

ABORIGINAL ART: KAMILAROI NATION, NSW

The content for this case study is taken directly from the Masters Thesis entitled "ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND GROUNDWATER" by Bradley J. Moggridge (University of Technology, Sydney, 2005). For full details, refer to the original thesis document, including a comprehensive set of references.

WARNING – THE AUTHOR OF THIS MATERIAL APOLOGISES TO ANY ABORIGINAL PERSON WHO MAY BE DISTRESSED BY THE MENTION OF THE NAMES OF PERSONS WHO MAY NOW BE DECEASED.

Aboriginal art is described as the oldest continuous tradition of art known. There is no known fixed notion of traditional Aboriginal art, for it is not a static relic of a bygone era but a vital and pertinent expression of current human concerns. Through their art Aboriginal people celebrate the ancestral mythologies which form the basis of their life.

Aboriginal art has played a significant role in classifying, representing and describing significant groundwater sites for Aboriginal tribes, as knowledge of water sources is so important for a tribe's survival. Aboriginal art was not painted on canvasses or linen as modern society now demands, but Aboriginal people used many mediums such as on the body for ceremonies, rock shelters and platforms, ground designs (sand drawings and ground mosaics also for ceremonies), implements or artefacts, ceremonial poles and the bark off a tree.

Aboriginal art, especially originating from desert regions of Australia and in the dot art form such as the Warlpiri and Pintupi Language Groups of the north central part of Australia will constantly make reference to and represent groundwater sources such as soakages and springs. Some good examples of desert art indicating groundwater sources (springs); along with explanations is given in Stokes (1993).

Aboriginal art uses traditional symbols which can be read in many ways. Because of this, even the secret/sacred parts of a story can be painted but still protected, for the artist is the only person who fully understands the meaning.



Kamilaroi Nation South Eastern Australia
 Source: Aboriginal Australia Wall Map, Horton D R (1996)
 Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS Canberra,
 Australia and Auslig/Sinclair, Knight, Merz.



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Three Waters painted Brad Moggridge is a personal story that was dreamt of and consequently painted onto canvas. The story was then later confirmed by Kamilaroi elders as representing three soakages within the ancestral country.

The painting represents three significant groundwater sources - soakages (large orange circles) which ancestors utilised throughout time. They are hand dug and consequently maintained en-route or when the ancestors passed these sites, the small black circles are camp sites along their travels and the black lines joining them indicate the travel routes taken between camps and the soakages.

A photo of a painting titled – Three Waters, acrylic on canvas, 60cm x 50cm, painted by the Kamilaroi author of this report.

Source: B Moggridge (2002) from personal collection



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