

This Side of the Frontier: Storylines Full Report.

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Background:

Storylines is the first sustained attempt to explore Indigenous art making outside of 'remote' Aboriginal Australia. Successive government reports into the Indigenous visual arts and crafts industry¹ have acknowledged the existence of Indigenous artists who operate outside the areas of Central and Northern Australia generally regarded as the heartlands of Indigenous art. They have had little to say about them - beyond lamenting the paucity of available information and calling for more resources to be directed to the area. Nevertheless, they have not hesitated to characterise the entire 'non-remote' sector on the basis of half a dozen of the most successful contemporary practitioners² – some of whom would baulk at the very description of themselves as 'Indigenous artists'. *Storylines*' survey does include the biographies of that small band of determined young 'Kooris' who were indeed - as the stereotype of the 'urban' Indigenous artist has it: art-school trained, politicised and city-based and who, more than twenty years ago, staked their claims to recognition as part of Indigenous art *and* as contemporary artists in their own right. But as we discovered, there is a great deal more than this to the art movement their agitation helped to launch into the consciousness of mainstream Australia.

The research was supported by a three year (2007-9) Australian Research Council Discovery grant supplemented by the College of Fine Arts, UNSW. Originally titled *This Side of the Frontier: Indigenous Art in 'Settled' Australia*, the project was re-named *Storylines* on advice from its first Indigenous Research Officer Joanne Brown. Project Director Professor Vivien Johnson initiated the project in 2006. Brown moved on in the middle of that first year and was replaced by Tess Allas who, ably assisted by PhD candidate Laura Fisher since late 2007, has overseen the very difficult and often trying task of data collection. Our survey area covered all of NSW, Victoria, ACT, Tasmania,

¹J. Altman et al, *The Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Industry: Report of the Review Committee July 1989* (Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1989), and Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, *Indigenous Art – Securing the Future: Australia's Indigenous visual arts and crafts sector* (Canberra, Standing Committee on Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, 2007). Note the bureaucratic progression between 1989 and 2007 from 'industry' to 'sector'.

² See *Indigenous Art – Securing the Future*, 5.3, 53, which generalised from the lives and careers of Bronwyn Bancroft, Richard Bell, Tracey Moffatt, Lin Onus and Michael Riley, concluding that "Their art may often be distinguished more by its subject matter ("politically charged"), media ("a wide range"), and the artists' relationships to contemporary art than by its geography ("the major cities of southern and eastern Australia").

and parts of SA, WA and Queensland – everywhere south (and east) of the so-called ‘Rowley Line’³, which divides ‘remote’ Aboriginal Australia from the rest.

The Rowley Line:

We came upon the Rowley Line while searching for a way of designating the artists in our survey that neither presumed what we set out to find - like ‘urban’, nor relied on negative characterisations - like ‘non-remote’. The Line was reproduced in the 2005 Macquarie Atlas of Indigenous Australia⁴ - though without explanation of the basis on which it was originally drawn (or Rowley’s intentions in drawing it) and with the currently preferred terminology of ‘remote’ alongside Rowley’s original ‘colonial’.⁵ In 2009, it would be neither acceptable nor possible to draw such a line: the Census no longer asks Indigenous respondents to divide themselves into ‘part’ and ‘full-blood’ cohorts of Aboriginality, and the very use of these terms would be considered highly offensive by many Indigenous people. To the end of his life, Rowley regarded the view that “a person with European ‘blood’ is not a ‘real’ native, Aboriginal, Papuan or what have you” as “one of the less forgivable myths of the colonial system” because “it dismisses the fact that culture and belief systems are not inherited with skin colour.”⁶ Yet almost forty years after he first published it, the Line, or the division between Indigenous people located on either side of it, remains an ongoing feature of non-Indigenous Australia’s response to Indigenous Australia – nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the case of Indigenous art. As a geographic representation of this “frontier within the Australian psyche”, the Line seemed an ideal way of demarcating the subject of our survey and it was as just such an “intellectual tool” that Rowley originally devised it.⁷

³ In C. D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society: Aboriginal Policy and Practice, Volume 1* (Canberra, ANU Press, 1970). The line was based on the calculations of researcher J. P. M. Long from the 1961 Census (the last in which Aboriginal people were obliged to identify themselves as ‘full blood’ or ‘part Aboriginal’).

⁴ B. Arthur & F. Morphy (Gen. eds), *Macquarie atlas of Indigenous Australia: culture and society through space and time* (North Ryde, NSW: Macquarie Library, 2005), 70.

⁵ The line marked the point at which the proportion of people of less than 50% Aboriginal descent exceeded the proportion of people of 100% Aboriginal descent. Rowley’s justification for the term ‘colonial’ was that in the “great area to the north of this line” colonial forms of administration and social interaction prevailed, due to the Aboriginal (by which he meant ‘of the full descent’) population exceeding both the non-Aboriginal and the ‘part Aboriginal’.

⁶ C.D. Rowley, *Recovery: The Politics of Aboriginal Reform* (Ringwood, VIC: Penguin, 1986), 22.

⁷ “our boundary between the two regions is no more than an intellectual tool to get to grips, as it were, with both facets of the social problem, and was made possible by omitting the town populations of the north from our calculations” C.D. Rowley, *The Remote Aborigines* (Ringwood, VIC: Penguin, 1972), 20.

Collecting the Biographies:

Over the period of data collection, the project amassed a grand total of 641⁸ biographies, which were published on the Dictionary of Australian Artists Online (DAAO) during the lifetime of the project. They can all be found with an advanced search on the DAAO on ‘Source of Info’: *Storylines*. We encourage you to follow the links in this Report to individual biographies and to trace through them a rich narrative of Indigenous life this side of the frontier. Most of the biographies were written by the *Storylines* team. A small but significant proportion were commissioned from art historians, curators, artist’s family members, and artists themselves. In some cases, the *Storylines* team worked with galleries and arts organisations to upload already-existing biographies that they had produced about artists in their stable. Included within the total are many ‘stubs’ created by *Storylines*. Stubs are provisional entries that give an artist a presence on the DAAO in lieu of a biography, often produced if the artist could not be contacted and/or there was not enough information available to write a biography of substance. Stubs serve as an invitation to the end user to contribute a biography, and the DAAO staff editor regularly receives correspondence from prospective writers who, having come across a stub on an artist about whom they are knowledgeable, ask to do just that. In some instances the artists themselves contributed a complete biography once they discovered a stub had been published. [Jessica Birk](#) is one such example.

Like any social scientific research, our results in part tell a story about the researchers’ access to their subjects – or lack of it. We knew before we started the project that our task would not be easy. From the very beginning, *Storylines* employed an Indigenous Research Officer to coordinate the data collection process utilising their existing networks to help counteract the reported resistance of Indigenous people in the so-called ‘settled’ regions to the intrusion of social researchers with their own agendas. We also believed that the publication on the DAAO site of the artist biographies we prepared from the survey questions would cater to the artists’ own career agenda, so that their participation in the study could be based on self-interest.

However, although the DAAO was scheduled to be operational by late 2006, it was not actually ready for public release until late 2007, towards the end of *Storylines*’ first year of data collection. This seriously hampered the researchers’ efforts to explain the benefits of participation in the survey by demonstrating to artists how their biographies would appear on the site. For these and other reasons documented elsewhere in this report, it is highly likely that our overall figures for the number of Indigenous artists in the survey area as a whole and in certain regions within it are unrealistically small, particularly for the two states from which data was collected in the first year: NSW and Queensland.⁹

⁸ At the time of writing (December, 09) 18 of these were “in the system” awaiting publication.

⁹ An illuminating point of comparison was provided by a name taking exercise conducted by an employee of Regional Arts NSW in mid 2009. Despite their best efforts, including a field trip to Broken Hill for an artists’ workshop on the project, the *Storylines* researchers had been able to gather the biographies of only 64 artists in regional NSW (including those living in the Blue Mountains, Central Coast and Wollongong). Yet this individual, travelling through regional NSW about two years in *Storylines*’ wake with a brief to record the numbers of artists for which each Regional Arts Development Officer (RADO) was responsible,

Over the following two years, some of the preliminary contacts made in 2007 were successfully followed up, especially in *Storylines*' home state of NSW, where most of the biographies are comprehensive. The following year, Tasmania and Victoria, and in 2009 the southern parts of WA and SA, were targeted with much better results. The most complete coverage is probably in Tasmania, where the whole *Storylines* team spent a week in the field, supported by the efforts of the Program Officer for Aboriginal Arts at Arts Tasmania, [Lola Greeno](#) to encourage artist participation.¹⁰

Methods of Data Collection:

Storylines is a blueprint for what the DAAO platform can achieve in terms of documenting a specific thread of Australian artistic practice. This Report is intended in part to provide future researchers with a guide to how similar projects documenting other aspects of Australian art practice can be carried out. Tess Allas and Laura Fisher prepared this guide to the methods they used to gather the data, which they hope will be useful to others:

SURVEY FORMS:

Questionnaire forms were distributed to all known artists in our catchment areas. These forms asked a range of questions about their life and practice, the answers to which became the primary data upon which biographies were based. The content of the questionnaire also corresponded to the metadata categories that accompany biographies on the DAAO, from which the statistical information discussed later in this report is gleaned.

HOT TIP – Keep the questions simple and provide sample answers. Ensure that your questions are relevant to your target group.

EMAIL CONTACT:

At times further clarification of artists' responses to the questionnaires was necessary and email contact would be established. One of the great benefits of email correspondence (unlike phone interviews) is that information given can be catalogued for future research.

HOT TIP – Treat emails as archival documents. Print out and file all emails for future research purposes.

PHONE INTERVIEWS:

Phone conversations were especially important in cases where artists did not respond to certain questions in the data form that related to a conventional artist's career path (for

came up with 215. The truth probably lies somewhere between the RADOs' estimates and *Storylines*' more limited data set. The RADOs may have been operating with the same working definition of an artist that remote community art centres apply: anyone who has produced and sold a piece of art or craft in the past 12 months – even though they may never have produced anything before or since. *Storylines*' researchers employed the more stringent DAAO definition of an artist: considering themselves artists, being considered artists by other members of the community, and having a sustained body of work to prove it.

¹⁰ See V. Johnson 'Storylines in Tasmania,' *Art Monthly Australia* 212 (2008):11-14.

instance, what kind of artistic training they had had), but could provide other information to enrich a biography that they did not realize was relevant or appropriate. Phone conversations often helped to make the project meaningful to artists, particularly older generation artists who had little or no experience with the web.

HOT TIP – If in doubt use this method, but try to create a hard copy of your correspondence in some form. The *Storylines* team found the personal approach to be extremely successful.

FACE TO FACE INTERVIEWS:

In some instances face to face interviews were conducted with artists, particularly where members of the team had pre-existing relationships with the artists. This method however was a double-edged sword as some artists made themselves available immediately upon request while in other cases the friendship between artist and researcher was a hindrance as the requests for interviews were often interpreted as a social gathering.

HOT TIP – Try and conduct them in a professional environment, for instance in the researcher's office.

WORKSHOPS:

Several workshops were conducted by the *Storylines* team over the three-year course of the research project. These were held in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. In some cases these workshops provided the team with artist contacts, while in others the workshops' only value seemed to be in promoting the DAAO and the *Storylines* project with the hope of future contact being established with artists by word of mouth. The most effective of all the workshops was in Tasmania because that state's Aboriginal Arts Officer was pro-active in facilitating and promoting our workshops to artists in her network. Having internet access while conducting the workshop so that participants could see examples of published biographies was invaluable in gathering support for the project.

HOT TIP - If you have no on-the-ground support with established art networks, don't bother with workshops - or be prepared for an underwhelming experience.

LOCAL/REGIONAL/STATE ARTS OFFICERS:

The *Storylines* team tried to correspond with arts officers in each state to seek their assistance in making contact with artists under their jurisdiction. Responses were varied. Some arts officers established lines of communication between artists and the *Storylines* team, providing useful information about artists and/or helped to facilitate workshops, while others provided little assistance.

HOT TIP – If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

STATE GALLERIES, MUSEUMS AND UNIVERSITY COLLECTIONS:

The *Storylines* team made frequent use of State Gallery and Museum websites to cross-reference artists' claims of having been acquired by those institutions, and to source other information about artists' careers and practice. While some of these websites have detailed and up to date information available, others had little useful content, and thus contact was also made with Indigenous art curators at these institutions on a regular basis

to ask specific questions. Some universities and galleries provided physical and electronic access to their archives.

HOT TIP – Try to make contact with the identified curators and archivists in each institution and make sure they have a good understanding of your goals.

ARTS ORGANISATIONS:

Where possible city based Indigenous arts organisations (and some mainstream centres) across the nation provided access to their databases and other resources that helped the *Storylines* team make direct contact with artists. Regionally based organisations distributed the questionnaire forms and assisted with the gathering of biographical information from all the artists associated with their organisation.

HOT TIP – It is vital that you emphasise the project's benefits to the organisation's artists, so that it is understood that your goals are aligned, rather than in conflict. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

COMMERCIAL GALLERIES:

In some cases commercial galleries who represented Indigenous artists worked with the *Storylines* team to upload biographies that they already had on file onto the DAAO. In some instances the galleries simply facilitated contact between researcher and artist.

