Learn More!

Contemporary Aboriginal Australian Art and Culture

Presented here is a range of resources that provide information about Aboriginal Australian art, culture, and history, as well as more specific references to individual artists. Resources include books, websites, and films and are organized under the following headings:

- Books for Educators
  - Books on Art
  - Books on History and Culture
- Books for Students
- Websites
- Films

The breadth of the resources on this list is a reflection of the diversity of Aboriginal Australian peoples and art and the scope of the Hood Museum of Art’s holdings in this area.

Books for Educators

Books on Art:


This book provides a concise survey of Aboriginal art from all over Australia.


This book surveys the great variety of Aboriginal art to reveal what it means to its makers and users and what it can tell us about the societies that produce it. Morphy discusses paintings (on rock, bark, human bodies, and canvas), sculptures, weapons, and utensils from across Australia, bringing out common themes but also highlighting regional diversity.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art: Collection Highlights from the National Gallery of Australia (Canberra, Australian Capital Territory: National Gallery of Australia, 2010)
The National Gallery of Australia holds the largest collection of Australian Indigenous art in the world. This exhibition catalogue is written by Indigenous authors and curators and other experts in the field. It features 183 works of art that highlight the diversity and variety of Aboriginal Australian art.

Ancestral Connections looks into the inner meaning of Australian Aboriginal bark painting. Morphy draws on more than ten years of fieldwork among the Yolngu—an Aboriginal people of Northeast Arnhem Land—and applies both anthropological and art historical methods to explore the graphic representation of traditional knowledge in Yolngu art. He also charts the role that art has played in Aboriginal society, both present and past.

Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art: Kaplan and Levi Collection, by Pamela McClusky et al. (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum; Yale University Press, 2012)
This catalogue for the exhibition at the Seattle Art Museum (May 31–September 2, 2012) features over one hundred artworks from the late twentieth to early twenty-first centuries, including paintings on canvas, ochres on bark, and sculptures carved of wood, woven of fiber, and cast in bronze.

Hetti Perkins takes readers on a personal journey of discovery into a world of ideas and the imagination of leading Aboriginal artists around Australia as she travels from the Arnhem Land to Sydney and from saltwater country to the desert heartlands of Central Australia.

Australian Art, by Andrew Sayers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)
This survey examines the interaction between Aboriginal art and that of European Australians. Painting, bark art, photography, rock art, sculpture, and the decorative arts are all fully explored to present the rich texture of Australian art traditions.

This book looks at the evolving style and variety of Aboriginal Australian art over time. It covers rock art, body art, fiber and weaving, and the Papunya painting movement with illustrations of the ground-painting techniques.

Beyond Sacred: Recent Paintings from Australia’s Remote Aboriginal Communities: The Collection of Colin and Elizabeth Laverty (Melbourne, Victoria: Hardie Grant, 2008)
Colin and Elizabeth Laverty began collecting Aboriginal art more than twenty years ago. They have traveled widely in central, western, and northern Australia and repeatedly visited various Aboriginal communities. This book is a comprehensive survey of Australian Aboriginal art today. It features the work of internationally renowned artists such as Rover Thomas, Emily Kngwarreye, and John Mawurndjul, as well as newer artists.

**Country Culture Community: An Education Kit for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collection** (Sydney, New South Wales: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2009)  
This kit helps students understand and appreciate the richness and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art through key works in the collection. In focusing on significant artists or groups of artists and their work, this resource provides an introduction to the many forms of Indigenous art practices and related issues and ideas.

This is the first anthology to chronicle the global critical reception of Aboriginal art since the early 1980s, when the art world began to understand it as contemporary art. Featuring ninety-six authors—including art critics and historians, curators, art center coordinators and managers, artists, anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, and novelists—it conveys a diversity of approaches.

This exhibition catalog was produced by the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University for a show featuring forty-nine "dot paintings" produced by Aboriginal artists from the settlement of Papunya. Dot painting has become an art instantly associated with Aboriginal Australia. In the more than thirty-five years since the advent of this movement, Papunya works have been widely exhibited and acquired by private collectors and museums in Australia, and increasingly abroad. This catalogue focuses on the founding expressions of Papunya art. It examines their origins in the paintings produced in Papunya in the Western Desert during the years 1971 to 1973, after the Sydney schoolteacher Geoffrey Bardon provided Aboriginal men with art materials and encouraged them to paint on Masonite, against the wishes of Australian government officials.

