

This publication accompanies the exhibition *The Inside World: Contemporary Aboriginal Australian Memorial Poles* from the Debra and Dennis Scholl Collection.

Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, NV
February 9, 2019–June 23, 2019

Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, Detroit, MI
July 18, 2019–December 29, 2019

Fralin Museum of Art, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA
January 24, 2020–June 28, 2020

Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum,
Florida International University, Miami, FL
July 2020–December 2020

Edited by
Henry F. Skerritt

With contributions by
Murray Garde
Louise Hamby
Howard Morphy
Kimberley Moulton
Diana Nawi
Wukun Waqambi
David Wickens

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Front cover: Gunybi Ganambarr, *Milŋurr Njaymil* (detail), 2016 (see p. 116)
Back cover: Gabriel Maralngurra, *Lorrkon* (detail), 2016 (see p. 54)

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THE INSIDE WORLD CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIAN MEMORIAL POLES

Skerritt

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Nevada Museum of Art
DeMonico • Prestel

*The outside surface of things hides what is inside.
I want to share what is hidden . . . Inside the larrakitj.
Inside our destiny. Inside our hearts.*

—Wukun Waqambi

The Inside World presents ninety-nine memorial poles by forty-nine artists from the remote Aboriginal Australian communities of Kunbarllanjja, Maningrida, Milingimbi, and Yirrkala. Traditionally, these poles—named *lorrkon*, *dupun* or *larrakitj*—marked the final point in Aboriginal mortuary rites. They signified the moment when the spirit of the deceased had finally returned home—when they had left all vestiges of the mundane “outside” world, and become one with the “inside” world of the ancestral realm. Today, these poles are made as works of art, becoming a powerful metaphor for the ability of Aboriginal art to cross cultures, to speak of the secret “inside” world within the mundane outside of the artworld. Drawn from the collection of Miami-based philanthropists Debra and Dennis Scholl, *The Inside World* is the first exhibition to attempt to map the production of contemporary memorial poles across the Arnhem Land region in northern Australia. It features some of the most respected contemporary artists working in Australia today. In this volume, leading art historians, anthropologists, curators, and artists shed light on the complex histories of memorial poles. The authors situate these enigmatic objects in both their traditional contexts in Aboriginal societies, as well as their changing position in the contemporary art world. Today, the *larrakitj*, *dupun*, and *lorrkon* that travel the world as art stand as the embodiment of the rich, living culture of Arnhem Land. They are not ritual objects in themselves, but metaphors for the crossing of cultures: spirit vessels designed to hint at the existence of an elusive “inside” world. The result is not a picture of dying cultures, but a celebration of life. Walking in this forest of bones, we find ourself reborn. Faced with this joyous elucidation of a culture so distant and different to our own, the world is made more alive.



The Inside World

Contemporary Aboriginal Australian Memorial Poles

From the Debra and Dennis Scholl Collection

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Henry F. Skerritt

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Page 7: Manini Gumana, *Garraparra* (detail), 2016 (see p. 117)

Page 9: Nicky Djawutjawuku, *Milminydjarrk at Garriyak (Sacred Waterholes)* (detail) 2016 (see p. 96)

Pages 40–41: Marrnyula Munungurr, *Djapu Larrakitj* (detail), 2016 (see p. 128)

Throughout this book, authors have chosen to use the Yolŋu Matha orthography. This is most evident in the use of macrons to indicate retroflexed sounds and the venar nasal or “tailed n” [ŋ̠]. Retroflexed sounds are pronounced while the tip of the tongue curls back to the roof of the mouth. The venar nasal “ŋ̠:ŋ̠” denotes the sound *ng* as in the English word sing.

Members of Indigenous communities are respectfully advised that a number of people mentioned in writing or depicted in photographs in the following pages have passed away.

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The Inside World

Henry F. Skerritt

Located in Australia's tropical north, Arnhem Land is another world: a place of spectacular natural beauty and irrepressible life. Occupying 37,000 square miles, it is home to some of the world's oldest continuing cultural traditions, with archaeological evidence confirming human habitation back over fifty thousand years. To the west, the rocky escarpments and sweeping flood-plains have long sustained the Bininj: the people of the stone country. While to the east, the white-sand beaches and sparkling bays are the sacred homelands of the Yolŋu. Between these poles live speakers of over a dozen different languages, each with their own distinctive cultural and artistic traditions. These differences are reflected in the diversity of works in this exhibition.