HOT TIP – Always be professional in your correspondence and dealings with gallery owners and offer a staff orientation on how to create and upload biographies.

COMMISSIONED WRITERS:

In some instances where outside writers and researchers were recognised as having great knowledge of a particular artist, *Storylines* commissioned them to write a biography for inclusion on the DAAO.

HOT TIP – Ask for monthly progress reports and keep in constant contact.

CATALOGUES:

Major exhibition catalogues were constantly utilised for both current and historical information. Some catalogues provided contact information, others had substantial exhibiting histories and bibliographies on individual artists. Particularly useful were catalogues and websites pertaining to specifically Indigenous art prizes and awards.

HOT TIP – Always cross-reference claims made in catalogues with further research if possible.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS:

At times government departments produce publications that contain biographical and contact information on artists within their demographic, as well as information about existing arts organisations and cooperatives so these are also useful.

HOT TIP – Always cross-reference claims made in publications with further research if possible.

Selecting the Sample:

To obtain an accurate set of figures on contemporary Indigenous artists from the survey area, it was necessary to exclude some of our 641 biographies from the sample. One of the stated aims of *Storylines* was to “inscribe Indigenous artists from the ‘settled’ regions in Australian art history” by publishing their biographies on the DAAO, whose representation of this area was particularly scant. Accordingly, we made a point wherever possible of collecting biographies of key historical figures from the ‘settled’ regions. Thanks to *Storylines*, the DAAO now includes the biographies of [Bowen Bungaree](#), the first recorded Indigenous Australian artist, and other nineteenth century figures such as [Mickey of Ulladulla](#), [Tommy McCrae](#) of Victoria, [Flora](#) and [Legallé](#) from Tasmania, Oscar of Cooktown from QLD, William Barak from VIC and [William Monop](#) from WA.¹¹ Though the lives and achievements of these artists are crucial to the history of Indigenous art, particularly in the ‘settled’ regions, this information was not relevant to demography of *contemporary* practitioners and their biographies were excluded from the survey group.

What exactly do we mean by ‘contemporary’ anyway? All currently producing artists were included, plus artists whose deaths had occurred since the early 1980s, when what was at the time called ‘non-traditional Aboriginal art’ made its debut before contemporary art audiences in Australia with the *Koori Art ‘84* exhibition at ArtSpace in Sydney. *Koori Art ‘84* is generally reckoned as the starting point of the contemporary Indigenous art movement (though as we shall see, its precursors amongst the survey group go back several decades at least before that). Though their deaths may have occurred within this period, we also excluded the child artists of Carrolup Native Settlement in Western Australia, whose biographies were collected and published on the DAAO in the course of the research.¹² Although their *descendants* continue their artistic legacy and constitute a very significant contingent of the survey’s Western Australian artists, the child artists were omitted because they had ceased to make art in the 1950s when they left Carrolup and thus did not qualify as ‘contemporary’ practitioners under this definition¹³.

However, others who have passed away in the past few decades were included in the survey. Pioneering figures like [Lin Onus](#), [Kevin Gilbert](#) and [Ron Hurley](#) were key agents in the emergence of contemporary Indigenous art, and [Bella Kelly](#) had a significant influence upon several currently practising artists in south-western WA during her lifetime.

¹¹ William Barak was already represented on the DAAO, however a more detailed biography was commissioned by *Storylines*.

¹² See [Parnell Dempster](#), [Keith Indich](#), [Claude Kelly](#), [Reynold Hart](#), [Simpson Kelly](#), [Milton Jackson](#) and [Vera Wallam](#).

¹³ The exception is [Alan Kelly](#), who was still painting in 2009.

We also excluded from the sample a group of contemporary practitioners who reside in communities in far North Queensland¹⁴. However we did leave in the sample a few individuals from ‘remote’ Aboriginal Australia and the Torres Strait Islands who have taken up residence in larger cities that are within the survey area – often in pursuit of a burgeoning art career. [Ken Thaiday Snr](#) and [Rosella Namok](#) come to mind.

Our total sample, arrived at after these exclusions, numbered 593 artists.

The Results:

So what did *Storylines* discover about Indigenous art practice south of the Rowley line? Our starting point is the statistical findings, which are an aggregation of the metadata that supplements all the *Storylines* biographies. They tell us about gender and age group breakdowns, what other occupations artists have engaged in over their lifetimes; the percentages of artists from each state that are based in urban centres or rural areas; what percentage have formal art qualifications; the significance of language and heritage groups and of family connections; what media they work in; what recognition they have received from the Australian art world – and so on. Since the *Storylines* metadata were not concerned with the content of art-work as much as the life path that has shaped an artist’s practice, the following overview will also draw out aspects of the biographies themselves to offer an insight into these dimensions and highlight some interesting implications of the statistical data. We will also canvas some of the compelling themes that we encountered, themes that are associated with an eclectic range of practices, and point to the way concerns that are shared amongst Indigenous artists across the country are being explored in a range of distinctive ways by the artists in this survey.

1. AGE

Dates of birth were available for about half the *Storylines* sample. To allow for statistical comparisons, they were converted into Ages and then divided into the age brackets 10-19; 20-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-59; 60-69; 70-79; and 80 and over.¹⁵

Though several of the artists in the survey reported working since childhood in their chosen medium (albeit under the tutelage of parents and grandparents), almost all the artists who supplied precise dates of birth were in their 20s or older at the time they were

¹⁴ The DAAO needs biographies of these artists for its larger project of gathering biographies of all Australian artists past and present, so they were accordingly included when the *Storylines* researchers came across their biographies in the catalogues of the two ‘Gatherings’ survey exhibitions of Queensland Indigenous artists staged at the Queensland Art Gallery in 2001 and 2006.

¹⁵ To facilitate comparisons with the Indigenous population as a whole, with other Indigenous visual artists, and with non-Indigenous visual artists we attempted to replicate the age ranges employed by the ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics). However, we discovered a disturbing lack of uniformity in the ABS’s own practice, let alone that of other researchers from whom we sought comparative data.

interviewed for *Storylines*, with just five in their teens. Eighteen-year-old [Iesha Farmer](#) from Port Augusta was the youngest female and sixteen-year-olds [Reuben Oates](#) from Tasmania and [Jonathon Doughty](#) from Western Australia the youngest males. As shown in Figure 1.1, the age distribution of this group around the median age of 49 is strikingly normal statistically speaking – in fact almost a perfect bell curve. This is quite a surprising result given the relatively small sample and more importantly the markedly younger age structure of the Indigenous population as a whole. Whereas many Indigenous people - remembering a time not so long ago when the average life expectancy of Indigenous men was 49¹⁶ - are still wont to celebrate ‘making fifty’, almost 25% of the *Storylines* artists whose age we knew were 60 and over. Perhaps being an artist provides satisfactions and consolations that help extend one’s life. Or perhaps those Indigenous people who do live on into old age and attain the status of elders within their families and communities are highly motivated to express their knowledge and their memories through art precisely because not many of their contemporaries have survived, and because they feel responsible for conveying community traditions and stories from their past to younger generations of their family and community. This could be said of artists like [Elaine Terrick](#), [Phyllis Stewart](#), [Ellen Trevorrow](#) and [Thanakupi](#). Such motivations may reflect a cultural shift that has taken place in Australia that has seen aspects of Indigenous people’s life experience and knowledge that were previously devalued and treated with secrecy and shame now embraced and shared with pride, reflecting the resilience of Indigenous people.

In both the non-Indigenous and Indigenous populations generally, women tend to live longer than men, and a slightly higher percentage of the female artists than the male (7% compared to 6%) were in their seventies and older, with shell stringer [Auntie Dulcie Greeno](#) the oldest woman at 86 compared with ceramicist [Vic Chapman](#) the oldest male artist at 77, both of whom are still working.

¹⁶ In 2006 it was 67 for men and 73 for women. Australian Bureau of Statistics 4704.0 - *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (2009), <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/lookup/4704.0Chapter2182010> [Accessed 1/7/2010].

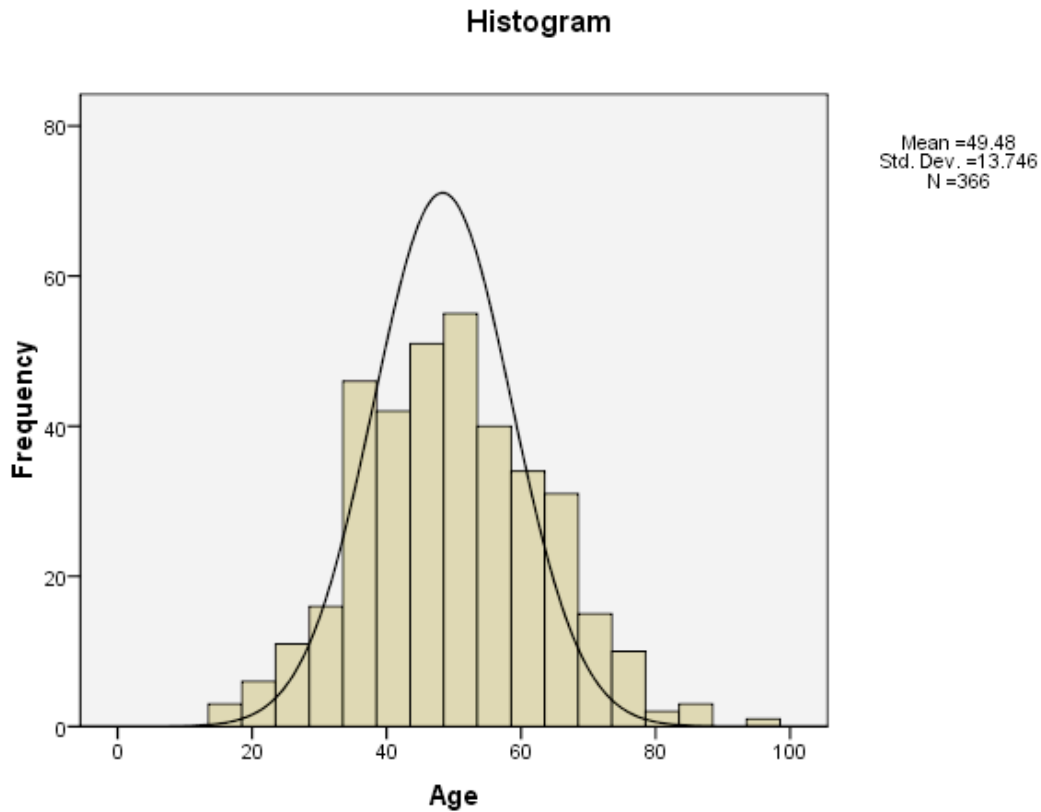


Figure 1.1: Frequency distribution of known ages for *Storylines* artists

2. GENDER

Gender was about the only category of metadata that did not require some sort of conversion and manipulation to interpret the survey results statistically. Women outnumbered men in the sample group 349 to 242. This is a much higher proportion of women than in either the general population or the Indigenous population for the survey region, where women outnumbered men 81,613 to 73,863 according to the 2006 ABS Census. Women do regularly outnumber men in the Indigenous arts industry – according to the 1989 Altman Review of the industry, women were 56% of artist group in remote Indigenous communities, and this gender imbalance is also reflected in the non-Indigenous visual arts sector.¹⁷ Interestingly, in the *Storylines* sample, men in their 30s actually outnumbered women in their 30s. By their 40s however, women outstripped men

¹⁷ D. Throsby and B. Thompson *But what do you do for a living?: A New Economic Survey of Australian Artists* (Strawberry Hills, NSW, Australia Council, 1994), 10. See also **Media** for a discussion of how the reclassification of media in which women predominate (like e.g. weaving) from “craft” to “art” has affected these figures.

both in absolute numbers and – though less dramatically - in the percentages of male and female artists in particular age brackets.

ABS10s	ABS20s	ABS30s	ABS40s	ABS50s	ABS60s	ABS70s	ABS80s	Total
5	17	70	104	87	61	21	4	369
1%	5%	19%	28%	24%	17%	6%	1%	100%

ABS10s	ABS20s	ABS30s	ABS40s	ABS50s	ABS60s	ABS70s	ABS80s	Total
3	9	40	41	35	24	8	1	161
2%	6%	25%	25%	22%	15%	5%	1%	100%

ABS10s	ABS20s	ABS30s	ABS40s	ABS50s	ABS60s	ABS70s	ABS80s	Total
2	8	30	63	52	37	13	3	208
1%	4%	14%	30%	25%	18%	6%	1%	100%

Figure 2.1 Ages of *Storylines* artists bracketed into ABS age categories.
Top table both genders, middle table male, bottom table female.