This publication from the National Gallery of Victoria gives in-depth coverage of Aboriginal art from the Kimberley Region. Placing the work in its cultural context, the texts explore how traditional beliefs and contemporary events fuse to produce a vibrant art.

**LandMarks: Indigenous Australian Art in the Nation**, by Judith Ryan (Melbourne, Victoria: Council of Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria, 2006)
This catalogue documents the LandMarks exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2006. It features full-color plates, a location map, and essays by Judith Ryan and others.

**One Sun One Moon: Aboriginal Art in Australia**, edited by Hetti Perkins and Margie West Theresa Willsteed (Sydney, New South Wales: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2007)
From rock shelters dating back 20,000 years to politically inspired contemporary prints, the artwork of Aboriginal cultures is recognized for its mastery, beauty, and cultural significance. Drawing from The Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Holmes Court Collection, Heytesbury, and the Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, this volume features contributions by twenty-five of the field's leading scholars as well as sixteen interviews with key contemporary artists.

**Our Way: Contemporary Aboriginal Art from Lockhart River**, by Sally Butler (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 2007)
The unique art of the Lockhart River community, Australia’s only youth-driven Aboriginal art initiative, is collected for the first time in this stunning anthology. Information about the people and places that influence the community’s artwork is combined with striking images of numerous individual pieces. Though it draws upon ancient spiritual traditions, this artwork also shows the global scope of Aboriginal cultural expression today.

**Papunya: A Place Made After the Story: The Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement**, by Geoffrey Bardon and James Bardon (Carlton, Victoria: Lund Humphries Publishers, 2006)
*Papunya: A Place Made After the Story* is a first-hand account of the artists and the works emanating from Papunya. Geoffrey Bardon's exquisitely recorded notes and drawings are reproduced here, showing his extensive documentation of the early stages of the painting movement. This book features over five hundred paintings, drawings, and photographs from Bardon's personal archive.

**Possessions: Indigenous Art/Colonial Culture**, by Nicholas Thomas (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999)
This book examines the process of cross-cultural exchange and the relationship between contemporary Indigenous art and modern Western art.

**Ricky Maynard: Portrait of a Distant Land** (Sydney, New South Wales: Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2008)
This catalogue features the photographic works by documentary photographer Ricky Maynard, encompassing more than two decades of the artist’s practice. These sixty evocative and captivating photographic works document a broad range of themes and issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people today.

**Tjukurrptjanu: Origins of Western Desert Art** (National Gallery of Victoria, 2011)
The Papunya artists’ bold initial experiments, in committing ceremonial designs that are
Tjukurtjanu (from the Dreaming) onto board, marked the beginning of a modern painting movement that would change the face of Australian art forever. Drawing on the expertise of leading anthropologists, art historians, and field officers, Tjukurtjanu offers insightful perspectives on the artists and the iconography of their complex and intimate paintings.

Books on History and Culture:

Aboriginal Title and Indigenous Peoples: Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, by Louis A. Knafla and Haijo Jan Westra (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010)
This book explores legal developments in regards to land and title rights in former British colonies. It offers new perspectives on Aboriginal title that extend beyond national borders to consider similar developments in common law countries.

This book provides a general account of traditional culture (sacred, material, and social), contact history, and contemporary issues. It includes an appendix on the Wiradjuri with a wordlist and songs and contemporary poems.

Australian Dreaming: 40,000 Years of Aboriginal History, by Jennifer Isaacs (Sydney, New South Wales: Ure Smith Press, 1992)
This book provides a history of the Australian continent and its people, as told by Aboriginal storytellers. It recounts epic travels of the Great Spirit Ancestors and tells how they created the animals and plants and gave birth to the earliest people of this land.

Bush Food: Aboriginal Food and Herbal Medicine, by Jennifer Isaacs (Sydney, New South Wales: Landsdowne, 1987)
In pre-colonial eras, Aboriginal people enjoyed a balanced, varied diet of fruits, nuts, roots, vegetables, meat, and fish. In this book, Isaacs uncovers the variety and quality of their culinary experience.