The Inside World presents ninety-nine memorial poles by forty-nine artists from four remote Aboriginal communities. It is not the first exhibition of Aboriginal memorial poles. Indeed, since *The Aboriginal Memorial* (Sydney Biennale, 1988; p. 37), memorial poles have been a regular feature in contemporary art exhibitions in Australia.¹ These exhibitions have, however, tended to focus on the work of a single community. *The Inside World* is the first exhibition to attempt to map the production of contemporary memorial poles across Arnhem Land—drawing on works produced through the art centers Injalak Arts (Kunbarllanjja), Maningrida Arts and Culture (Maningrida), Milingimbi Art and Culture (Milingimbi) and Buku-Larrngay Mulka (Yirrkala). Many of the works were commissioned specifically for this exhibition, and in several instances, as David Wickens notes in his essay, these commissions have resulted in the revival of the practice of producing memorial poles. In other instances—most notably the artists of Buku-Larrngay Mulka—the exhibition captures a

profound moment of artistic development, as artists such as Wukun Waṅambi (b. 1962), Gunybi Ganambarr (b. 1973) and Nyapanyapa Yunupirju (b. ca. 1945) push the boundaries of the form into new and unexpected trajectories.

Traditionally, memorial poles like those in *The Inside World* would have been used as ossuaries: the final resting place for the bones of the dead. The poles would be made from the trunk of a carefully selected *Eucalyptus tetradonta* (stringybark tree) that had been naturally hollowed out by termites. The most perfectly cylindrical trunk would be selected and its bark stripped so that it could be painted with powerful clan designs that would identify and protect the spirit of the deceased. Today, many artists have chosen to incorporate natural imperfections in their work, heightening the sense of connection between the human and natural worlds.

In western Arnhem Land, these objects are generally called *lorrkkon*; in central Arnhem Land, *ḍupun* is the more common term; while in northeastern Arnhem Land, they are usually called *larrakitj*. As Louise Hamby documents in her essay in this volume, there are a myriad other clan-specific names for memorial poles, reflecting the linguistic and cultural diversity of Arnhem Land. We have respected this diversity here, allowing for variations in spelling and terminology that indicate local differences.² Similarly, in English, these objects have gone by a range of descriptors, most commonly "hollow-log coffins" or "burial poles." We have opted for the term "memorial poles" to register their movement beyond the confines of the mortuary process, as well as to capture their broader symbolic and aesthetic roles in both Aboriginal society and the contemporary art world.

Wukun Waṅambi, *Bamurrŋu* (detail), 2016 (see p. 134)



Fig. 1. John Bunjuwuy (Australian/Gupapuyŋu, c. 1922–1982), *Gupapuyŋu Mortuary Ceremony*, before 1966. Earth pigments on bark, 41½ x 24½ in. (105.4 x 62.2 cm). Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. Edward L. Ruhe Collection. Gift of John W. Kluge, 1997

The symbolic nature of these objects is not something new, as Murray Garde notes in his essay in this book, these poles are never hollow: they are filled with memories of those loved and lost, reminding us of our connection to those who came before us. Indeed, in Aboriginal cosmology, the entire world exists on a highly metaphorical plane, as everything in the universe is considered mimetic of ancestral actions. Aboriginal ceremony renews and affirms these ancestral connections. Like all ritual, it is high in metaphor, allegory and symbolism. Generally speaking,

memorial poles would be produced to mark the end of the mortuary process. In the early parts of the funeral ceremony, the body of the deceased would be placed on a raised platform. Once the flesh had decayed, their bones would be collected and worn round the neck of close family members in a woven dilly-bag. Once the grieving process was complete, these bones would be placed in a hollow-log coffin as part of an elaborate ceremony (such as the *Lorrkkon* ceremony recounted in Garde's essay). Not everyone would be granted this honor: often it was restricted to high-ranking or ritually powerful members of a clan.