3. (other) OCCUPATIONS

One of the striking features of the ‘day jobs’ described by *Storylines*’ artists was how enormously varied they were. They ranged across the full spectrum of ABS categories from business managers and administrators through professional, trades, clerical, sales, machinists and labourers. Many of the artists, particularly the older people in the sample, have worked at the most menial levels of mainstream society (farmhand, maid, railway track-layer, wardsman). Many occupations reflected the rural backgrounds of the survey group: bush tracker, cattle ringer, chaff cutter, crop farmer, fencer, fruit picker, horse breaker, meatworker, musterer (of sheep and cattle), rouseabout, saw mill worker, shearer, shearer’s cook and stockman. There were nurses and teachers, dancing and motorcycle instructors, electricians, a welder, a fire fighter, a fitter and turner, fishermen, sailors, pastors, a sports coach and even a footballer and a couple of amateur boxers. Also remarkable was the diversity of jobs that individuals in the sample had held over their lifetimes: [Geoffrey Narkle](#) went from boxer to pastor; [Verna Nichols](#) from deckhand to mothercraft nurse; [Janine McAullay Bott](#) had worked as a horse trainer and a member of a racing yacht crew and [Vic Chapman](#), who started out as a shearer’s rouseabout, became a primary school principal.

Moreover, these are not just ‘fill-in’ jobs like the bar work, waitressing and taxi driving with which many non-Indigenous artists supplement their often meagre incomes from art, but ‘real’ jobs. It seemed to us that many in the sample had not set out to be artists, but came to it later in life after training and working in a technical trade or profession – or a lifetime of menial jobs or even unemployment. This included some of the highest profile

artists in the sample, like [Richard Bell](#), who was Administrator of Pius X Aboriginal Corporation at Moree and a public servant before taking up art as a career. Among the younger members of the survey group however, these tendencies were much less evident, and many who provided no other occupations were among the more successful artists in the survey group: if they did 'fill in' jobs, they did not consider them occupations alternative to art making.

Another striking feature of the 'other occupation' data was the number of people who cited occupations in other areas of the arts. We classified these occupations under 'Other' and assigned them to a separate category (9), because there did not seem to be an ABS category that enabled us to recognise the significance of this type of alternative occupation for our survey group. Didjeridu players, actors, storytellers, filmmakers and dancers we had expected, but the sample also included book illustrators, choreographers, singer/songwriters, writers, a playwright, a couple of poets, a gospel singer, a saxophonist, a gum leaf player, designers, performing artists, a radio host and an animation artist. Examples of artists who have worked across various areas of the Arts include [Gail Mabo](#), [Esther Kirby](#), [Herb Patten](#) and [Graham Davis King](#). Men appeared much more likely than women also to be involved as practitioners in other areas of the arts.

In sharp contrast to the most common occupation for employed Indigenous people in the 2006 Census: 24% were labourers, by far the largest ABS category for both men and women in the *Storylines*' sample was Community and Personal Service Workers (ABS 4). Here we placed not only the handful of cooks and chambermaids amongst the older artists but also the large numbers of people who had graduated from clerical, administrative, trades and labouring jobs to various kinds of employment in the Indigenous arts industry. Many had found employment as casual teachers, passing on their skills in weaving, carving or painting to other Indigenous people within TAFE courses and to the general public in workshops. Some of these individuals had no other vocational qualifications than their Indigenous identity and their experience as artists. Others were working as tutors or guest speakers in university or school and community programmes or had found employment as art education or cultural heritage officers. Still others had found full-time employment in Indigenous education at all levels from early childhood to youth workers, or Indigenous health or housing or cultural tourism. We separated out those who worked as full time teachers in schools, TAFEs and universities in the area of Indigenous arts, and those who were professional curators, working for major galleries and museums.

To document these tendencies without obliterating the fascinating range of earlier occupations of the *Storylines*' artist group, and also to highlight the significant differences between men and women, we prepared two tables of occupational status by gender, one showing all the occupations which *Storylines* artists have worked in and another showing the highest status occupation in which they have worked. **Figures 3.1** and **3.2** show these frequencies for men and **Figures 3.3** and **3.4** for women. No women had stayed in menial category 8 jobs, and although a few were working in retail or in clerical and administrative, by far the largest category was category 4: which meant

teaching and other forms of community work, with significant numbers moving into category 2 (professional) with increased experience and/or formal qualifications (see **Training**). The men, by contrast, show a few labourers and machine operators and clerical workers in the Highest Occupational Status Table. Where ABS category 4 work was unpaid or casual, men were less likely than women to claim it as another ‘occupation’. Nevertheless, category 4 was most frequently their highest ABS category of occupation and also the occupational category most men had worked in, although almost equal numbers had worked at some time in trades and professional work (ABS categories 3 and 2). For many men and women in the survey then, becoming an artist had meant, if not substantial earnings from their art making, then a significant qualitative improvement in their employment prospects, often in some area of the Indigenous arts industry. It appears that the recent Senate Report’s recommendation that more Indigenous people be employed in the industry is already happening, for both men and women, but especially for women.¹⁸

Key to Figures 3.1-3.4

1	Managers
2	Professionals
3	Technicians and Trades Workers
4	Community and Personal Service Workers
5	Clerical and Administrative Workers
6	Sales Workers
7	Machinery Operators And Drivers
8	Labourers
9	Other

ABS Status	Frequency
1	8
2	24
3	25
4	49
5	12
6	4
7	3
8	23
9	40

Figure 3.1 Frequency distribution of male Storyline artists’ other occupations (NB all occupations included for each artist)

¹⁸ R. Myer, *Report of the Contemporary Visual Arts and Craft Inquiry Commonwealth of Australia*, (Canberra : Dept. of Communications, Information Technology & the Arts, 2002).

ABS Status	Frequency
1	8
2	18
3	17
4	19
5	1
7	1
8	5
9	17

Figure 3.2 Frequency distribution of male Storylines artists' other occupations using only highest status attained. Total number of male artists = 86

ABS Status	Frequency
1	10
2	41
3	22
4	80
5	26
6	13
8	7
9	29

Figure 3.3 Frequency distribution of female Storylines artists' other occupations (NB all occupations included for each artist)

ABS Status	Frequency
1	10
2	27
3	11
4	44
5	5
6	1
9	12

Figure 3.4 Frequency distribution of female Storylines artists' other occupations using only highest status attained. Total number of female artists = 110

4. PLACE OF BIRTH:

Like dates of birth, places of birth were not available for many artists in the *Storylines* sample. The artists whose places of birth were unknown were often those whom the researchers had not been able to interview directly but relied on information from catalogues and other published sources and unpublished data sets to compile the provisional entries that the DAAO refers to as ‘Stubs’. Of those who were interviewed, it appeared that being removed or ‘stolen’ had not significantly prevented most people from knowing their places of birth, although in quite a few cases only the city or sometimes just the state in which a person was born was specified. In the end we had places of birth for 400 artists: **Figure 4.1** gives the numbers from each state as a percentage of this total: NSW 103 (26%); VIC 55 (14%); QLD 109 (27%); SA 45 (11%); TAS 22 (5%); WA 63 (16%) and NT 3 (1%). The interpretation of these results is complicated by the fact that large parts of SA, WA and all of the NT and Far North Queensland lie north of the Rowley Line i.e. outside the survey area. Substantial proportions of those state’s Indigenous populations live in these northern regions. Victoria, with 6.5% of the overall Indigenous population, appears to be the most over-represented in the *Storylines* sample – on this measure at least.

State	Frequency	Percent
NSW	103	26%
NT	3	1%
QLD	109	27%
SA	45	11%
TAS	22	5%
VIC	55	14%
WA	63	16%
Total	400	100%

Figure 4.1 Frequency table for states of birth

To give a sense of where within each state these artists came from, the various birthplaces supplied to the researchers were categorised into regions, based on ABS divisions. Of the artists with birthplaces in NSW, more were born in Sydney than anywhere else in the state (27), followed by North Coast 14, the New England/North West 12, Richmond Tweed (Northern Rivers) 11 and the rest scattered across the state or with only ‘NSW’ given as their place of birth. In every other state in the survey, the opposite pattern was found. The data from Victoria indicated that about the same number of artists came from Gippsland and East Gippsland (15) as were born in Melbourne (16). In Tasmania, the state where our data was most complete in terms of both the overall number of artists and detail on their lives, most of the 22 artists who provided their birthplaces were not from Greater Hobart, but from Northern and North-East Tasmania. In Queensland, where the northern parts of the state lie outside the survey area, only six people reported being born in Brisbane, compared with 28 in Far North Queensland. In SA, where similar considerations apply, only 6 gave Adelaide as their place of birth – more came from Eyre

(7) and the north of the state (12). Again in WA, 11 people cited Perth as their place of birth compared with 25 from the Lower and Upper Great Southern region in the south west of the state. These findings tend to suggest that a majority of *Storylines* artists may not have come originally from ‘major capitals’ – though as we shall see in the findings on **Residence**, many of them later gravitated to the big cities.

5. **RESIDENCE**

For the purposes of the *Storylines* survey, we have based generalisations about what state an artist is associated with not on place of birth (or language group or heritage country - all possible criteria of statehood), but on where they are currently residing. This follows accepted ABS practice, so that our findings do not run the risk of being misinterpreted by those who take the residence criterion for granted as the determinant of an artist’s statehood.¹⁹ Moreover, current residence was one of the most frequently populated fields in the survey. We had places of birth for only 396 and heritage countries for a mere 178. 435 people had provided at least one language group, but often there were several such groups for each individual, and some of these groups’ territories overlapped state boundaries, nor were these individuals necessarily born in their language groups’ areas - making for a very confusing picture had we decided to use ‘language group’ as our determinant of an artist’s ‘home’ state. However in almost every case we either had explicit information about - or we could infer from their inclusion in exhibitions based on the current residence criterion - the state where the artist had recently been a resident.

State	Frequency	Percent
ACT	5	1%
NSW	132	23%
QLD	120	20%
SA	91	16%
TAS	36	6%
VIC	143	24%
WA	60	10%
Total	587	100%

Figure 5.1 Current State of Residence for *Storylines* artists

¹⁹ Current residence is the criterion used by the ABS and by most of the various state-based Indigenous art awards around the country. The exception is the NSW Parliament Indigenous Art Award, which accepts entries only from people who were born into a NSW language group.

The results make an interesting comparison with the birthplace data (**Figure 4.1**). 143 artists out of 587, i.e. 24% of the *Storylines* sample, were currently residing in Victoria, an even greater over-representation than for the places of birth data: between 3 and 4 times the percentage of the overall Indigenous population residing in that state. By contrast, 23% of the artists in the sample were currently residing in NSW, only slightly less than the percentage of Indigenous people who live in that state. 20% of the survey group were currently resident in Queensland. WA accounted for only 10% of artists' current state of residence. SA had 16% (91) of the sample resident south of the Rowley Line, more than double the number (45) who had reported being born in that state. Similar results were obtained for Tasmania, with 22 artist birthplaces in the state and 36 currently living there.

These figures do seem to suggest that some artists are moving interstate in search of better opportunities, with Victoria apparently their destination of choice. High profile examples like [Brook Andrew](#) and [Ellen Jose](#) who were born in NSW and Queensland respectively and now live in Melbourne come to mind. The Victorian government is particularly supportive of Indigenous artists. The Koori Business Network, a unit within Business Victoria, developed *Tribal Expressions*, a comprehensive directory of Indigenous artists working in Victoria which proved very useful to the *Storylines* researchers. The Wilin Centre within the Victorian College of the Arts, which uniquely integrates visual art with drama, music, film and television production and community cultural development, has proven a very successful model of Indigenous art education. And after all, notwithstanding Brisbane's vibrant art scene, the mainstream art world continues to operate as if nothing exists outside of Melbourne (and Sydney) – and remote Indigenous Australia.

Residences	Artists
1	284
2	92
3	38
4	21
5	13
6	8
7	7
8	2
10	1
11	1
15	1
Total	467

Figure 5.2 *Storylines* artists with multiple residences

One thing did emerge with clarity from the residence data: the high mobility of *Storylines* artists. Of the 467 artists for whom we had comprehensive residence data, just 284 had had only one place of residence. 92 had two, 38 had 3, 21 had 4, 13 reported having lived in at least 5 different places and 20 artists cited more than five residences. The most mobile in the sample was [Danie Mellor](#) with 15 places of residence. When we took every place an artist reported having lived and classified them into the same ABS statistical divisions that we had used to analyse places of birth, some interesting patterns emerged. In NSW, Sydney scored highest with 79 *Storylines* artists having lived there at one time or another, followed by Richmond-Tweed (Northern Rivers) (27), Illawarra (23), Northern NSW (21), and mid North-Coast (18). Few artists were or had been living in other areas of the state. Similar results were found in Victoria, where 60 artists included Melbourne as one of their places of residence, with Gippsland and East Gippsland in the south and east of the state the next most popular places of residence with a combined total of 37 artists who had lived there, followed by Mallee in Western Victoria with 23. Again numbers in other regions of the state were small.

In Tasmania however, Greater Hobart with 20 artists in residence at various times, had less than Northern Tasmania, with 29. In Queensland, Brisbane also was not obviously preferred to regional sites of residence, with the Far North around Cairns rivalling its total for artists having lived there 13 to 16, although the lack of detailed data on residence may have affected this result. In South Australia, Adelaide was even less favoured by *Storylines* artists over life in the regions: only 18 artists reported having lived there, compared with 48 in Eyre and 30 in northern South Australia, although these latter figures may also reflect movements within these regions by the same individuals.