Books for Students:

The book explores Indigenous Australian culture and traditions, looking back to ancestral beginnings while also devoting space to art and culture in the past four decades. Recommended for grades 4–12, adults.

And a Kangaroo Too (Canberra, Australian: National Gallery of Australia, 1997)
A collection of images of animals in Australian Aboriginal art, including goannas, magpie geese, crocodiles, emus, possums, and turtles. Each double page introduces, with its Aboriginal names, a painted animal from the Dreamtime taken from Aboriginal art. Recommended for grades K–2.
This is a story about an Aboriginal Australian boy coming of age. Author Paul Morin tells a story of friendship and tradition as he introduces the reader to the customs and traditions of this particular culture group. Recommended for grades 2–6.

Bayagul means “Speaking Up” in the Eora language of the Sydney area, and this book looks at the ways in which Indigenous Australians are speaking up for themselves in film, tourism, fashion, the media, and the performing arts. Discover what motivates and inspires a range of talented Aboriginal Australian people and Torres Strait Islanders. Recommended for grades 4–12, adults.

From the Dreaming: Dreaming Stories from Aboriginal Australia, by Jean A. Ellis (Sydney, Australia: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002)
In From the Dreaming, Jean Ellis has chosen a collection of stories from the different areas of Australia. These stories reflect the vivid imagination, strong sense of drama, and intimate understanding of nature that is characteristic of the Aboriginal people of Australia. Recommended for grades 4–12, adults.

The stories in this book are presented with approval from Aboriginal Australian elders in an effort to help foster a better understanding of the history and culture of Aboriginal peoples. Gadi Mirrabooka, which means below the Southern Cross, introduces wonderful tales from the ancestral beginnings. Through these stories you can learn about customs and values, animal psychology, hunting and gathering skills, cultural norms, moral behavior, spiritual belief system, survival skills, and food resources of many Aboriginal Australian peoples. Recommended for grades 4–12, adults.

The Flying Emu and Other Australian Stories, by Sally Morgan (New York: Viking Penguin, 1992)
Dedicated by the author to “all the naughty children in the world,” this book contains twenty lively original stories, replete with the mythic stuff of wonder tales—magic, transformation, resurrection, eating alive, disgorging, and other comically earthy workings of the digestive tract—all recounted in an engaging and accessible style. Recommended for grades 2–6.

Websites:
http://aboriginalartandculture.wordpress.com/
Will Owen and his partner, Harvey Wagner, have been collectors of Aboriginal Australian art since the late 1980s. In 2009 and 2011, Owen and Wagner donated over four hundred works of art to the Hood Museum of Art, making the Hood one of the leading places to study contemporary Aboriginal Australian art in the United States. The
collection spans the continent and includes art created in both rural and urban areas. This blog is written by Will Owen. His reflections on Aboriginal Australian art, culture, politics, anthropology, music, and literature are considered to be essential reading, as are his thoughtful reviews of new scholarship and current exhibitions in Australia and around the world.

The National Gallery of Victoria
This link leads to an online resource called “Tradition and Transformation” that is dedicated to bringing collections to schools using interactive technologies. On the right, you will find two categories that are especially useful for schools: Interactive Map of Australia and For Teachers and Students. The second category leads to outstanding online resources that combine looking at art using Harvard University’s Artful Thinking methodology with research suggestions and art-making projects. Topics include Exploring Identity, Symbols, Color, Line, & Shape, and Personal Portraits.

http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/ancestralmodern/
This link provides web links, books, and classroom resources for the Seattle Art Museum’s exhibition of Aboriginal Australian art, Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art.

A note about the following websites:

Art and culture centers exist in many Aboriginal Australian communities and serve a number of functions. They are a place to learn about Aboriginal Australian art and culture, they serve as galleries and places for artists to show and sell their work, and they are often hubs for community activity and economic sustainability. The websites listed below are region-specific art centers that provide information on the history of these communities and the art that they have created.