Interment in a memorial pole marked the final point in a long and complex mortuary process designed to guide the spirit of the deceased on its final journey. It signified the moment when spirits were considered to have finally returned to their ancestral homes—when they had left all vestiges of the mundane "outside" world and become one with the "inside" realm of the ancestral world. This is matched in the symbolism of the hollow-log coffin. The trunk of the tree is stripped of its skin, till only its "inside" body remains. The bones of the deceased are then placed into this new body, which is painted with the clan designs that signify the "inside" identity of the deceased. As Morphy notes, at this point the bones "have ceased to be the bones of the person and have, to use a Yolngu metaphor, become part of "the bones [*ngaraka*] of the clan."³

Embodying this complex symbolism of life, death, and eternity, the hollow-log coffin was ripe for artistic investigation. And if collectors and institutions were slow to grasp this potential, Aboriginal artists have explored it for some time. In particular, the depiction of hollow-log coffins has provided fertile ground for bark painters trying to represent the complex interconnected nature of Aboriginal cosmology. Take for instance *Gupapuyŋu Mortuary Ceremony* by John Bunjuwuy (ca. 1922–1982) (Fig. 1). At the center of the work Bunjuwuy depicts a large *djalumbu* (the Gupapuyŋu term for memorial poles), along with other ceremonial items from the mortuary ceremony. Bunjuwuy does not distinguish the foreground of the *djalumbu* from the background of the painting, uniting them with a field of fine white dots. This serves to flatten the picture plane—but also creates a powerful metaphor for the *djalumbu*

as a site at which the ancestral and physical realms meld. On the *djalumbu* he depicts a white diving duck (*burala*), while in the top left corner he depicts three ceremonial objects also known as *burala*.⁴ To the right, a black diving duck balances the composition. The effect is a highly fluid and poetic merging and mirroring of the ancestral, ceremonial, and natural worlds.

INSIDE OUT

There are some things that unite the peoples of Arnhem Land. One is their belief that everything in existence has an "inside" and an "outside meaning." Morphy notes: "Inside things are ancestrally powerful and sacred, while outside things are mundane; inside things are restricted whereas outside things are unrestricted."⁵ Despite this apparent binary, the division between "inside" and "outside" operates as a continuum that structures the entire universe. In his essay in this volume, Wukun Waŋambi describes the complexity of this continuum, and the ways in which it structures Yolŋu teaching and learning. In the cross-cultural context of the art world, memorial poles become a tool for explaining the interrelation between the "inside" spiritual world and the "outside" world of the mundane. This is a frequent refrain of Waŋambi's, as he has noted elsewhere:

The outside surface of things hides what is inside. I want to share what is hidden. In Yolngu, understanding the life of the spirit is a circle. The *larrakitj* is a circle. We are looking for our identity and we search around and around until we find our destiny and we go straight to that circle and join it and become a part of family. We used *larrakitj* as a coffin but now instead of digging it in the ground we want to show it as art. We believe that the spirit travels through the water and returns to its source and then is born anew. The body dissolves and the bones return to the land as the *larrakitj* decays. I have wanted to share this understanding with non-Indigenous people for a long time. To show them what is inside. Inside the *larrakitj*. Inside our destiny. Inside our hearts.⁶

With the arrival of missionaries in Arnhem Land in the 1920s and 30s, the use of hollow-log coffins slowly diminished. In some

cases, missionaries discouraged traditional practices, while in others it was just a matter of modern convenience, as the artist Joe Guymala (b. 1969) notes, "*balanda* brought more easy coffin box one with key." This is not to say that traditional practices died out, but rather, that they were refashioned. In many regions today, the painting of coffin lids remains an important part of the funeral process. In the late 1970s and 80s, there was a resurgence in the production of memorial poles for the developing Aboriginal art market. While not being used as funerary objects, the production of these poles was most clearly framed in terms of Aboriginal cultural resistance to the tide of westernization. Moving into the category of fine art, memorial poles retained all of their power as objects that embodied life, death, and memory. As Morphy notes in his essay in this catalogue, these have long been the major subjects of art because they transcend existence, connecting the living and the dead. But in the political context of Indigenous rights, they also represent a wholly *different* take on these universal experiences. It is in this sense that the memorial pole becomes both a powerful pedagogical tool with which Aboriginal artists can explain their culture to outsiders, while drawing to the fore the profound differences in our comprehension of human existence. This is the essence of great contemporary art: to communicate across worldviews without losing any of its distinctiveness, in order that it reveals both our differences and our shared humanity.⁷