In WA, Perth (54) had larger numbers of artists taking up residence at one time or another than in the regions. The numbers on Lower Great Southern, with 40 artist residences (only 17 artists reported being born there) and particularly the South West with 17 (and only 3 reportedly born there) may likewise reflect a movement within these regions by artists who either were born there or removed there under the child removal policies that seem to have been such a feature of the artist group in that state.²⁰

The *Storylines* artists' movements reflect a range of circumstances. Some of the more high profile artists, such as [Danie Mellor](#) and [Judy Watson](#) moved around in order to pursue educational, research and professional development opportunities related to their artistic career. The movements of other artists, such as [Nikki Carabetta](#) and [Richard Bell](#), were driven by the need to find employment or the search for family. These artists moved between many different parts of Australia, while there were also lots of artists – see for

²⁰ For instance, [Bella Kelly](#) was away at a funeral when four of her children, including [Geoffrey Narkle](#) who was then eight years old and his five year old sister [Caroline Narkle](#) were taken away from relatives who were looking after them and brought to St Francis Xavier Mission at Wandering (also known as Wandering Mission), seventy kilometres from their parents' home. Other artists who were taken to Wandering Mission were [Laurel Nannup](#) and [Philip Hansen](#), at the age of eight and nine respectively. After two years at Carrolup Mission, [Alma Toomath](#) was sent to Roelands Mission when she was seven years old, where [Graham \('Swag'\) Taylor](#) was also placed after being taken away from Jureen Rock Reserve at the age of 13.

instance [Peter Farmer](#) and [Bella Kelly](#) - who travelled in childhood and adulthood within a particular region or state.²¹ For high profile artists in the sample, their adult itinerancy was often directly connected with their artistic career (e.g. [Fiona Foley](#)) and for some may have been one of its attractions, but for most in the survey this was not the case.

6. LANGUAGE GROUPS

This area presented unique difficulties in terms of compilation of statistical data. There were major spelling variations for almost every language name (with some significant exceptions, like 'Yorta Yorta', which was always spelt the same). Spelling variations are also commonplace for remote Indigenous artists' skin names, heritage countries and language groups, but the reasons are importantly different here. They are not due to linguists and anthropologists re-inventing the orthographical orthodoxy every few years. Indigenous communities in 'settled' Australia generally excite little interest from academia, which is inclined to take the view that these languages no longer exist or are no longer spoken.²² It was the artists themselves who insisted – vehemently – on the correctness of the variant they were supplying. Each *Storylines* biography was checked by the artist him or herself for accuracy in every respect including language group spelling, and many artists absolutely refused to accept any other spelling than their own in their entry.²³

So what is the source of these different spellings? Within these communities, Tindale's influence seems to have been vast: the map of Aboriginal "tribes" is on the wall of almost every Aboriginal organisation around Australia and for some in the survey his spellings constitute an orthodoxy. Others react against Tindale's versions and defiantly spell their tribal name the way it sounds to them – just like the linguists/anthropologists in Central Australia and Arnhem Land, and they have come up with just as many variants. The vehemence with which they insist on their individual spellings points to the major significance of language groups as bases of Indigenous identity in the 'settled' regions. Reflecting the history of dislocation and dispossession of Aboriginal people in these areas, few people supplied a heritage country (see below) – but 436 named at least one language group (and many named several) with which they identified. This did not necessarily mean that they could speak the language or indeed that there were any speakers of the language left. Rather it was a reflection of the importance of this information to their identity as Indigenous people in 21st century Australia.

²¹ Some regions named by artists may not correspond to ABS regions.

²² The 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) by the ABS found that just under 10% of Indigenous people in 'non-remote' areas spoke an Indigenous language (compared with more than 50% of those in 'remote' locations. These figures had not shown any decline since 1994. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4714.0 - *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey*, (2008), www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/4714.0/ [Accessed 1/4/2010].

²³ To accommodate the artists' wishes while allowing for effective searching on specific language groups, the DAAO now includes in the Note field for language group every variant spelling of each language group we have come across (to this point!).

126 people in NSW cited at least one language group, amounting to 29% of those with language group identifications in the sample and only 6 people less than the total number of NSW resident artists in the survey. In Queensland by contrast, only 81 gave a Queensland language group, compared with the 120 resident there. Although the predominance of ‘stubs’ in this state may have contributed to this outcome, it may also reflect the particularly harsh history of Indigenous government policies in that state. In Victoria, 45 more people reported a Victorian language group than a Victorian place of birth. The movement into Victoria from other states noted already was confirmed by there being at least 42 artists currently living in that state who reported neither a Victorian language group nor a Victorian birthplace. In South Australia, the numbers who reported a South Australian language group (49) and/or a South Australian birthplace (45) were only about half those currently resident in the state. In Western Australia, 47 artists provided a local language group compared with the 60 who had been born in the state and/or currently resided in the survey area, and in Tasmania, slightly more people (22) reported a Tasmanian place of birth than a Tasmanian language group (18), whereas 36 were currently resident.

There were some startling disparities in the numbers of people identifying with particular language groups. In NSW, 36 of the 126 people who provided this information gave Wiradjuri (Waradgerie, Wirradjeri) as at least one of their language groups, 29 gave Kamilaroi (Gamilaroi, Gamillaroi, Gamilaraay, Kamileroi, Kamillaroi, Gamilarray, Gamiaraay, Goomeroi)²⁴, 16 Bundjalung and 15 Dunghutti. Smaller numbers, often as few as one or two persons, reported affiliation with another 32 NSW language groups. In Queensland, where 59 different language groups were identified by 81 members of the sample, most were represented by only one individual. There were 21 different language groups provided within South Australia, with Kokatha (16) and Ngarrindjeri (13) cited the most often. Yorta Yorta (32), Gunditjmara (24), Gurnai/Kurnai (21), Kirrae Wurrung (19) and Wemba Wemba (13) were the language groups most frequently cited of the 21 Victorian language groups represented in the survey. In Western Australia, only 15 languages groups were cited. By far the most often identified (28 of 47) was ‘Noongar’ (also spelt Nyungar and Nyoongar).

The term ‘Noongar’ has a long history as a signifier of Indigenous group solidarity in the south-west corner of Western Australia. [Laurel Nannup](#), who has lived in these parts all her life, recalled first hearing the word used in this way – by her fellow ‘Noongars’ - when she left Wandering Mission at the age of about 15 – over fifty years ago. Subsequently, ‘Noongar’ became one of those terms used amongst themselves by Indigenous people that a generation or so ago ‘crossed over’ and came into currency among non-Indigenous people to refer to Indigenous people in particular states of Australia. The term ‘Koori’ came into art world currency for about a decade following the *Koori Art '84* exhibition as a ‘hip’ alternative to ‘Aboriginal’ (or for those really ‘in the know’ for Aboriginal people from south-east Australia).²⁵ Queenslanders were quick

²⁴ From here on the spelling of each language group has been standardised. All the variations have been included on the DAAO.

²⁵ The 1990 edition of the [Macquarie Encyclopedic Dictionary](#) defines Koori as “n. 1 an Aborigine” – adj 2 Aboriginal”.

to point out that they were ‘Murris’ and would take ‘Koori’ as an insult. In South Australia the word was ‘Nungars’, not to be confused with Western Australia’s ‘Noongars’ or Nyungars. These terms are rarely used nowadays outside the Indigenous communities in question to refer to these artists – the generic “Indigenous” seems to be the preferred terminology among the non-Indigenous – or language group affiliations. ‘Noongar’ was the only one of this set of terms given by artists in the *Storylines* survey when asked to supply their ‘language group’ – perhaps because it is the only one that is also the name of a language group.²⁶ In Tasmania at this time (1980s), the struggle for official recognition that Tasmanian Indigenous people still existed (led by the group from the Furneaux Islands formerly known as ‘Islanders’) overwhelmed any concern with terminological niceties. In the 1990s, ‘Palawa’²⁷ emerged as a term of political identification/group solidarity amongst some Tasmanian Indigenous people to counter the generic ‘Koori’. However as of the last five years or so, most Indigenous people in Tasmania now refer to their original language groups. Palawa was named as ‘language group’ by only 5 of the 18 artists who gave a Tasmanian language group, with 11 giving Trawlwoolway, one of 7 other Tasmanian ‘language groups’ identified in the survey.

Before leaving language groups, it is interesting to compare these findings with the places of birth data. While Wiradjuri was the language group identification most frequently given in NSW (36), only 8 artists indicated they had been born in the Central West and Murrumbidgee regions, which this language group covers. By contrast 29 artists gave Kamilaroi as at least one of their language group affiliations and 19 gave birth places in the Northern and North Western regions of the state with which this language group is associated. Bundjalung (16) covers the Richmond Tweed region, where 9 artists in the survey reported being born, and Dunghutti (15) covers the Mid-North Coast region, where 11 artists’ birthplaces were recorded. In South Australia, the majority of language group affiliations were Kokatha (16) in the Northern region of the state where most artists who reported South Australian birthplaces were also born; and Ngarrindjeri (13), which covers parts of the Murray Lands and South-East regions of the state where 6 artists reported being born. In Victoria the Goulburn region, traditional lands of the Yorta Yorta, was reported as the birthplace of only 4 artists in the survey, whereas 32 people reported Yorta Yorta language group affiliation. Gunditjmara (24) and Kirrae Wurrung (19) cover parts of the Western District, where no artist birthplaces were recorded in the survey, and Wemba Wemba (13) which covers the Mallee region was the birthplace of 7 artists amongst those born in Victoria. Gurnai/Kurnai (21) covers East Gippsland, where the majority (13) of reported Victorian birthplaces were located. The south west corner of Western Australia, home to the Noongars (28), covers the regions of Perth, the South West and Upper and Lower Great Southern, was the area of birth of 31 artists. In Tasmania, where 14 artists gave birthplaces in the Northern ABS region, 11 cited as (at least one of) their language group(s) Trawlwoolway, whose territories are in north-

²⁶ It appears - as ‘Yungar’- in the SW corner of WA on a map of Aboriginal languages put together by Wilhelm Schmidt in 1919 which predates Tindale’s map. See <http://austlang.aiatsis.gov.au/disclaimer.php>; http://austlang.aiatsis.gov.au/php/public/schmidt_map.php.

²⁷ This does not however imply a connection with the ‘Palawa Kani’ program associated with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre in Hobart.

eastern Tasmania, and another gave Pyemmairrener, which Tindale's map places also in the north-east corner of the state.

7. HERITAGE COUNTRY

When it came to naming their 'heritage country', few in the sample were as decisive or particular as so many had been in specifying their language groups. Some were, like Queensland artist [Avril Quail](#), whose biography notes that she is of the "Goenpul and Nuigi people of Moreton Bay (Quardamooka) SE Queensland", but others simply gave their language group names again as a way of identifying their country. There were a few who said simply "Unknown" and most people (70% of the sample) did not specify anything at all in this field. Those who did often named a region, like North Coast NSW or Murray River Victoria or Wheatbelt WA or a town or city like Kempsey, Newcastle or Melbourne. Despite this reticence, the artists within the *Storylines* catchment illustrate the multitude of ways that Indigenous Australians connect with country, and show that 'country' is a source of inspiration not only for those living north of the Rowley line. As we shall see in the **Media** findings, the survey group contains many weavers, shell-workers, wood carvers, emu egg carvers, paper makers etc. all of whom draw their artistic materials from the land. The collection and preparation of those materials is always a life affirming and rejuvenating part of the cycle of art production.

For the kelp and shell workers of Tasmania, such as [Vicki West](#), [Eva Richardson](#), [Verna Nicholls](#), [Bernice Condie](#), [Lola Greeno](#) and [Dulcie Greeno](#) art making entails regular visits to heritage country on the Furneaux Group of islands to collect materials, which allows those artists to reacquaint themselves with country, to care for country, and to ensure that new generations of family members establish these connections as well.²⁸ [Vernon Graham](#)'s employment as a Tasmanian Aboriginal heritage officer sees him spend much of his working life 'in the field'. His artistic practice as a craftsman working with natural materials and an environmental photographer is therefore intertwined with the custodial duties he has in this role. The participation of artists like Graham and [Ricky Maynard](#) in the yearly mutton-bird harvest on the islands also allows for a meaningful engagement with country in a manner that informs their work.²⁹

Many artists have created bodies of work on the theme of country that express a sense of loss and nostalgia for pre-colonial times. [Graham \(Swag\) Taylor](#) has painted the view from Bunbury – his grandmother's country, as he imagines it would have looked before settlement. Many of the Noongar artists of the Southwest of WA paint country in a naturalistic style, though it rarely relies on the conventions of observation that underpin the European landscape tradition. The moody, sometimes fantastical feeling of many of their works echoes the tone of the Carrolup children artists' paintings and drawings of the 1940s and 50s, whose style has been an abiding source of inspiration for artists across several generations of Noongar people. These artists' works are also informed by an

²⁸ See also A. Reynolds (ed), *Keeping Culture: Aboriginal Tasmania* (Canberra, National Museum of Australia Press, 2006).

