



Kimberley Society

Book Note

Aboriginal Artists: Dictionary of Biographies: Central Desert, Western Desert and Kimberley Region by Janusz B Kreczmanski & Margo Birnberg. J.B. Publishing, Marlestone (SA), 2004, 446 pages, colour illustrations, maps & portraits, ISBN: 1876622474. RRP \$75.00.

This book is the first attempt to document Aboriginal artists of the desert region since Vivian Johnson's 1994 work *Aboriginal Artists of the Western Desert, A Biographical Dictionary*, published by Craftsman House. It contains the names (including different versions of names), regions and language groups of 900 to 1000 Aboriginal artists with a brief biography and a list of selected exhibitions, awards and collections. There are numerous photographs of the artists, often at work or with their works, and sometimes more than one picture of the artist and his or her works.

Kimberley artists from Warmun, Balgo, Fitzroy Crossing, Kalumburu are well represented. However an omission that is surely glaring is that of the work from Mowanjum and its artists. Their renaissance under the leadership of Donny Woolagoodja, whose Wandjina was used in the 2000 Olympics opening ceremony, dates back to the late '90s. In 1999 they had sell-out exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne, and this appears to be ignored.

However the authors must be congratulated to have completed such a major work, which obviously required a lot of time, effort and travelling to isolated communities in the desert and the Kimberley. Many artists received mentions who otherwise would have been best considered as minor but who have still contributed to the corpus of "Aboriginal Art".

Kimberley artist Rover Thomas receives a whole page including his design of a \$1 postage stamp. Two thirds of the page documents his selected exhibitions and collections. My other minor criticism of the book is a description of prolific Balgo painter and "Maparn" (traditional healer), Dominic Martin, as being "deaf and dumb". This is an insulting term to any hearing impaired (or even deaf) person, especially Dominic. Excuse my invective but, with both my parents being teachers of the deaf, I couldn't let this pass by.

Let me state again that this is a major work. It will be a significant important reference work for many years to come, and the authors are to be congratulated.

Jack Vercoe

Editor's note: This book was out of print in 2014.

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