ENCOUNTERING MEMORIAL POLES IN THE PRESENT

At the time of his death, the great Ganalbiŋu artist Johnny Bulunbulun (1946–2010) was working on an imposing memorial pole. He had painted the underlying forms: a menagerie of fish and lizards that danced around more abstracted shapes signifying sacred sites within his ancestral homelands in the Arafura Swamp. All that remained was to "finish" the piece with the shimmering bands of cross-hatched infill (or *rarrk*) that distinguished the great master's oeuvre. With Bulunbulun's passing, however, the piece lay silent: an unfinished requiem cut short before it could be sung. In accordance with Aboriginal protocols, the pole was hidden from view in a back-room of the Maningrida Arts and Culture center where Bulunbulun had worked.



Fig. 2. Men preparing for a smoking ceremony at Maningrida, May 2015. Photograph by Henry Skerritt

In 2015, following a lengthy process of grieving, Bulunbulun's widow Laurie Marburduk (b. 1951) decided to complete her husband's final statement. Marburduk had a steady and practiced hand: she had assisted her husband many times before on the laborious task of infilling *rark*. This time, she sat alone. One can only imagine the thoughts that passed through Marburduk's head as she performed this final act of devotion, completing the clan designs of her late husband on this form (the hollow-log coffin) that for millennia had been used to guide the spirits of the deceased back to their ancestral homelands.

Traditionally, in Aboriginal Australian societies, objects associated with the dead were destroyed. The fine art economy—like other elements introduced following the British invasion of Australia in 1788—has necessitated some modification to such traditions. Rather than destroying Bulunbulun's majestic final artwork, a smoking ceremony was planned to "cleanse" the pole and ensure that any lingering spirits were sent on their way. So, on a hot day in May 2015, I was invited to witness a group of ten men perform this solemn ritual in the sandy clearing in front of the art center (Fig. 2). I stood back with a group of women, children, and other *balanda* (non-Aboriginal people) as the men moved rhythmically around the pole with smoldering

eucalyptus branches; the sweet, sharp smell of burning leaves hanging in the humid air. As they circled, the men sang the lilting hymns of the *Ganalbinu*, a gentle murmur rising to a pulsing climax. Marburduk wiped tears from her eyes.

When the brief ceremony was complete, the men promptly assembled around Bulunbulun's pole to have their photographs taken—participating in that most contemporary form of memory preservation (Fig. 3). As a non-participant observer, I was quickly roped in to help, with several cell phones thrust into my hands. I noted with amusement later in the day that some of these photos turned up on the social media accounts of the younger men. For non-Aboriginal commentators, this mix of ancient cultural practices and modern technology is often characterized as disjunctive. Indeed, it has become something of a cliché to speak of Indigenous peoples as living "across two worlds." And yet, for most Indigenous Australians that I have spoken to, there is little tension between tradition and modernity. Indigenous Australians do not view their cultures as being out of step with the present, but rather, they see continuity and change as being in dynamic relation. Nowhere is this more clearly evidenced than in the contemporary Aboriginal art movement. As Howard Morphy has noted for the Yolŋu, the artistic system exists in a state of creative tension: "art mediates between the ideology of immutable forms and order originating in the ancestral past, and the reality of sociocultural change and political process."⁸

Contemporary Indigenous Australian conceptions of time, tradition, and memorialization have their roots in some of the oldest continuous philosophical traditions on the planet. In recent years, these ideas have found increasing global traction as EuroAmerican artists and academics have sought ways beyond the limiting paradigms of modernity. Following the collapse of modernism as the dominant artistic discourse in the West (and what Peter Osborne calls the "pyrrhic victory" of dematerialized and conceptual art practices), much Euro-American contemporary art and theory has begun to adopt parallel concerns to those that Indigenous artists have long championed.⁹ Where the classic narratives of modern art have tended to eschew tradition—as epitomized in Ezra Pound's

famous dictum, "make it new"—contemporary artists have reveled in the complex relationships between past, present, and future. This is evidenced as much in those artists attempting to reinvigorate the modernist tradition (such as Gerhard Richter [b. 1932] or Mark Bradford [b. 1961]), as it is in those whose explorations tap more explicitly into the processes of collective and individual mourning (take for example Doris Salcedo [b. 1958] or Rabih Mroué [b. 1967]). In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that Aboriginal memorial poles from remote northern Australia have emerged as one of the most intriguing forms of contemporary Australian art.