²⁹ See also [Esme Timbery](#) and [Phyllis Stewart](#).

image of country captured in their mind's eye, imbued with a sense of familiarity, love, nostalgia and yearning. As Taylor told Laura Fisher, the South-west tradition is about "imagining where you want to be in country", and "painting country as you see it". [Gordon Syron's](#) *Where Wildflowers Once Grew* series recalls "Minimbah, the land we grew up on, the land of the Biripi people." [Glenn Pilkington](#) creates works which explore the emotions of loss and longing that come with displacement, and with imagining one's heritage country from afar while living in an urban environment. Other city-based artists such as [Deborah Bonar](#), [Bevan Thompson](#) and [Craig Charles](#) use their work to reflect upon and remain connected to their heritage country.

Given that 49 is the median age of the sample, half of the *Storylines* artists were born in 1960 or earlier, a period when institutional living overseen by white supervisory staff, whether church authorities or government employees, was still a feature of many Indigenous lives south as well as north of the Rowley line. [Roy Kennedy](#) and [Elaine Russell](#) are well known for their portrayals of mission life, but *Storylines'* research revealed just how pervasive the experience is, and how it has positive as well as negative associations for many. Thus a significant number of people cited missions where they or previous generations of their family had lived as their 'heritage country'. In NSW Bowraville, Burnt Bridge near Kempsey, Cabbage Tree Island, Caroon Mission, Cummeragunja, Toomelah, Wallaga Lake, Darlington Point, La Perouse and Moree; in Victoria Coranderrk, Lake Condah and Lake Tyers; in SA Innaminka, Ooldea and Yorke Peninsula (site of the Point Pearce mission); Cape Barren Island and Wybalenna on Flinders Island in Tasmania; Katanning in WA and Lockhart River and Palm Island, Queensland: all former mission stations were named by *Storylines* respondents as having this significance for them. Many artists also acquired what artistic training they had received from their mission experiences. For example, [Frank Harrison](#) recounts how he learnt his carving skills from observing the 'Old People' such as Waddy Pepper, Laurie Moffatt and Foster Mullett at the Lake Tyers Mission in Eastern Victoria. Basket weaver [Connie Hart](#) was born near Lake Condah Mission in South Western Victoria and attended the mission school during her childhood, though she was always attentive to the stories and practices of her mother and her elders on the mission.

8. FAMILY

The importance to artists in the *Storylines* sample of their Indigenous ancestry and their family history was demonstrated by their often detailed knowledge of relatives going back three or four generations to great great grandparents, great aunts or uncles and so on, far more than the average non-Indigenous Australians' knowledge or recall of their family history.³⁰ Family is a subject for many *Storylines* artists, in works underpinned by both celebration and mourning, for example [Michael Riley's](#) series *A common place: portraits of Moree Murries* (1991) and *Yarns from Talbragar Reserve* (1998) and [Ricky](#)

³⁰ The DAAO value list for the 'Family member' field only caters to the grandparent generation, despite *Storylines'* protestations at the inappropriateness of so many of the artists' significant relations being consigned to the category 'other'.

[Maynard's](#) series *Moonbird People* (1985-1988) and *Portraits of a Distant Land* (2005-2007).

An important family figure represented in bush sculptor [Janine McAullay Bott's](#) work is 'Oldie', a nickname shared by her grandfather and a big kangaroo that had turned up on her grandparents' property in Katanning WA as a joey after its mother had been shot. McAullay Bott created a 6 foot weave of Oldie the kangaroo, and recalled the way her Grandma Ada would have to fend off the towering 'Oldie' - who thought he was a rooster and was thus protective of the hens - with her broom while the kids ran between the squawking fowl to grab the eggs, and Grandpa 'Oldie' stood laughing in the doorway. One of [Laurel Nannup's](#) most recognisable works is 'The Lolly Tree', which illustrates a moment from her childhood when her uncle Lionel Hart drove her and her siblings in horse and cart past a tree which he had filled with lollies with coloured wrappers. [Vic Chapman's](#) *Baagi Vase* depicts his grandmother who, as his biography states, he remembers "setting off to her favoured fishing hole with her bait, sugar bag and handmade fishing lines smoking a bent stem pipe".

Sometimes flights of fancy give family members grander lives – [Brenton McKenna's](#) illustrations for his graphic novel *Ubby's Underdogs and the Legend of the Phoenix Dragon* are inspired by his grandmother's youth in Post WW2 Broome, and pictures Ubby as a savvy street ruffian creating and surviving mischief. In some cases family members are mobilised as subjects within works to give extra punch to a confronting political message, as in the work of photographer [Bindi Cole](#).

In addition to providing subject-matter for their later art making, many *Storylines* artists received their only art training from members of their family. Most who cited family (or 'elders') as the source of their artistic training were among the older half of the sample. The passing on of skills was not necessarily deliberate – as in the case of [Connie Hart](#), who began basket weaving at the age of 65 after returning to Little Dunmore to care for her elderly mother. Connie recollected the baskets that her mother had made from Puung'ort grasses when Connie was a child. She commented, "No one taught me to make my baskets. My mum told me we were coming into the white man's way of living. So she wouldn't teach us. That is why we lost a lot of culture. But I tricked her and I watched those old people and I sneaked a stitch or two."³¹ [Lucy Williams Connelly](#) learnt the technique of pyrography (wood burning) from watching her father 'burn in' images of Indigenous people with their tents and humpies, and native animals such as kangaroos, porcupines and emus onto pieces of wood the family collected on fishing expeditions to the Murray/Murrumbidgee region. Her father's cousin taught her the slow and difficult task of emu egg carving – although it was from members of the Country Women's Association (CWA) in Bendigo and Horsham in the early 1970s that she learnt her basketry techniques. [Roy Coulthard](#) learnt by watching his father and grandfather create wooden artefacts when he was a child. [Sue Charles'](#) basket weaving "was inspired by Aunty Dot Peters, a renowned elder and weaver, who used to take me to collect flax and

³¹ A. Jacomos and D. Fowell *Living Aboriginal History of Victoria* (Melbourne, Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1991), 74.

grasses for weaving eel traps”, and she is committed to ensuring that the basket weaving traditions she has inherited are conveyed to younger generations of her family and community. Respected basket weaver [Edith Terrick](#) (Aunty Eadie) was born at Wallaga Lake Mission in NSW and was following a family tradition handed down through generations from her mother and grandmother. Aunty Eadie in turn taught her daughter [Elaine Terrick](#) basketry skills and now takes pride in knowing the skills have been passed down through another two generations to her grandchildren. [Aunty Zelda Couzens](#) learnt to weave baskets from her great-grandmother, grandmother, mother and father, and passed on these weaving techniques to her daughter, artist [Bronwyn Razem](#). [Corrie Fullard](#) grew up watching her mother, father and grandparents gather, dry and clean shells before stringing them into necklaces and at the age of 16 she decided to dedicate her life to continuing this tradition. [Esther Naomi Kirby’s](#) father was a well respected egg carver who taught her as a child to use files and knives, the tools she still uses for her own carvings. And [Esme Timbery](#) learnt from her mother, grandmother and aunts the names of shells and the times of the year she was most likely to find them and from the age of seven began creating shellworked brooches under their guidance. Family remains an important source of inspiration to some of the younger artists in the sample, like [Joel Birnie](#), who builds his identity as an Indigenous artist on the foundation of his famous ancestor Fanny Cochrane Smith, creator of the only recordings ever made of Tasmanian Indigenous song and speech.

9. TRAINING:

Key to Figure 9.1:

1	University
2	TAFE, College of Advance Education
3	Community colleges, CEDP’s, Art Society, Workshops
4	Family and elders
5	Self Taught
6	Other (prison etc)

Training	Frequency	Percent
1	107	35%
2	112	37%
3	11	4%
4	48	16%
5	20	6%
6	6	2%
Total	304	100%

Figure 9.1 Level of training of *Storylines* artists

Instruction by elders and family was the experience of only a minority (16%) of the 304 *Storylines* artists who responded to the survey question on Training. Another 6% were “self-taught”. Like their non-Indigenous counterparts³², *Storylines* artists tended to be considerably better educated and qualified than the rest of the Indigenous population, only 19% of whom had completed Year 12 at the time of the 2006 Census. By contrast 35% of the 304 people who indicated their educational qualifications under ‘Training’ had university degrees, including post-graduate degrees. A further 37% had completed TAFE or College of Advance Education qualifications, making a total of 72% with post-secondary training – well ahead of the general Australian population, let alone the Indigenous population.³³ This is despite the older age profile of the *Storylines* sample – in the 2006 Census, younger Indigenous persons were found to have completed a higher level of education than older Indigenous persons, with only 8% of all persons in the Indigenous population as a whole aged over 55 years having completed Year 12.

The frequency of TAFE courses in the training data reflects a very particular set of circumstances. There were many individuals amongst the *Storylines* artists who, having been denied the opportunity to gain professional qualifications and sustainable employment opportunities in their early life, had reached middle age with very few skills that would lead to employment. The establishment of Aboriginal units in TAFE colleges located in rural and regional areas made it possible for these individuals to acquire new skills and find a fresh focus in life. Furthermore, the fact that these units accommodated Indigenous people’s experience and perspectives in new ways meant that in many cases there was a validation and enhancement of the skills and knowledge that these individuals had acquired through life but that had not previously been valued.

TAFE has thus often played both an instigative and consolidatory role with respect to *Storylines* artists’ practice later in life. [Caroline Narkle](#), for instance, acknowledged the impact of her years of study at Great Southern TAFE in Katanning and Mt Barker and wanted her biography to express her gratitude for the support and encouragement she received.³⁴ TAFE attendance also accounts in part for the mobility of many of the artists in the *Storylines* catchment: many artists have moved temporarily to towns in which a TAFE college is located in order to study.

Some TAFE courses may also have a case to answer in terms of the number of their former students producing work that was derivative of, or sought to emulate, the ‘dot dot’ style of the central desert, and tended to paint images of native animals or landscapes decorated with dots. Some teachers have encouraged people to employ the techniques that are most clearly associated with ‘Indigenous art’ as it is popularly recognised. However in the cases where artists were producing derivative and imitative work, the team often sensed that they were seeking to assert their Indigenous identity, and thus

³² See Throsby and Thompson, *But what do you do for a living?*

³³ These figures might be even higher if we take into consideration the number of ‘stubs’: artists might not have mentioned TAFE or CAE qualifications in putting together a biography for a catalogue or art prize entry.

³⁴ See also [Kevin Atkinson](#).

gravitated towards the styles of artists who had achieved the greatest recognition and success.

10. MEDIA

Contradicting the stereotype of the 'urban' Indigenous artist as innovative and working in a variety of media, the majority of *Storylines*' artists (338 out of 593) worked only in one medium, and almost all of these were painters. Others who worked in a single medium tended to work in 'traditional' Indigenous media such as carving, weaving, shell necklace making and possum skin cloak making usually passed on by family members, or as part of a workshop program conducted by those who had acquired their skills from family members (see **Family**). There were exceptions like [Vic Chapman](#) who developed from childhood a fascination with working in clay, to the point where even his lifetime's work as a teacher was seen through the metaphor of his work in clay: "as well as delivering 'readin', 'ritin' and 'rithmetic, I was, like the potter referred to in Jeremiah 18:2-6, given the challenge to refashion lives that threatened to collapse." [Cornelius Richards](#) on the other hand acquired his ceramic skills at Yarrabah mission, an environment holding out but few opportunities for artistic diversification. Sometimes artists who came to art later in life chose to concentrate mainly on one medium to which they were introduced by TAFE courses: e.g. printmaking and [Roy Kennedy](#). (Although it must be noted here that Kennedy won the 2009 Parliament of NSW Art Prize with a *painting* after years of submitting a print). Noteworthy perhaps about the non-painting single medium is that in most instances (apart from the possum skin cloak revival of a traditional medium supported by government funding for the 2002 Commonwealth Games) these other media hold out some possibility of paying their way: pottery, baskets and traditional carvings do sell, photographers can earn a living with their skill ([Mervyn Bishop](#)) and so on.

Generally speaking, the older the artist, the more likely they were to focus on a single medium, and the more successful an artist was, the more likely they were to have worked in a number of media – though it would be confusing cause and effect to suggest that their success led to exploration of other media. More likely the art school training that was highly correlated with success in the survey group had given them proficiency in a number of different media.

The art school trained group also included a small contingent of usually younger artists who had elected to focus on a medium other than painting – installation, ceramics, photography etc. For instance [Yhonnie Scarce](#), the winner of the 2008 Qantas Foundation Encouragement for Australian Contemporary Art Award for the state of South Australia, studied glass blowing at the University of Adelaide and uses the medium to great effect to explore historic and contemporary forces of colonisation. [Robyne Latham](#) has developed a distinctive practice as a sculptural ceramicist and [Duncan Robinson](#) is a video artist who manipulates video-tape as well as television and mobile phone imagery. There appears to be an emerging tendency for younger Indigenous artists in the *Storylines* demographic to develop their skills in other media – making the most of training

opportunities usually not available to young Indigenous people in 'remote' regions, even though many of them shy away from painting as an 'old persons' thing.

