in exchange for the cash. The rolls were put in the back of the utility van and the man left. When I enquired about the transaction, being interested in the fact that he did not even want to look at any of the paintings, I was told with a bright smile by Lucky Morton: "They were all rubbish paintings", and everyone around us starting chuckling and breaking out into loud laughter.

This situation exemplifies not only the disinterested and ignorant dealer but also the particular negotiation tools and skills developed by Utopia artists: thus their acting as their own agents. The absence of an art centre has a veritable effect on artists in a remote Indigenous community: all structures, including networks with art dealers, getting art materials, the marketing and promotion of their works to art dealers and possible customer travelling through the community as well as residing within it, have to be either organised on a one-on-one-basis between artist and dealer/customer or the artist has to be in charge of everything, which is the common situation in the non-Indigenous art world in Australia as well as in the urban Indigenous art world. This is very different in the context of the remote Indigenous community. Artists have to learn a great deal about the quality of brushes, paints, canvas and linen as these are keys to the art dealers' market: if the dealer supplies the artists

looked into this in one of their programs and found a great group of businesses operating on this level in Alice Springs alone
(<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2008/s2314182.htm>) last sighted 26/07/2015).

with the highest quality acrylic paint and the highest quality brushes as well as Belgian linen¹⁷, the art dealers expect a product to match the quality of the materials. However, if an art dealer supplies the artist with student paints and cheap cotton canvas that is pre-primed¹⁸ their market is in general towards the lower end and tourist market. The quality of materials given to the artists is one of the factors how they distinguish the quality of the artwork expected from the art dealer. Thus, an artwork painted with inferior materials for a dealer who only works with tourists as clients will not be paid the same amount as an artwork painted for a high-end fine art dealer. Both art dealers have very different markets and are thus looking for different kinds of artworks, furthermore they will pay substantially different amounts for these artworks. The size of the commissioned painting can be another indicator for the amount of money a dealer is willing to pay.

Working with various art markets and art dealers

These factors (quality of materials, amount of materials and sizes of canvases and linen) all give an indication to the artist at the beginning of the relationship as well as throughout it what target audience the artworks are for and what price range they are looking at. Together they determine the quality and thus the price of the artwork.¹⁹ I have discussed these quality markers in great length in my doctoral dissertation (Schmidt 2012); however, I outline them here to give an insight into how Indigenous artists in Utopia decide

¹⁷ Belgian linen is renowned for being the highest quality linen in the world, some of the linen ranging from \$42-\$48 per metre.

¹⁸ Pre-primed cotton canvas is one of the most cost effective ways of supplying materials to artists.

¹⁹ However, as Eric Michaels (1994:162) sums up "[The work] is the product of too many discourses: the painters' attempts to have their designs (and themselves) acknowledged seriously in the contemporary market, the market's requirements for exchange-value fodder, and the consumer/collectors' own interests, which may well include the desire to be associated with auras of authenticity as well as investment speculation." The interaction of these discourses determines, in which end of the art market artworks are being sold. My observations describe how much of this the artists in Utopia understand and negotiate.

to sell artworks to a countless number of art dealers.²⁰ Similarly to a manager of an art centre, artists in Utopia deal with the entire spectrum of the art market, very few artists limit themselves to selling to only a couple of art dealers and no one only works with one: this would mean limiting viable income sources and cash flow streams. Angelina Pwerl, for one, chooses to paint not only with a single stick in a monochrome style for her high-end fine art dealer; Bill Nuttall from Melbourne, limiting herself to one topic, "Bush Plum – Anweketey²¹", but also calls him 'one stick Bill'. Pwerl uses in all her other artwork several sticks at once, in a bundle, whereas larger tip sticks and the 'roughest' and 'quickest' works are done with a brush depicting a completely different topic, but not her personal Dreaming²², Bush Plum. When being asked about this approach, Pwerl sees it as her technique to sell to a variety of people at the same time as maintaining relationships with a network of art dealers and different customers. An important factor when talking about the quality of the artwork is, not only for Pwerl but for every artist from Utopia who participated in my doctoral research, the time invested in creating the artwork.

A 'quick' artwork equals therefore a 'sloppy' or 'rushed' artwork and is subsequently not considered "good and not worth good money".²³ Again this comparison, similarly to being paid upfront before being sold to a customer, evokes behaviour towards art-making according to the principles of a work ethic: one, in which the time and the care invested equal the amount being paid for the artwork. This is contrary to the high-end fine art dealer's concept of art-making, in which the creative and innovative process is at the core of the artwork and its value lies in its aesthetics rather than in the process

²⁰ During the entire time of my research, I was not able to determine the exact number of art dealers travelling to Utopia to purchase artworks, nor how many have worked with Utopia artists over the past four decades.

²¹ See note 12.

²² *Altyerr* (Anmatyerr) or the *Dreaming* describes the belief-system and ontology for Indigenous Australians. The country and the people are from the Dreaming. The "Dreaming may refer both to the specific stories and to the whole creative epoch of which the stories are part" (Myers 1991: 48).