Papunya Tula Artists is entirely owned and directed by traditional Aboriginal people from the Western Desert. The aim of the company is to promote individual artists, to provide economic development for the communities to which they belong, and to assist in the maintenance of a rich cultural heritage.

http://www.maningrida.com/
Maningrida Arts & Culture, owned by Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation and formally established in 1973, is one of the oldest Aboriginal arts centers in Australia. Based in Maningrida community, MAC is currently servicing more than 250 artists from Maningrida and its surrounding 34 outstations, covering an area of more than 10,000 square kilometers.

http://www.tiwiart.com/
The Tiwi Art Network is an alliance between the three art centers on the Tiwi Islands: Munupi Arts & Crafts, Tiwi Design, and Jilamara Arts & Crafts.

http://www.warlu.com/
Warlukurlangu Artists' Aboriginal Corporation is a fully Aboriginal-owned and governed art center. One hundred percent of the proceeds from the sale of all art works go directly back to the artists and their community projects. Warlukurlangu means "belonging to fire" in Warlpiri; it is named after a Fire Dreaming west of Yuendumu. Owned and governed by its more than 600 members, Warlukurlangu art center is famous for its gloriously colorful acrylic paintings and fine limited-edition prints. Many of its members' works are highly collectable.

Established in 1985, Warlukurlangu Artists' Aboriginal Corporation has a well-regarded international profile. Artworks have been featured in hundreds of exhibitions around the globe and have been reproduced in many publications.

Located at Yuendumu, 300km northwest of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, the art center is both a stronghold of traditional Warlpiri culture and an essential part of Yuendumu's community life.

The Association of Northern Central Australian Aboriginal Artists ("ANCAAA") was originally established in March 1987 by sixteen Aboriginal-owned and controlled community art and craft centers. Its main function was to foster the Aboriginal arts industry for the benefit of its artists and organizations. Today, ANKAAA represents up to 5,000 artists from forty-nine art and craft centers located in the Tiwi Islands and the Darwin/Katherine, Kimberley, and Arnhem Land regions.

Warlayirti Artists supports the art and culture of the Kutjungka region through the production and sale of fine Indigenous art and activities that provide opportunities for intergenerational knowledge transfer and learning.

Warlayirti Artists operates from a community development framework implementing community development principles and processes to maximize the participation of the Indigenous staff, committee, and artists in the organization.

http://www.warmunart.com/
Warmun artists are renowned for their use of natural ochre and pigments on canvas, which is integral to the contemporary expression of land and culture as identity for Gija people. The work of Warmun artists is an inseparable and celebratory part of Gija culture and country and draws on traditional Ngurrangkarni (Dreaming) stories and contemporary life. Warmun art has a national and international reputation, thanks to the leadership of highly successful Warmun artists like Rover Thomas and Queenie McKenzie, George Mung Mung, and Paddy Jaminji.
http://www.koorieheritagetrust.com/
The Koorie Heritage Trust aims to protect, preserve, and promote the living culture of Aboriginal people of southeastern Australia. Established in 1985, the trust is a not-for-profit Aboriginal community organization.

Films:

http://www.creativecowboyfilms.com/documentaries/the-contemporary-art-of-angelina-pwerle/
This link takes you to the website for Creative Cowboy films where you can see many video clips of Aboriginal Australian artists at work. The short video of Angelina Pwerle, whose work can be seen in this exhibition, painting on a canvas provides an example of how some artists create their paintings. Through this video, students may better understand the process behind much Aboriginal Australian art, as well as its performative aspect.

This is a three-part series about contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and the artists who create it. Past and present, tradition and modernity, and the imagination and individual experiences of artists converge in this film, which celebrates the survival and resilience of a whole culture.

Crossing Country: The Alchemy of Western Arnhem Land Art. Sydney, New South Wales: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2004. This DVD features the work of artists from Western Arnhem Land, along with artist interviews and images of country.

This film celebrates Aboriginal Australian artists and works inspired by Dreamings. The film takes the viewer to the sacred heartland of Australia to see Aboriginal artists at work. The artists talk about their work, its association with the land, and its spiritual connection with their people and with animals and plants.

First Australians chronicles the history of Australia as never told before, from the perspective of its first people. Over seven episodes, First Australians depicts the true stories of individuals – both black and white – caught in an epic drama of friendship, revenge, loss, and victory in Australia’s most transformative period of history.

Painting Country. Civic Square, Australian Capital Territory: Ronin Films, 2000. Painting Country takes a group of Aboriginal artists on a journey back to their traditional country. The film intimately portrays the life and humor of these indigenous artists. It
reveals why they had to leave their country and why their relationship to the land is still fundamental to their existence.