MEMORIALIZING THE ART WORLD

In his contribution to this volume, Morphy explores the somewhat paradoxical history of memorial poles as contemporary art. On the one hand, their scale and weight were often a deterrent to collectors of Aboriginal art, who preferred the portability of paintings on bark or canvas. Moreover, their form, with its clear reference to pre-colonial mortuary rites, was often cast in negative terms as "ethnographic," "tribal," or "primitive," creating a considerable barrier to their appreciation within the category of "fine art." On the other hand, these physically imposing and symbolically loaded objects were well suited to the cavernous halls of modern art museums. As Morphy notes, one of the first significant institutional acquisitions of Aboriginal art was the Art Gallery of New South Wales's 1958 commission of seventeen Pukumani grave posts from senior artists of the Tiwi Islands. Aboriginal art had long been exhibited in natural history museums, but this marked a significant entry into the contemporary art world.

Four decades later, memorial poles featured in arguably the most decisive intervention by Aboriginal artists into contemporary art: *The Aboriginal Memorial*, 1987–88, exhibited at the 1988 Sydney Biennale. Conceived by curator Djon Mundine and the artists of Ramingining in response to the events surrounding the bicentennial of British colonization, *The Aboriginal Memorial* consisted of two hundred memorial poles—one for each year of British occupation. Describing the installation in the Biennale catalogue, Mundine noted: "Each Hollow Log is ceremonially a



Fig. 3. Men having their photographs taken with Johnny Bulunbulun's final memorial pole. Maningrida, May 2015. Photograph by Henry Skerritt

Bone Coffin, so in essence the forest is really like a large cemetery of dead Aboriginals, a War Cemetery, a War Memorial to all those Aboriginals who died defending their country.”¹⁰ Unlike Aboriginal paintings, which were often characterized by their uncanny similarities to modernist abstraction, in the context of the Biennale, *The Aboriginal Memorial* resonated as a work of installation art. As Kimberley Moulton eloquently argues in her essay in this book, a large part of this resonance came from the profundity of the political challenge that *The Aboriginal Memorial* posed to mainstream Australian notions of colonial sovereignty. The art historian Terry Smith draws a similar conclusion in his analysis of *The Memorial*:

A key point is that such interventions not only strongly assert the presence of those peoples who will not fit into an imposed, colonial fabricated nationality but also radically subvert western modernity’s model of nationality as such. Aboriginal peoples, in this context, are basically saying: *We refuse your model of the nation state, for we have quite other practices of sociality; the only way you can deal with us is to reenact your early attempts at obliteration, which we know you cannot do.* This keeps nationality open, like a promise and a running sore.¹¹

For Smith, at the heart of *The Aboriginal Memorial’s* claim to be important contemporary art was its strategic balance of cultural incommensurability with the possibility of cross-cultural dialogue. Despite its seemingly impenetrable cultural difference, Smith concludes, “its aesthetic richness, its open sharing of sacred imagery, and its suggestion of persistence of life after death makes it an extraordinary yet entirely accessible template for reconciliation.”¹² In his more recent art historical investigations, Nigel Lendon has shown that the very conception of *The Aboriginal Memorial* was a highly collaborative act—a work of “relational art” whose agency was dispersed between its “conceptual producer” Djon Mundine, the artists of Ramingining, and the institutions that have exhibited *The Memorial*.¹³ This is not to deny *The Memorial’s* pivotal role in the history of contemporary art, but rather, to confirm it as an embodiment of the types of transactional practice that define both contemporary

art and contemporary life. As every essay in this volume attests, what makes Aboriginal memorial poles such compelling contemporary art is the insistence with which they work across distinctions such as art and ethnography; tradition and modernity; locality and globalism; cultural difference and our shared humanity. As Diana Nawi notes, Aboriginal memorial poles transcend and confound these binaries around which conventional histories of contemporary art have been written.