There were some fairly predictable gender differences in the use of various media. There were twice as many male carvers as women - though [Esther Kirby](#) is a well-known emu egg carver. Men were also much more likely to use digital media, women more likely to experiment with installation and mixed media. Men were significantly better represented in the medium of print despite their smaller numbers in the sample, perhaps reflecting its affinity with carving. Women were disproportionately represented among the jewellery and textile and fashion makers and accounted for almost all of the weavers in the sample ([Steve Russell](#), [Shaun Kalk Edwards](#), and [Glen Mackie](#) being the three exceptional male weavers). There were small numbers of ceramicists amongst both men and women, similarly for photography, sculpture and drawing but there were almost no video or filmmakers. One of the reasons for the preponderance of women in this survey probably has to do with the shift in recent times in the perception of ceramics, textile and fibre art, jewellery and weaving which tend to be dominated by women, from being perceived as "craft" to being acknowledged as - at least potentially - "art" media. On the other hand, male-dominated areas like wood carving have undergone a similar transition.

Despite the prevailing image of 'urban' Indigenous artists as art school trained sophisticates, the vast majority of the artists in the sample appear to be orthodox rather than innovative in their use of artistic media, and where they deviate from painting, drawing, ceramics and print making, it is generally not in the direction of experimentation with new media, but in exploring and maintaining what might be described as 'traditional' Indigenous media such as wood and emu egg carving, weaving, and shell work. However, one of the most interesting groups of work uncovered in this research involved innovative uses of traditional media: [Vicki West](#)'s work with bull kelp immediately springs to mind here, but there were many others who worked in innovative ways with 'traditional' media including seaweed, possum skin cloaks, shells, bark, pyrography (burning designs onto wood) and 'sculptures' composed of traditional weaponry.

For a significant numbers of *Storylines* artists working in these 'traditional' media, these skills were passed on to them by family members - rather than being reconstituted from objects in museums, as the stereotype of the disculturated 'urban' Indigenous artist would have us believe. Thus Tasmanian shell-workers have, against all odds, been able to maintain a shellworking tradition on the Furneaux group of Islands. Artists such as [Lola Greeno](#), [Dulcie Greeno](#), [Corrie Fullard](#) are carrying on an age old tradition. In recent years, these artists have engaged with the shell necklaces that are in the collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (which has around 187 necklaces dating from the 1800s), and the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery collection (which has a collection of 170) which have now added the contemporary shell-workers to their collections. These women's art practice bears witness to the fact that the 'artefacts' in museum collections are not locked in the past, but are part of a tradition that has survived the displacement and loss that colonisation brought about, and proves the idea that Tasmanian Indigenous culture didn't survive to be a fallacy.

Storylines artists, like their contemporaries north of the Rowley Line, do also engage with their ancestors' work in museum and art gallery collections. The Possum Skin Cloak project, spearheaded by [Vicki Couzens](#), [Debra Couzens](#), [Treanha Hamm](#) and [Lee Darroch](#), has seen a remarkable reclamation of the making of possum skin cloaks in Victoria, following the revelation of two 19th century cloaks in the archives of Museum Victoria that had been collected in the artists' heritage country.

Similarly Noel Lonesborough, Aaron Broad, Clive Freeman, Suzzane Stewart, [Phyllis Stewart](#) and [Steven Russell](#) from Boorlarng Nangamai were offered opportunities to apply their existing skills to replicating objects for the Museum of Sydney. When creating a sample of a fishing net, Russell said that whilst working out how to create the loops and knots required, he remembered sitting outside his grandfather's tin shack at La Perouse Beach with his siblings Marilyn, Clifford, Bill, Neil, Leonard and Charlie watching his grandfather, Hubert Timbery and his uncles Joe and Spud repair their fishing nets using wooden needles they had also made. It was this memory of his male elders looping and knotting that helped Steven with the creation of his piece for the Museum of Sydney. Also and though not strictly engaging with an ancestor's work, Russell was given access to the breast plate of his great, great uncle, Joe Timbery (held in Australian Museum collection) who, in the first half of the 19th century was known as the 'Chief of the Five Islands' (a group of islands off the Illawarra coastline).

The DAAO media value list was intended to be cross-cultural, but as soon as the *Storylines* project got underway it became obvious how skewed it was towards mainstream practice. After much discussion, carving and weaving were added to the list after it was agreed that emu egg carvings and traditional weapons could hardly be classified as 'sculpture' and that woven mats and baskets were not 'textiles' – although obviously some carved and woven objects produced by *Storylines* artists also qualify as 'sculpture'. A detailed consideration of the range of media that still needed to be placed in the category 'Other' further illustrates these points. There were text, neon, shadow boxes, "sound bibles", book illustration, papermaking, bark etching and tapestry.

One of the other commonalities which the Senate Report found across the whole spectrum of Indigenous art was collaboration and nowhere is this more exemplified in this survey than amongst the weavers. Weaving so often involves women chatting together, working together, and affirmation of intergenerational and community ties between women. The past few decades have seen cross-pollination of weaving styles amongst Indigenous – and non-Indigenous - weavers across the country. In this medium we found the greatest sharing of knowledge between Indigenous artists from different parts of Australia, and between Indigenous artists and non-Indigenous artists. Coil weaving, adapted from techniques used by Indigenous women in South-east Australia, was introduced to Arnhem Land in the 1920s:

Perhaps the first time Arnhem Landers saw baskets made with the coiling technique was when they appeared with the then latest female missionary on Goulburn Island in 1922. Margaret Matthews, (1877-1948), better known as Gretta, was the new schoolteacher at the Methodist Mission, who included domestic activities such as

sewing and basket making for the young girls and their mothers. The skills necessary to make baskets she obtained when working at the Maloga Mission on the Murray River founded by her father, [Daniel Matthews](#), and the rest of the family. They later moved to Cummeragunja Aboriginal Station near Echuca. Matthews was taught the coiling technique by Ngarrindjeri women and may also have been influenced by others including Bangerang, Wiradjiri and Yorta Yorta women.³⁵

In the mid 1990s, prior to her inclusion in the Venice Biennale, Ngarrindjeri weaver [Yvonne Koolmatrie](#) was in conversation with some of the women weavers of Maningrida in Arnhem Land, NT. At that time these women were weaving only mats and baskets and told Koolmatrie that the market for these items was flooded. Koolmatrie suggested they try to weave more sculptural items such as turtles and hats. She offered to visit Maningrida and present workshops in making these forms, a proposal that was accepted by the Maningrida women. As a result, Yvonne Koolmatrie was able to pass on some of her designs and weaving knowledge to a community over 3,000 kilometres from her own at the mouth of the Coorong in South Australia.

As a child, Wood Wood based weaver [Marilyne Nicholls](#) used to watch her grandmother Emily Karpany (nee Pinkie) making baskets, hats and feather flowers. Emily was a Ngarrindjeri woman whose family had come North to the Victorian part of the Murray River from the Coorong in South Australia to prevent their children from being taken away by the state. Marilyne's mother Letty and later Marilyne herself took up weaving, thereby retaining a connection, through the practice of weaving as well as the gathering of materials used in their creation from the banks of the Murray River, with the Ngarrindjeri country from which her maternal ancestors were displaced. Marilyne's friend [Lucy Williams Connelly](#) who first learnt to weave at a Country Women's Association event has since been involved in numerous workshops, passing on these skills to other Indigenous women.

Boolarng Nangamai Aboriginal Art and Culture Studio (BN) based in Gerringong on the NSW south coast ran a series of weaving workshops jointly co-ordinated by Kelli Ryan, Director of BN and Alison Page, the Aboriginal Cultural Development Officer at Arts Mid North Coast. Titled the 'Deadly Design Weaving Project' [Steven Russell](#) and [Phyllis Stewart](#), two weavers from BN, taught weaving techniques to 123 Indigenous participants from Bowraville, Macksville, Port Macquarie, Bellbrooke, Wauchope, Coffs Harbour, Kempsey, Taree and Forster (all in Arts Mid North Coast region). The aim of the workshops was to introduce weaving to these communities and produce a regional work of woven fish to be part of an exhibition at the *Saltwater Freshwater Festival* in January 2010 at the Yarrawarra Cultural Centre at Corrindi Beach, NSW with a possible NSW regional tour.

The generic description 'weaving' does not do justice to the diversity of materials used by Indigenous weavers, including a mix of synthetic materials, or to the strong

³⁵ See L. Hamby "Introduction: Coiled Together" in *ReCoil: Change & Exchange in Fibre Art*, M. West (ed.) (Darwin, Artback Northern Territory Arts Touring, 2007), 5.

engagements with country that the collecting of materials makes possible or the very local inflections given to standard weaving styles by the ingenious use of materials endemic to the painter's locale. [Muriel Maynard](#), for instance, brought together Tasmanian Indigenous weaving and shell-working traditions by decorating her baskets with posies of the distinctive opal-like shells of Cape Barren Island where she was born. Nor does the generic title of 'weaving' convey the amazing variety of woven forms produced by Indigenous artists across the country, including *Storylines* artists: everything from conventional baskets, elaborately patterned mats, traditional functional objects such as eel traps, baby carriers and bush safes to expressive, sculptural weaves of people, animals, furniture and biplanes. Besides the practice of Nicholls, Connelly, Maynard and Koolmatrie, the work of weavers such as [Elaine Terrick](#), [Edith Terrick](#), [Ellen Trevorrow](#) and 'bush sculptor' [Janine McAullay Bott](#) exemplify this diversity.

11. RECOGNITION:

A complaint frequently voiced by some of the high profile artists in our sample is that 'urban' Indigenous artists – themselves included - are ignored by sections of the Australian art world who tend to regard 'Indigenous art' as only that produced in remote community art centres. Only when the levels of recognition enjoyed by 'remote' Indigenous artists have been subjected to an analysis comparable to *Storylines*' will informed comparisons really be possible. However the *Storylines* data does enable us to measure the success of *Storylines* artists by standard art world criteria like inclusion in collections and art awards and to map how factors such as formal art school training, gender and age correlate with such forms of recognition.

From the perspective of a conventional art historian, the Collections section of the DAAO metadata provides a convenient guide to where works by the artist in question may be located, but for *Storylines*, these data have other layers of significance. 227 *Storylines* artists have been collected by the national and state galleries and museums and some major private individual and corporate collections – as well as by a vast array of other collecting institutions and organisations. Our data is by no means exhaustive: many in our sample do not maintain CVs and were often vague on the details of even major acquisitions of their work. The information the artists supplied was carefully checked before being entered in the DAAO's metadata fields. To aggregate information into percentages that summarise the overall patterns of representation of *Storylines*' artists work, the following "tiers" of significance were devised, and each collection was classified into one of them:

Key to Figure 11.1

Tier 1	national and state galleries and museums
Tier 2	regional galleries, university collections, National Library, Parliament House, ArtBank, major private collections
Tier 3	state libraries, other state and federal government agencies and departments including overseas embassies and consular offices, AIATSIS, corporate collections
Tier 4	community organisations, medical centres, schools, local council collections
Tier 5	international ³⁶
Tier 6	other

Collection	Count
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW	30
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, SA	20
Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, WA	29
Australian Museum, Sydney, NSW	7
Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney, NSW	16
Australian War Memorial, Canberra, ACT	1
Bunjilaka Aboriginal Centre, Melbourne Museum, VIC	12
Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, NT	17
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, NSW	8
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, ACT	68
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, VIC	32
National Museum of Australia, Canberra, ACT	34
National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, ACT	1
Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, NSW	14
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, QLD	46
Queensland Museum, Brisbane, QLD	13
South Australian Museum, Adelaide, SA	7
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, TAS	12
Western Australian Museum, Perth, WA	2
Total	369

Figure 11.1 Representation of *Storylines* artists in Tier 1 collections

³⁶ as the numbering suggests, this was added almost as an afterthought, because so few artists in the survey had significant overseas representation that it was initially overlooked.

Representation in the collections of state and national galleries (Tier 1) and regional galleries, university collections, the National Library, Parliament House art collections, ArtBank, major private collections (Tier 2) provides a measure of acceptance by the Australian art establishment. According to our data, all the state and national galleries include at least some *Storylines* artists in their collections, with the National Gallery of Australia well ahead of the rest in terms of the number of individual artists represented (68). The next highest number of artists represented was the Queensland Art Gallery with 46, followed by the National Museum of Australia with 34 then the National Gallery of Victoria with 32, the Art Gallery of NSW with 30, the Art Gallery of Western Australia with 29, the Art Gallery of South Australia with 20, Museum and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory with 17, the Australian National Maritime Museum with 16, Powerhouse Museum 14, Queensland Museum 13, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and Museum Victoria with 12 each, Museum of Contemporary Art 8, South Australian Museum 7, Australian Museum 7, Western Australian Museum 2 and the Australian War Memorial and National Portrait Gallery with 1 each.

The collections of some Tier 2 institutions appeared to rival those of Tier 1: thus Flinders University Art Museum has works by 31 *Storylines* artists; the Koorie Heritage Trust in Melbourne has 22 *Storylines* artists in its collections; the University of Western Australia's Berndt Museum of Anthropology has 18; ArtBank has 16, the University of Wollongong 13 and the Wollongong City Gallery 12. However the AIATSIS collection included works by only 6 *Storylines* artists and the Parliament House Art Collection in Canberra by only 3. Tier 2 institutions tended to collect more works by lesser-known artists in their local catchments.