²³ Personal conversations with Utopia artists (2009-11).

of production.²⁴

In her article about ‘working’ and ‘working for’ Diane Austin-Broos (2005) shows that for Arrernte people from Ntaria/Hermannsburg in Central Australia a definite relationship exists between *ritual* and *work*. Through *ritual* meaning is created and relationships are reaffirmed within the community. The preparation and celebration of ritual is meaningful *work*, in which people work for the successful performance of the *ritual*. Austin-Broos notes that in Arrernte there is no word for ‘work’ or ‘business’, the closest word in meaning being ‘working for ritual or preparing for ritual’. Both ‘work’ and ‘business’ therefore have a connotation with ritual. The time spent for preparing the ritual, organising it and travelling to the performance place; the length of the ceremony itself and the question of how many people attended and were involved highlight the importance of the ritual. Time is a crucial factor in ceremonial work.

Despite Utopia artists being Anmatyerr and Alyawarr speakers, which are both languages within the Eastern Arandic language group, therefore similar in many ways to Arrernte, their colonial experience varies greatly to that of the Arrernte in Ntaria, which became a mission in the 1880s. Utopia residents were never moved from their country nor did they ever experience the presence of a permanent mission, i.e. only temporary missionaries. In fact, they lived in and around cattle stations that were set up on their homelands since the 1920s. Their understanding regarding ‘work’ and the quality of a product would therefore be influenced by their many years of engagement with the cattle industry as stockmen and house maids, combined with their traditional understanding of ‘work’ as ritual business.

Art-making is thus a meaningful activity, similarly to ritual as it

²⁴ Throughout my doctoral research I interviewed curators, gallery owners, collectors, wholesalers who ‘interacted’ with artists from Utopia, and artists from Utopia. I was able through these interviews to highlight in particular two kinds of art dealers: fine art dealers who often have a background in fine art, such as painting and/or being a collector, and dealers who have made their way into the industry by chance.

evokes country and Dreaming stories associated with it, and the longer it takes to create it the higher the quality of the artwork. On the other hand, art-making is work in many aspects similar to working on a cattle station²⁵ as the better the work one delivers to one's superior or station owner the more one raises in status and prestige amongst the workers. One gets paid after having delivered the work, sometimes in kind and sometimes in cash²⁶ and the amount an artist gets paid depends not only on the hours worked but also on the quality of the work, for example, when putting up a fence. Interestingly, this combination of time and effort or labour involved is one that artists from Utopia now apply when determining the quality of their artwork.

Fred Myers (1999; 2002) argued that for the Pintupi the price expected for an artwork by a Pintupi artist depended on different factors: importance of the Dreaming story or site depicted, seniority of the artist and his/her knowledge about the place, and status within the community of the artist. None of these factors relate to the actual aesthetics of the artwork, the artwork is an expression or embodiment of the person and has to be paid in accordance to the importance of the person in the community. During my doctoral research in Utopia this discussion about the seniority of the person who created the artwork being important for the price of the artwork never arose. However, many artists found a link between the Dreaming story or site depicted and the market or audience which that particular story attracted. Rather than understanding the style of the person and the aesthetics of the painting as the important aspects for high-fetching prices of artworks, the power and significance of the Dreaming story are considered crucial in their success in the contemporary art world.

²⁵ Utopia used to be a station and many of the artists and their families used to work on Utopia station as well as surrounding stations. This was their first exposure to the notion of working for money.

²⁶ Note that some art dealers still pay artists in kind rather than in cash, recreating an economy prior 1967 when equal pay rights for Indigenous workers were achieved through the Wave Hill Station 'Walk Off' (August 1966).

Conclusion

The particular situation in Utopia highlights that artists in this region operate with various art markets and their representatives, that is, art dealers. By combining their traditional knowledge about ritual and ceremonial business with their knowledge about work on cattle stations, artists negotiate successfully all different kinds of markets and become their own agents. This unusual situation developed through the absence of an art centre and the need for artists to comprehend the various markets and their specific demands in terms of quality of artworks as defined by art dealers. Materials provided by dealers are now a key indicator for artists: pointing them in the direction of the market, for which the works are intended to be and for the pay they can expect for these.

Despite the fact that artists from Utopia are able to successfully negotiate this wide spectrum of art markets, their artistic development is limited by the lack of an art centre. Only two wholesalers that I encountered throughout my research invested into the artistic development of the small group of artists they worked with. Unfortunately, through the absence of an art centre there is no facility or institution that can adequately replace this constant dialogue between an artist and a studio manager, for example. In Utopia the *Bachelor Institute for Tertiary Education* tried to take on the role of inspiring the artists. Over the past five years, it has on several occasions provided workshops in the community – ranging from batik workshops to print making and stop motion animation film making. However, these are one-off workshops, which have an adult education background. The aims of these workshops are not towards creating commercial exhibitions.

Art centres operate similar to fine art schools in the non-Indigenous art world. Within that context artists have the advantage of constant feedback and discussions about their works, however, in the absence of it, there are only the peers to discuss it and who have similar limitations in regards to understanding art markets. In some instances in Utopia, this situation led to very close one-on-one

artist-dealer-relationships, which saw a similar success and fame as known amongst international, non-Indigenous artists, for example, in the cases of Emily Kame Kngwarreye and Gloria Petyarr. However, these relationships need to be nurtured and not interfered with. Otherwise the value of the artworks may diminish in the market through an oversaturation.

The absence of an art centre and an agency where artists exert influence points to a major deficiency: the lack of important services for Indigenous artists. Unfortunately, there are no classes or courses for Indigenous artists in remote Australia educating them about materials, best practice in art dealing, copyright, resale royalty or even agreements between art dealers and artists. All these tasks are also executed by an art centre – leaving artists without an art centre in very vulnerable positions. The only technique to counter that, Utopia artists found, is to vary the quality of the artwork.

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