

# After Berndt

## 1947-2008

Crayon to Etching



Berndt Crayon Drawings 1947

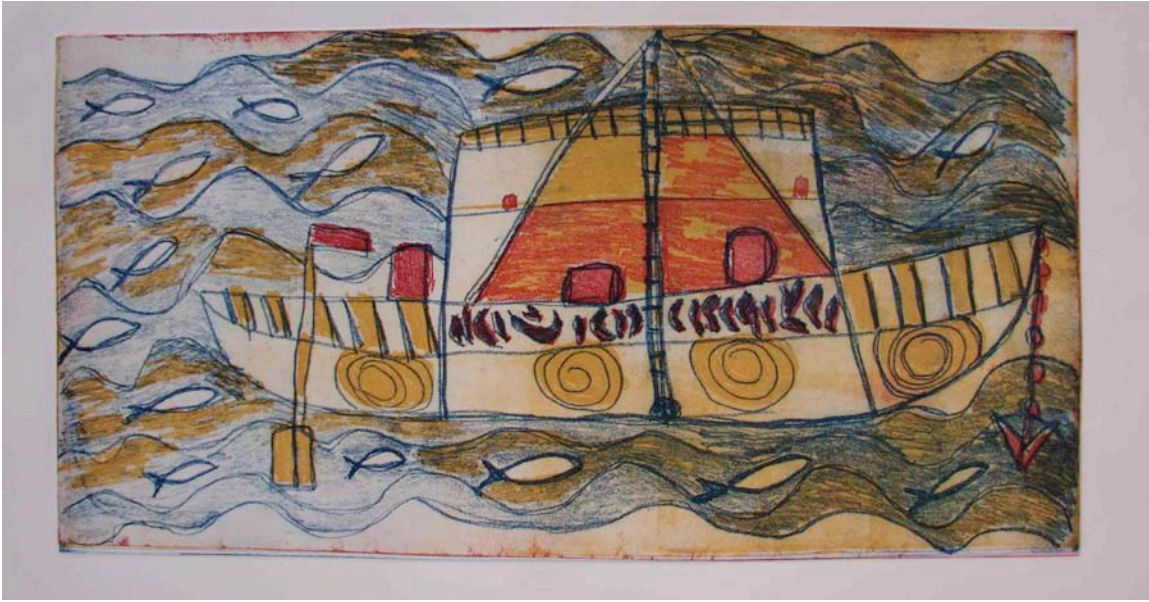
“The collection was obtained by anthropologist R.M. Berndt during fieldwork at Yirkala, NT in 1947. Having assembled a large collection of bark paintings, he was concerned that they would not survive the trip out to Darwin. He arranged for his father to send him some crayons and butcher paper from Adelaide, which he gave to the men to draw on -- he had earlier collected material this way at Birrundudu, NT on the advice of C.P. Mountford. The men had never used paper or crayons before. The Collector always regarded the crayon

drawings as extensions of his field notebooks, since they contained key notations. RMB No.4”  
Berndt Museum interpretative text.

The resulting 365 crayon drawings have remained in the Berndt Museum in Perth since then. Apart from 18 drawings which were included in a national travelling exhibition through Visions Australia 1995-9, they have only been seen by appointment. After sixty years these images have returned to the place of their creation.

Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre’s philanthropically funded digital media archive and studio, The Mulka Project, has funded the reproduction of 100 of these historic works. They were made to convey sacred knowledge. Berndt annotated the drawings with numbers relating to the voluminous notes he recorded about each image. They appear here without those notes. Almost all of the original images are on paper which is 115cm x 75 cm. Therefore these reproductions are almost all the actual size of the originals.

Western culture focuses on the material object itself. As reproductions these images could be seen to lack the value of the originals. For Yolngu the distinction is unimportant. It is the intellectual property in the designs that matter rather than the actual piece of paper they were rendered on originally.



### 'Berndt' Etching Series 2008

The elders of 1947 were sharing their knowledge as part of their ongoing task of renewing and enlivening the Law. Their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren inherit that Law and the task of celebrating it.

In 2008, the printmakers of Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre at Yirrkala in collaboration with Basil Hall of Basil Hall Editions in Darwin mastered a technique for producing new work that honours the Berndt Crayon Drawings. The use of pencils on a soft ground etching plate captures the feel of the works from sixty years ago. It is as new a medium for the artists of today as the crayons were then.

The point of the pencil dislodges the wax which coats the zinc plate lying under the paper. Acid then etches the artist's own line into that metal. The printers then laboriously rub

ink into these crannies. Each new colour requires a new plate.

Printmakers Araluen Maymuru, Marmyula Mununggurr and Dianne Blake with assistants Dindirrk Mununggurr, Whaiora Tukaki, Djuwakang Marika, Barayuwa Mununggurr, Rosie Ngyilipa Pearson, Ruby Djikarra Alderton produced the bulk of the 30 editions in the Yirrkala printshop of Buku-Larrnggay. Basil Hall and Merran Sierakowski provided training in soft ground etching techniques through Northern Territory DEET Flexible Response Funding and produced some editions in Darwin.

Please do not photograph either the crayon or etched works.