Even though these percentages, individually and collectively, do roughly correspond to the percentages of the *Storylines* sample resident in those states, they may still be 'unrepresentative' in the different sense that the same artists are being acquired by each institution. We will focus on the most prestigious collections, those in Tier 1, in the following discussion. Overall, Tier 1 institution collections of artists in the *Storylines* sample consisted of 3% ACT based artists; 18% NSW; 29% Queensland artists; 7% South Australian; 13% Tasmanian, 23% Victorian and 6% Western Australian. The corresponding percentages of *Storylines* artists in the sample as a whole are 1%ACT; 23% NSW; 20% QLD; 16% SA; 6% TAS; 24% VIC and 10% WA. On these figures, Queensland and Tasmanian *Storylines* artists appear to be slightly over-represented in the national collections and South Australia somewhat under-represented in relation to the sheer numbers of artists practising in each state.

The picture shifts when we look at the collecting patterns of individual Tier 1 institutions. Some exhibited a striking preference, others only a slight one, for collecting the work of artists from their home state. Generally, the museums were far more likely to concentrate on local artists: 83% of those collected by the Australian Museum in Sydney were NSW artists; 50% of those collected by the Western Australian Museum were from that state; 85% in the South Australian Museum were from South Australia, 77% in the Queensland Museum were from Queensland and 90% of those in Bunjilaka Aboriginal Centre at Museum Victoria were Victorian. Departing from this trend were two national

institutions: the National Museum of Australia in Canberra, whose collection was 44% Tasmanian and Australian Maritime Museum located in Sydney whose collection of *Storylines* artists is 43% NSW artists. The National Gallery of Australia showed a more even spread across the states: 6% ACT; 21% NSW; 26% QLD; 4% SA; 12% TAS; 22% VIC and 9% WA, with South Australia again somewhat under-represented in terms of artist numbers in that state according to the *Storylines* survey. Most state galleries took a similarly 'national' approach though most had some emphasis on collecting the work of local artists. Thus 53% of *Storylines* artists in the National Gallery of Victoria were Victorian; 43% in the Art Gallery of NSW were NSW residents; 38% in the Art Gallery of Western Australia were Western Australian residents; and 25% in the Art Gallery of South Australia's collection were from that state.

Who then did these Tier 1 institutions collect? Men more than women? To answer this question accurately we need once again to take into account the 'star' factor in their collections policies. The 127 *Storylines* artists represented in Tier 1 collections are 70 (55%) female and 57 (45%) male. This is close to the proportions of men and women in the overall *Storylines* sample, in which women outnumber men 346 to 238 or 59% to 41%. However, when we look at *how many* works by women and how many by men make up these collections, we get a different picture: 49% are by women and 51% are by men. Given the significantly larger numbers of women in the *Storylines* sample, this suggests there may be some bias towards male artists. On the question of whether older artists are favoured over younger ones, the histogram (**Figure 11.2**) of the ages of male *Storylines* artists in Tier 1 collections indicates that the spread is weighted towards older men - especially given that there are fewer of them in the overall sample. By comparison, the female by age spread of Tier 1 artists (**Figure 11.3**) is, like the age spread in the sample as a whole, close to a random distribution (bell curve) which peaks around the sample median of 49. 103 of these 127 artists had provided detail of their Training and Qualifications, but there appeared to be no significant difference between this group and the remainder of the sample.

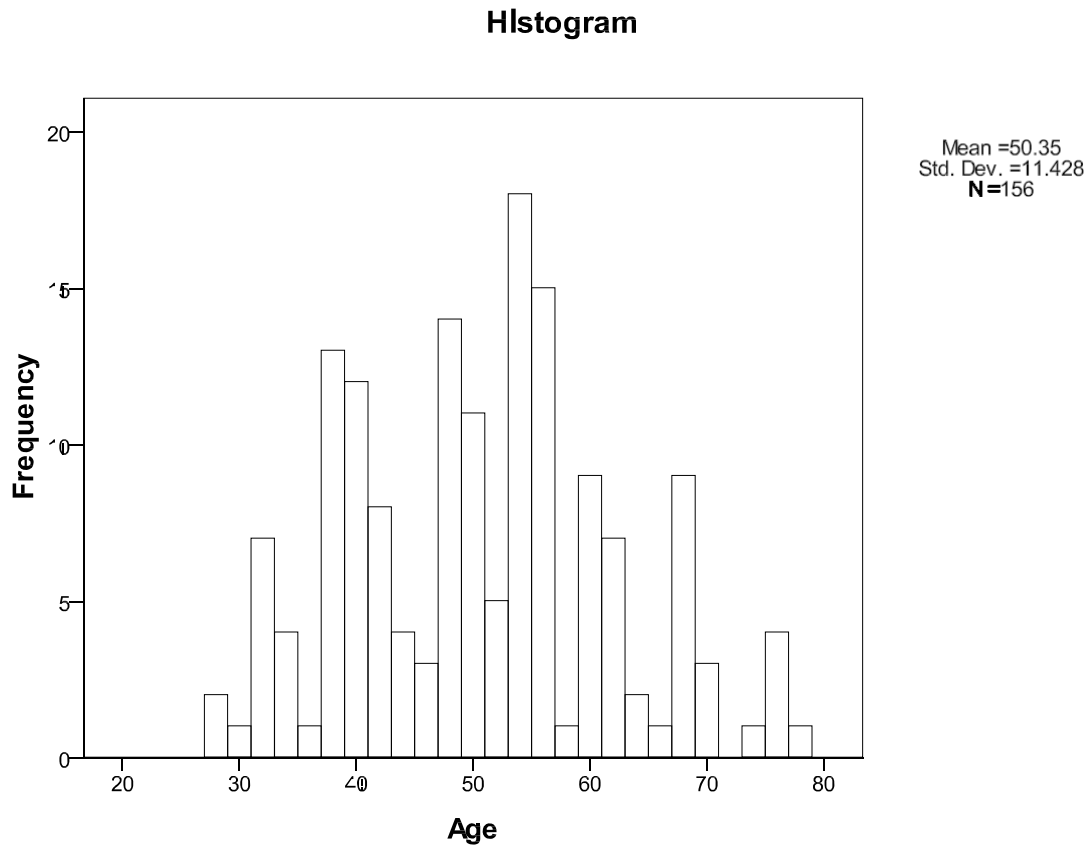


Figure 11.2 Histogram of ages of Tier 1 Collection male artists

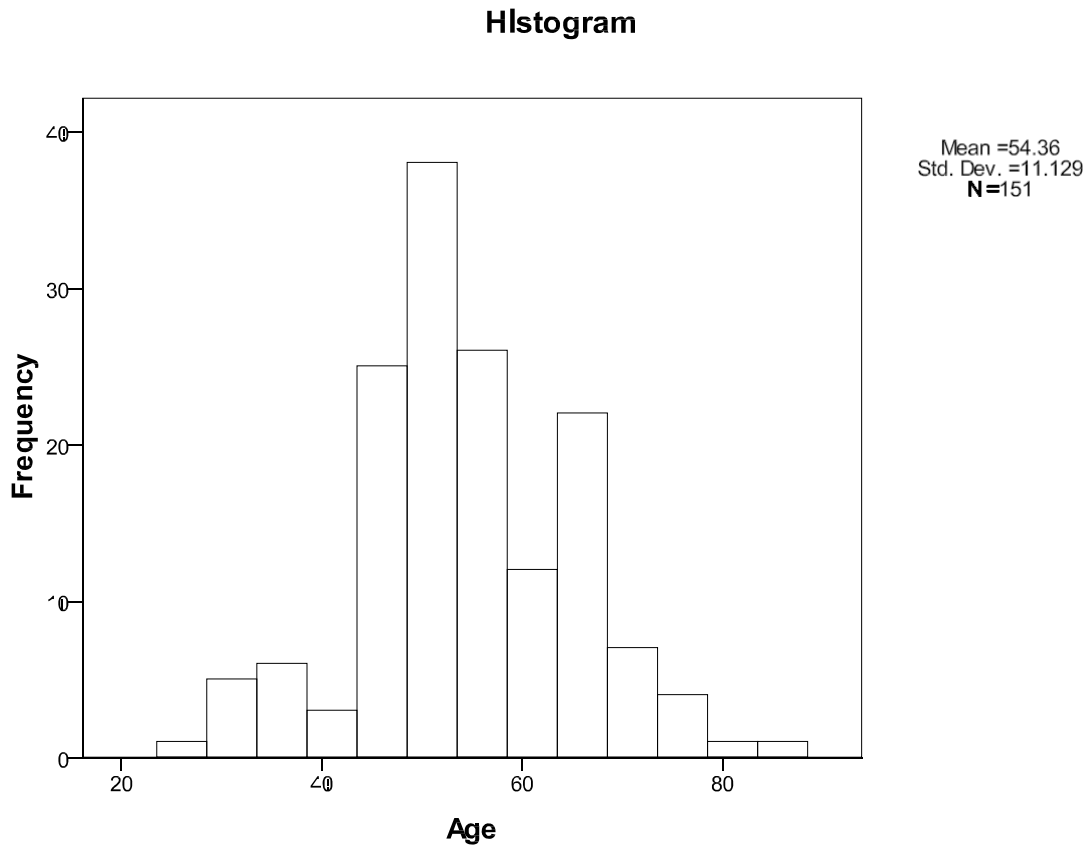


Figure 11.3 Histogram of ages of Tier 1 Collection female artists

Similar results were obtained when the Tier 1 and Tier 2 Collections data were examined. There were 161 artists represented in the collections of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 institutions. 68 (42%) of them were men and 93 (58%) were women. The distribution of their ages, like that of the sample as a whole, was close to a bell curve and there was no discernible difference between the training of this group and the rest of the sample. Even with the 359 people in the sample who had *not* been acquired by a public or significant private collection, 141 (39%) of them were men and 218 (61%) were women. The ages of the 176 people not in collections again produced a fine normal curve like the sample as a whole. Information about their training was available for 176 of the unrepresented group, and 95 or 70% of them had either tertiary training or TAFE or CAE – about as high as the sample as a whole, with 31 artists or 19% indicating they were either taught by family and elders, or self-taught. These percentages are identical to those at the very highest levels of success and recognition, the Top 10 men and the Top 10 women in Tier 1 and Tier 2 collections were also 70% university or TAFE/CAE trained. Therefore, perhaps surprisingly, tertiary qualifications appear not to play a role in determining whether an institution acquires a *Storylines* artists' work.

Only 26 *Storylines* artists were represented internationally, and few of these were major museums or collections. The British Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Aboriginal Art in Utrecht, The Netherlands, the St Louis Art Museum and the Kluge Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection at the University of Virginia were among the exceptions.

Other recognition:

Apart from what collections they were represented in, *Storylines* artists were also asked what other recognition they had had as artists. Their responses ranged from a Highly Commended at the local agricultural show to receiving the Order of Australia (though not for services to Indigenous art). To obtain a more general picture of the levels of recognition attained by artists in the *Storylines* survey required grouping these often disparate forms of recognition in some way that would enable us to bring statistical order to this chaos of achievement. We decided upon the idea of levels of recognition and for each artist in the survey selected their highest level of recognition in accordance with the following schema:

Key to Figure 11.4

International	Major 1A	e.g Mother Jones International Documentary Award
	Minor 1B	e.g Visiting artist at Alutiiq Museum Alaska
National	Major 2A	e.g Winner Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award
	Minor 2B	e.g Finalist Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award
State	Major 3A	e.g Winner of NSW Parliament Indigenous Art Award
	Minor 3B	e.g Finalist, Victorian Indigenous Art Awards
Local	Major 4A	e.g Local Government Cultural Award
	Minor 4B	e.g Merit Certificate in Port Lincoln Art Prize
Other	Major 5A	e.g Queen's Birthday Honours list
	Minor 5B	e.g works used in film

Rank	Total	Percent
1A	2	0.8%
1B	1	0.4%
2A	30	12.3%
2B	29	11.9%
3A	22	9.0%
3B	92	37.7%
4A	30	12.3%
4B	23	9.4%
5A	8	3.3%
5B	7	2.9%
Total	244	100%

Figure 11.4 Highest Level of ‘Other Recognition’ of *Storylines* artists

This is a crude ordering obviously, and there will be debate as to whether minor international recognition should rank above major national or major state recognition, and so on down the list – and whether Other major forms of recognition like the Queen's Birthday Honours list outrank them all - or alternatively have no bearing on the question of what recognition these individuals have received *as artists*. Of the 244 artists who provided information on other forms of recognition only 2 had received major international success; 12.3% (30) major national recognition; 9% (22) major state recognition. Minor recognition internationally had been the highest level of recognition achieved by just 1 of the 244 artists in question here, minor national (most often it was being hung in the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards) by 11.9% (29); 37.7% (92) had a highest ‘other recognition’ level of minor state (being a finalist in a state Indigenous art award or inclusion in a state sponsored survey of Indigenous artists were the most usual accolades in this category). Locally, 12.3% (30) of this group had achieved major recognition and 9.4% (23) minor – their achievements ranging from artist residencies at local universities to painting backdrops for a local theatrical production.