LIVING MEMORIES

One of the most surprising cultural and political phenomena of recent years has been the emergence of memory as a key concern in western societies, a turning toward the past that stands in stark contrast to the privileging of the future so characteristic of earlier decades of twentieth-century modernity.¹⁴

Andreas Huyssen

Memory has emerged as a crucial concern of contemporary artists. This has been particularly noticeable in (although not limited to), the work of artists from previously marginalized and oppressed cultural backgrounds. Often this memory discourse has centered around historical trauma and the uncovering of previously concealed histories (such as Paddy Bedford’s [1922–2007] depictions of previously unrecorded massacres of Aboriginal people, or Paul Rucker’s [b. 1968] obsessive documenting of the Ku Klux Klan). In other instances, it has been at the behest of keeping cultural practices strong—as in the ceramics of Janet Fieldhouse (b. 1971) (Fig. 4) which reimagine traditional weaving practices of the Torres Strait Islands into fragile elegies in porcelain. For other Indigenous Australian artists, memory has served to reaffirm connections to their ancestral country in exile, such as the luminous abstractions of artists like Weaver Jack (1928–2010) or Nyilpirr Spider Snell (1925–2016). Indeed, the ceremonial songlines of Indigenous Australia are themselves a highly sophisticated mnemonic device for navigation and survival.

The pervasive interest in memory amongst contemporary artists is clearly indicative of shifting attitudes towards



Fig. 4. Janet Fieldhouse (Australian/Meriam Mir, born 1971), *Memory Series 2*, 2014. Porcelain, 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 6 in. (20 x 26 x 15 cm). Kluge–Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. Gift of the artist, 2017

temporality brought about by the changed conditions of globalization. As Huyssen notes, the acceleration of global movement and communication has radically transformed our experience of time, making us acutely aware of the “discrepant temporalities” of the contemporary.¹⁵ Whereas modernity tended to be framed in terms of linear progress, contemporaneity is characterized by a coming together of different, but equally “present” times: a recognition of the myriad ways of inhabiting the present.¹⁶ This is the very definition of “contemporary” which means to share one’s time with others. In this “temporal turn,” contemporary artists have increasingly turned to memory for its ability to marshal both the individual and the collective.¹⁷ Unlike history—which is often characterized as official, institutional or national—memories are deeply personal. And yet, while memories structure our being (what are we but our memories?), they also shape our shared understandings of the past, present, and future (our *collective* memory).

My sense is that the memory embedded in the memorial poles in this exhibition operates on a slightly different level. For the artists of Arnhem Land, *Iarrakitj*, *dupun* and *lorrkkon* embody living memories: the sign of a past that remains embedded in the present. In this sense, the wielding of memory becomes an

act of *authority*. It is perhaps unsurprising that memory and trauma are so often bedfellows. Hal Foster has argued that trauma, much like memory, has absolute authority. “One cannot challenge the trauma of another: one can only believe it, even identify with it, or not. *In trauma discourse, then, the subject is evacuated and elevated at once.*”¹⁸ Jill Bennett reasons that, in this regard, “trauma-related art is best understood as *transactive* rather than *communicative*. It often touches us, but it does not necessarily communicate the ‘secret’ of personal experience.”¹⁹ In doing so, it avoids what Jennifer Biddle has described as the “violence of identification,” in which understanding the Other is filtered through the logic of resemblance.²⁰ In memorial poles we see the transaction of memory as lived experience—as part of a worldview that has both surface (“outside”) meanings and hidden (“inside”) meanings. We see the Other as a shimmering surface, whose depth we know, but which lies always out of view. As Waṅambi notes: “*Balanda* can see the surface side of the designs—like looking at the surface of the water—but underneath is the bigger part that only we know.” In doing so, memorial poles offer the aesthetic contours of the Aboriginal worldview—the awareness of a “whole structure” that Waṅambi describes—while maintaining the restrictedness of this inside world.²¹

Today, the *Iarrakitj*, *dupun*, and *lorrkkon* that travel the world as art stand as the embodiment of the rich, living culture of Arnhem Land. They are not ritual objects in themselves, but metaphors for the crossing of cultures: spirit vessels designed to hint at the existence of an elusive “inside” world. As artworks, each one expresses this in a unique way: while many of the poles refer to clan designs, most use these designs as the launchpad for highly individuated expressions. The result is not a picture of dying cultures, but a celebration of life. In an interconnected world, in which the fear of difference is being increasingly marshalled by the supporters of xenophobic nativism, these works offer a remarkable olive branch: a model for considering the potential for dialogue within a world of diversity. Walking in this forest of bones, we find ourself reborn. Faced with this joyous elucidation of a culture so distant and different to our own, the world is made more alive.