

Using the arts to build strong communities

Indigenous arts have achieved international acclaim but their importance may be much more significant back home within communities. SYLVIA KLEINERT introduces the Charles Darwin Symposium, “Mwarre anthurre” Art works: Communities thrive.



PHOTOGRAPH

Courtesy Sylvia Kleinert

The Charles Darwin Symposium in Alice Springs on 1 October is an exciting opportunity to hear leading Indigenous and non-Indigenous experts speaking on the arts. The symposium, entitled “Mwarre anthurre” Art works: Communities thrive, brings together Indigenous representatives, leading researchers, academics, including CDU’s own staff, as well as regional and Federal Government authorities. It is designed to encourage lively and informed debate on issues of importance to all Territorians.

Indigenous culture will be pivotal to the symposium. “Mwarre anthurre” Art works: Communities thrive weaves the Arrernte word “Mwarre anthurre” (pronounced Mar-da an-thurdda) meaning good, right and proper into the title. Used with permission of the Lehre Artepe Aboriginal Organisation, the word “Mwarre anthurre” pays respect to the traditional owners of the Alice Springs region.

During the past 40 years the Indigenous arts have achieved extraordinary success. Since the development of acrylic “dot painting” at the government settlement of Papunya, in the south-west corner of the Northern Territory, in the early 1970s, Aboriginal art has become a multi-million-dollar industry that is widely acclaimed in Australia and overseas. Indigenous performances are now a central feature of local, national and international events such as the opening of the Olympic Games in Sydney 2000 and, in recent

years, Indigenous culture has become a major focus of domestic and international tourism.

Government agencies, both locally and federally, are partners in this success through the cooperative development of policies and strategies designed to foster and support the arts.

But how should success be defined? Is it just the record prices achieved at auction? And is it more than just the visual arts? What of the diversity of Indigenous art forms – from the visual arts and film to literature, music and dance? This one-day symposium provides an exciting opportunity to debate and challenge these popular perceptions.

For Indigenous people, the arts are central to their wellbeing. The arts reinforce connections to country, help build individual and community identity, and foster social cohesion. And with the arts comes education, training and employment with the opportunity for economic sustainability through the development of business enterprise.

Leading the Symposium will be two keynote speakers: Minister for Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage, Parks and Wildlife and Central Australia, the Honorable Alison Anderson MLA, and Head of the Centre for Cross Cultural Research at The Australian National University, Professor Howard Morphy. They will introduce the Symposium by addressing the question: How do the arts foster social cohesion in communities?

In the following session, educationalists including writer Veronica Perrule Dobson, CDU’s Anja Tait and Leonie Murrungun will examine the tangible outcomes of art and music programs in schools and communities. The Symposium will then explore the way the arts enhance social cohesion by bringing communities together to create a meeting place for cross-cultural exchange. Featuring in this discussion will be the Barunga Festival south east of Katherine celebrating its 23rd anniversary, the innovative cultural tourism projects developed by Papulankutja artists in Blackstone, West Australia and the recently established Tangentyere Artists providing art and marketing services for the artists and residents of Alice Springs town camps.

WEB BYTE

Visit the Charles Darwin Symposium website at www.cdu.edu.au/cdss/series.html.

Government policies and strategies are crucial to the success of these initiatives. Keynote speaker, Northern Territory Minister for Arts and Museums, Indigenous Policy, and Education and Training Marion Scrymgour will address the question: What is the intersection between the arts, education and policy? She will be joined by a panel of experts drawn from local and Federal Government agencies. These include Chief Executive Officer of the Australia Council, Kathy Keele; Chief Executive Officer of the National Association for the Visual Arts, Tamara Winikoff; Executive Director, Northern Territory Department of Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Lyn Allen; and Executive Director Central Australia, Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training, Sue Murphy.

Rounding off this exciting program will be a group of senior custodians who will address the question: What happens next? Board member for the Centre for Desert Knowledge Harold Furber, ANKAAA Chair Djambawa Marawili, and cultural advisor, teacher, author and artist Margaret Kemarre Turner will provide an Indigenous perspective on goals for the 21st Century.

With the focus on Indigenous arts, the Symposium is a significant opportunity to feature cultural performances from Indigenous artists.

Leading the Symposium as Master of Ceremonies will be Director of the Alice Springs tourist development Jungala Enterprises, Jungala Kriss. This will be followed by a welcome to country provided by traditional owners from the Lehre Artepe Aboriginal Organisation. Highlights of the Symposium will include a cultural performance by women dancers from the Amoonguna community, and a lunchtime performance by the well known Alice Springs band, NoKTuRNL.

This is an exciting time for the Alice Springs region. Through the Symposium, Charles Darwin University will make a vital contribution to the cultural events planned for Alice Springs at this time. "Mwarre anthurre" Art works: Communities thrive, will link directly with the Desert Mob Symposium on the 26 September 2008 and the Desert Mob exhibition at the Araluen Arts Centre and Art at the Heart, the national conference of Regional Arts Australia opening on 2 October 2008.

Undoubtedly this exciting Symposium will attract a wide-ranging audience. "Mwarre anthurre" Art works: Communities thrive will be of direct interest to artists and educators, those working in the art industry, academics, government agencies and the wider public.

Most importantly, the Symposium welcomes Indigenous people from Alice Springs and the surrounding region.



ANTENNAE

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