There did not appear to be any marked differences in terms of ‘other recognition’ on the basis of gender. Training however did provide more differentiation, at least for those 166 people for whom we had information on both Training and Other Recognition. Those with University degrees scored highest by a significant margin for major national recognition. It also appeared to us that this Training category included almost every ‘name’ artist in the survey as well as most of the ‘emerging’ ones. The achievements of this university and art school educated group, when taken together with those with TAFE and CAE qualifications accounted for most of the recognition *Storylines* artists had received. Those with Community College, CDEP, Art Society or Workshop Training or who were self-taught had received almost none – or they haven’t been taught how to put together an artist CV that records them anyway. Major exceptions to this are the self-taught /one day workshop trained weaver Yvonne Koolmatrie, who became an overnight sensation after her inclusion in the 1998 Venice Biennale and is one of the most collected

by Tier 1 and 2 institutions of all *Storylines* artists, and high school drop-out [Richard Bell](#), a self-taught artist who won the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 2003 and has twice been an exhibitor in the Biennale of Sydney (1993 and 2008). A few individuals like [Rosella Namok](#) and [Jeanette James](#) who had been taught by family and elders had achieved some measure of success at national and state level, but primarily those individuals also had University degrees or TAFE Training.

Commissions:

An important form of recognition for many of the artists in the Storylines catchment were commissions. These ranged from school murals to illustrations or logos for government websites or publications to festival banners for events such as NAIDOC week to large scale public art commissions. Some important distinctions can be drawn between the kind of public art commissions that artists received. Artists who had achieved tertiary qualifications and were part of the highly art-literate city based artist-group tended to be commissioned to do work for prominent urban public spaces, Museum environments or corporate buildings. [Ron Hurley](#), [Brook Andrew](#), [Judy Watson](#) and [Fiona Foley](#) are examples from this group who have each created several major public art pieces.³⁷ Ron Hurley created the Eddie Gilbert Memorial at the Woolloongabba Cricket Ground in Brisbane as well as Gerrabughis Middens at Kangaroo Point in Brisbane. Andrew and Watson were commissioned to create work for the Walama Forecourt at the Sydney International Airport Terminal, and Watson has also created a permanent floor installation at the Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre in Sydney and the work 'fire and water' for Canberra's Reconciliation Place. Foley's commissions include 'Bible and Bullets', at Redfern Park in Sydney, and 'Witnessing to Silence' at the Brisbane Magistrates Court.³⁸

Artists who were not part of this 'elite' group tended to be commissioned to create work on a smaller scale, and in some cases, of very localised importance. For instance [Donny McKenzie](#) was commissioned to create a large sculpture of a midwife holding a baby for the grounds of the Port Augusta Hospital. Port Augusta has historically been and remains an important birthing site for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women alike, and this commission followed from other sculptural work by McKenzie that commemorated the significance of this. The ceramicist [Vic Chapman](#) was commissioned to create the imagery of a local Illawarra Dreaming story (Yaroma the hairy man) for Wollongong City Council. He and another ceramicist, Aldos Cox transformed Vic's conceptual drawings into ceramic mosaic pieces which were then installed in Moreton Bay Fig Park in Figtree to honour the local people and the mighty fig tree that once grew at the mosaic site.³⁹

³⁷ See also [Karen Casey](#).

³⁸ Walama Forecourt <http://www.uap.com.au/page/artprojects/civic/sydneyintairport> and Witnessing to Silence <http://www.uap.com.au/page/artprojects/civic/witnessingtosilence>

³⁹ See <http://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/community/publicartcollection.asp> for Vic Chapman's 'Yaroma Story'. See also [Leann Edwards](#), [Mark Blackman](#).

Conclusion:

It did not take long to realise how very appropriate a title *Storylines* was for this project, as we found ourselves listening to or reading artists' stories about their life experiences, their sources of inspiration, and about how their art practice began, that were unexpected and often very moving. The stories that underpin many of the biographies resonate far beyond art history and are relevant to Australian cultural history in general. In many cases, they are illustrative of the experiences of Indigenous Australians that have only recently come to be acknowledged and historicized as part of the country's past and character.

Only in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney did we really encounter the kind of recalcitrance we had hoped to avoid with strategies like putting an Indigenous researcher in charge of the data collection process and offering the artists publication of their biographies on the DAAO to encourage their participation in the survey. Many of the artists *Storylines* spoke to were conscious of being at the margins of the art world and said they were heartened to learn that the project was specifically focussed on 'non-remote' artists. If nothing else, the research has achieved, via the DAAO, the inscription into Australian art history of over 600 new artists, many previously undocumented anywhere on the World Wide Web. We would like to thank all the contributing artists for allowing us the access into their private lives that made this possible.

Although Indigenous art from 'settled' regions is widely seen as first emerging with the *Koori Art '84* exhibition and the establishment of the Boomalli artists' cooperative in Chippendale, Sydney in the late 1980s,⁴⁰ many artists in our sample had been active for decades before these landmark events. Not just the high profile pioneers/ 'founding father' figures like [Ron Hurley](#), [Trevor Nickolls](#), [Gordon Syron](#), [Kevin Gilbert](#) and [Lin Onus](#) but also many people, usually women, who worked from a very young age in 'traditional' media: weaving, shellworking, egg carving etc. not recognised until recently as art media. [Esme Timbery](#) claimed to have had her first shellwork making experience at seven years of age. Many people working exclusively in such media were continuing a creative practice that went back well before the 1970s and 80s when the contemporary Indigenous art movement gained momentum.

The majority of artists documented by *Storylines* were working outside of the paradigm of conceptual contemporary art that dominates the practice of established urban based Indigenous artists, and is often founded on high level art school training and immersion within an urban art world. What was striking in our results was the diversity of forms of art making among *Storylines* artists that challenged the paradigms of 'remote' versus 'urban' that underpin the way Indigenous art is currently perceived in the mainstream art world. In some cases an artist's profile was extremely localized and completely off the

⁴⁰ See M. Neale "United in the struggle: indigenous art from urban areas" in *Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture* eds S. Kleinert & M. Neale (Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2000).

radar of city-based curators, galleries and art magazines. Many artists had been extremely poor for periods of their lives, and for them selling artwork had been, in a very unromantic sense, part of a hand-to-mouth existence. Therefore dozens of *Storylines* artists could be described as ‘remote’ within the Australian art world in a manner that tells a very different story to that usually evoked by that categorisation. Furthermore, the journeys taken by artists we documented often diverged radically from the conventional path of receiving art school training, entering an artistic milieu of like-minded peers, negotiating existing genres and developing an artistic career within the nexus of gallery representation, exhibitions and art critical scholarship. Art making was often grounded far more in family and community togetherness than individual professional development. The maintenance and rejuvenation of pre-colonial traditions, as well as the transfer of skills between family members, took so many different forms in so many different contexts that the *Storylines* team can also vouch for the need for a more nuanced understanding of the role of ‘tradition’ in Indigenous art created outside the Central Desert and the Top End. The same can be said for how ‘connection to country’ shaped artists’ practice.

In terms of becoming artists, the mission experience has been as formative for many *Storylines* artists as the settlement experience for Indigenous artists on ‘remote’ communities. We were surprised by the number of artists who cited missions as their heritage country, although in retrospect this is no different from the hundreds of ‘remote’ Indigenous artists who give as their heritage country the names of former government settlements (and missions) like Papunya, Yuendumu, Oenpelli or Ernabella where they were born and/or have lived most of their lives, rather than the distant countries they may never have seen to which they are linked through familial ties. It was on or in the vicinity of ‘missions’ that many of the older artists were born – and where some of them first learnt the artistic techniques they employ in their work today.

Storylines confirmed the observation of the recent Senate Report⁴¹, that despite their apparent differences, certain factors “appear similar for Indigenous artists across the country”, pre-eminently “maintenance of links to culture and heritage, often through family”.⁴² Many artists gave family and ‘elders’ as the source or one of the sources of their artistic training. This is commonly the case with Indigenous artists from remote communities north of the Rowley line, where art audiences seem to find it acceptable because it is felt that rather than art school training, these artists have culture and tradition. Urban-based Indigenous artists, however, are believed by these same audiences not to have ‘culture’ or ‘tradition’ as such, only politics, and they can reach an acceptable place in the art world only when they work within the groove of conceptual, political art, participating within the dialogues that underline particular art genres, as a result of art school training.

⁴¹ albeit based only on an examination of the lives of just five artists: Lin Onus, Richard Bell, Tracey Moffatt, Bronwyn Bancroft and Michael Riley.

⁴² Senate Standing Committee, *Indigenous Art – Securing the Future*, 54. The other two commonalities they found were “strong mentoring” and “connection or collaboration with other artists, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous”.

This helps to explain why some *Storylines* artists employ the styles of Central Desert and Top End artists in their work. Such inclinations reflect the struggle faced by Indigenous Australians who do not come from remote communities in having their Indigenous identity acknowledged by non-Indigenous society. For those people whose family had lived under an oppressive social structure which compelled them to feel ashamed about, conceal and/or escape from their cultural identity – a shift towards embracing one’s Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity, and learning to feel proud and strong as an Indigenous person can understandably lead to such artistic identifications, particularly as art is so strongly associated with self-expression. Unfortunately it will also prevent these artists from ever being taken seriously within the mainstream art world as having their own artistic vision.

However we also encountered numerous artists and artists’ groups who wanted nothing to do with the generalised and generic image of what ‘Indigenous art’ is, and were seeking to establish styles that reflected their own localised traditions, their own country, their own distinctive experiences. In some cases an explicitly defiant stance can be discerned. Based on an interview with [Milton Budge](#), Tess Allas noted in a supplement to his biography that “Budge said that he and [Robert Campbell Jnr](#) were acutely aware of the successes of ‘regional’ styles in particular the style emerging from Papunya, NT. Together they decided that they would create a ‘Kempsey style’. This style emerged after many months of painting side by side and it is the style that Campbell Jnr is renowned for and that Budge continues to paint in to this day. This style incorporates transparent 'dots' or bubbles that appear to fall over the completed painted image on the canvas.” Similar sentiments are conveyed by the title of the East Gippsland Aboriginal Arts Corporation’s 2008 publication *Not Just Dots: Aboriginal Art and Artists from East Gippsland in South Eastern Victoria*, from which several biographies were derived. Uncle Albert Mullett states in his foreword that “The environment is part of the heart; art is a way of connecting to the environment. I never saw dots in the past – only in recent years... It is important that the Traditional Owners are supporting young people in the development of their artwork. We tell our artists they shouldn’t do dots, it doesn’t belong to this country”.⁴³

It became clear to the *Storylines* team that alternative forms of training, whether they be workshops, short courses, residencies, mentoring programs etc. had been particularly valuable for regional communities and people in isolated areas, and ‘mature-age’ artists for whom tertiary education is not accessible. We encountered a range of such programs that had brought fantastic energy and vitality to regional Indigenous art production. For instance the Kidogo Institute in Fremantle, WA has organised residencies and art courses that dozens of Noongar artists have benefited from, and that ensures the artists observe and support each other’s practice. While all forms of art that were being produced, derivative or original, have a therapeutic value that enriches artists’ lives, being introduced to forms beyond painting, such as sculpture and printmaking, and with the

⁴³ R. Evans and East Gippsland Aboriginal Arts Corporation *Not Just Dots: Aboriginal Art and Artists from East Gippsland in South Eastern Victoria* (Bairnsdale, Vic. : East Gippsland Aboriginal Arts Corporation, 2008 2008), v.

opportunity to develop skills and receive some guidance, artists can reach beyond this and discover new ways of expressing themselves that can potentially become great art.

Storylines' findings on **Recognition** tell us that however neglectful they may have been in the past of Indigenous art from this side of the Rowley line, the major public and private collections do now acknowledge these artists' existence in their acquisition programs. But the raw figures indicate only the representation in these institutions of artists included in the *Storylines* sample. At the same time as we were compiling these statistical outcomes, we were also chasing up a small number of high profile artists whose biographies had not yet been completed by their commissioned authors. Whenever another high profile artist biography was added to the survey, the numbers of artists represented in the Tier 1 and 2 collections rose across the board. The reason is simple: the same group of about 25 of the highest profile artists in the *Storylines* sample - about 4% of the 586 artists in the survey - make up a substantial proportion of Tier 1 and Tier 2 collection totals in almost every case. There is nothing shocking about this, since collecting institutions generally follow the art world's so-called 'star system' in their acquisitions policies, but it is worth bearing in mind when considering how representative these institutional collections really are of Indigenous art making this side of the Rowley Line.

Similar remarks apply to major public art commissions, whose selection criteria are often based on representation in prestigious public collections rather than representation of local artists or local cultural meanings of the site. These commissions reflect the search by government departments and those in the cultural sector for ways to make Indigenous interpretations of place, history and community more visible to the wider community and to affirm Indigenous Australian perspectives in the public domain. In less high profile cases the objectives behind these commissions have been served by drawing in more localised knowledge through the participation of some of the less visible artists uncovered by *Storylines'* three years of intensive research. Either way the proliferation of such public art projects in recent decades demonstrates to all Australians that particular environments that were historically exclusive of and harboured discriminatory treatment towards Indigenous people have been transformed.

In the DAAO spirit of collaborative research, we hope that researchers who continue the work of *Storylines* beyond the life of this project will improve the comprehensiveness of the data on this group of artists and make possible both a more complete picture and monitoring of ongoing developments.

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