Lecture summary:

In February 2009 Cornell University art museum launched the first-ever exhibition devoted to the earliest Papunya ‘boards’ (1971-72), which gave birth to the ensuing Papunya Tula movement. Exhibition curator Roger Benjamin will discuss the origins and vicissitudes of the exhibition, which included negotiations with traditional owners who forbade the reproduction of secret/sacred images. The exhibition travelled to Los Angeles and New York, and set a precedent in the handling of works considered culturally sensitive.

The lecture examines the early stages of the movement, and proposes the boards have been subject to a curatorial and market “fetish” that has seen them isolated as an aesthetic and historical category, and subject to the greatest accrual of value ever seen in the Australian artworld. Prof Benjamin will also give an account of the development of Papunya art over a two-year period, focussing on major artists like Kaapa Tjampitjinpa, Johnny Warrangula Tjupurrula, Shorty Lungkata Tjungurrayi, and Clifford Possum Tjapaljarri. Icons of the Desert presaged the larger exhibition Tjukurrjtjanu: Origins of Western Desert Art, which opens on the 27th September at the National Gallery of Victoria.

Slide list:

1. Herbert F Johnson Museum of Art by I.M. Pei, 1971 (Cornell U) + Fowler Museum, UCLA
2. Icons of the Desert at Cornell with Bobby West Tjupurrula, Joseph Jurra Tjapaltjarri and Ray James Tjangala, Feb 2009
3. Ray James Tjangala and Bobby West applying wamulu to Cornell ground painting
4. Ray James Tjangala and Bobby West applying finishing touches Cornell ground painting
5. Map of Central and Western Desert nations/languages (IAD map)
6. Papunya from the air, c. 1973-4, photo Michael Jensen
7. Albert Namatjira with US Davis Cup player, Sydney c. 1957 + Namatjira, Grass Trees, c. 1950
8. Geoffrey Bardon (far right) with senior men outside ‘Great Painting Room’, Papunya, early 1972
10. Anatjari Tjakamarra, Man Dreaming shield 1972 + Clifford Possu, Carved Snake 1973, NMA
11. Old Walter Tjampitjinpa (L), Old Mick Tjakamarra w sand mosaic for Bardon’s film A Calendar of Dreamings, 1974
15. Michael Jensen, photo of Kaapa Tjampitjinpa at work on *Children’s Story*, ca Sept 1972
18. Great Painting Room, Papunya, ca. September 1972, photo Michael Jensen
19. Charlie Tarawa Tjungurrayi (l) and Johnny Warrangula Tjupurrula (r), photo Michael Jensen
25. Tim Leura, *Yala Dreaming*, c. late 1972, Wilkerson Coll, NYC.
29. Tommy Lowry Tjapaltjarri, *Two Men Dreaming*, 1984
31. Ronnie Tjampitjinpa, Untitled, 2005 (Wilkerson)
32. Papunya Tula painting studio at Kintore, NT in 2007
34. Collaborative women’s painting for Swimming Pool fundraiser, c. 2005
35. Bobby West Tjupurrula, *Untitled*, 2011, General Painting Prize, Telstra Art Awards, August 2011

**Bibliography:**


Website: Iconsofthedesert.com
Honey Ant Dreaming, mural at Papunya Special School, Jly-Aug 1971

Mural in Jly 1972, before effacement by govt authorities
Kaapa Tjampitjinpa, *Men’s Ceremony for Gulardi*, July 1971

Namatjira, *Mount Sonder*, watercolour, c. 1950
Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri, *Big Cave Dreaming with Large Ceremonial Object*, mid 1972, Wilkerson Coll, NYC.
Bobby West Tjupurrula, *Untitled*, 2011, General Painting Prize, Telstra Art Awards, August 2011