Indigenous Australian Art: An Analytical and Cultural Survey

Class code  
ANTH-UA 9038 – 001 or SCA-UA 9836 – 001

Instructor Details  
Petronella Vaarzon-Morel  
pvm2@nyu.edu

Matt Poll  
matt.poll@sydney.edu.au

Consultations by appointment.  
Please allow at least 24 hours for your instructor to respond to your emails.

Class Details  
Spring 2018

Indigenous Australian Art: An Analytical and Cultural Survey

Wednesday 12:30 – 3:30pm  
31 January to 9 May  
Room 302  
NYU Sydney Academic Centre  

Prerequisites  
None

Class Description  
This course is a survey of the principal themes and issues in the development of Indigenous art in Australia. It focuses on some of the regional and historical variations of Aboriginal art in the context of the colonisation of Australia, while considering the issues of its circulation and evaluation within contemporary discourses of value. Topics include the cosmological dimensions of the art, its political implications, its relationship to cultural and national identity, and its aesthetic frameworks. There will be four required fieldtrips/excursions during which students will visit some of the major collections of Indigenous Australian art as well as exhibitions of contemporary works. There will also be guest presentations from Indigenous artists and Indigenous curators of art.

Required field trip/excursions:  
Guided tour of Aboriginal rock art sites at Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park (Week 2).

Australian National Maritime Museum Exhibitions: 1) Eora First People. Precious Works
of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture; 2) Gapu-Monuk Saltwater: Journey to Sea Country. (Week 6)

Student presentations on selected art work in Yiribana Gallery, Art Gallery of NSW (Week 11); and Week 12.

Desired Outcomes
As a result of successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the diversity of Indigenous arts in Australia—ranging from acrylic paintings of the Western Desert to bark paintings of Arnhem Land to urban, politically motivated works in various media (including photography, sculpture, print-making, etc.) and reflect critically on the ways in which it is displayed.
- Think about these works both as objectifications of cultural expression (Aboriginal histories, religious beliefs, cultural/linguistic practices) and as political interventions.
- Appreciate the role of anthropology/art history in defining “Aboriginal art” as a genre of high art; think about “Aboriginal art” as itself an intercultural production, and be able to thoughtfully address our own participation in defining this category on various markets/multiple regimes of value.
- Relate case studies in Indigenous arts to broader themes, including the definition of race/Aboriginality in Australia; the recognition and representation of Indigenous Australians in various forms (the constitution, art museums, media); how value is understood/accrued on markets; destabilising dichotomies between remote/urban, art/craft, ethnography/art, prehistory/history; defining and problematising “authenticity,” and appropriation” and many more.

Assessment Components
This course is comprised of in-class seminars and field trips—to best expose students to various nodes in the Indigenous Australian art world. Students will also be expected to attend at least one major exhibition of Indigenous Australian art, in addition to any officially organised field trips.

Class Participation: 10%
Class Presentation 10%
Exhibition Review: 15%
Artwork Presentation: 15%
Community Profile: 15%
Research Paper: 35%

Class participation includes two components:
1) Active engagement in discussions and respectful listening; collaborative group work as occasionally assigned (10%).
2) 15 minute presentation of course materials during the semester (to be decided via student sign-up on the first class). You will need to summarise authors’ arguments, present major themes, and raise questions for further discussion. Collaboration
with another student may be necessary depending on numbers. Film/video/web clips and/or PowerPoint are welcome but not required (10%).

Review of a current exhibition of Indigenous Australian art in Sydney: 4-5 pages; (15%)
Your instructor will provide a listing with addresses.
- Due by 12.30pm, Wed 28 Feb (Week 5)

Presentation on a work of art: 10 minutes; (15%).
Visit the Art Gallery of New South Wales and select and research one work of art by an Indigenous artist that is on display and prepare a 12 minute, object-centered talk on this work. We will be presenting in front of the selected works in the Yiribana Gallery at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.
- Due by 12.30pm, Wed 11 Apr (Week 11) and Week 12

Profile of an art producing community: 4-5 pages; (15%)
You will compose a profile of an Indigenous art producing community in Australia detailing its first experiments with making art for the public domain. Please specify the cultural, historic, stylistic negotiations that informed the community’s adaptive practices and include some information on one of its better-known members.
- Due by 12.30pm, Fri 27 Apr (Week 13) – PLEASE NOTE MAKE UP DAY

Final Research paper: 10 pages; (35%)
Write on a significant topic/issue in Aboriginal art using at least three of the class readings. Assessment criteria and a list of suggestions will be distributed in session 8; you may also choose your own topic/issue in consultation with the lecturer. Please schedule an in-person conversation; email is not sufficient.
- Due by 12.30pm, Fri 11 May (Week 15)

Written work must include appropriate and consistent citations and references (reference lists are not included in the required number of pages); please follow NYU’s Style Guide available on the NYU Classes site for our course (check under “Resources”).

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component will result in failure of the class.

For this course your total numerical score, calculated from the components listed above, is converted to a letter grade without rounding.

Extra Credit: Site policy does not allow grading of work outside of the assignments included in the syllabus. The final grade will only be calculated from the assessment components listed here and no other work, whether additional or substituted, is permitted.
Assessment Expectations

**Grade A:** Excellent performance showing a thorough knowledge and understanding of the topics of the course; all work includes clear, logical explanations, insight, and original thought and reasoning.

**Grade B:** Good performance with general knowledge and understanding of the topics; all work includes general analysis and coherent explanations showing some independent reasoning, reading and research.

**Grade C:** Satisfactory performance with some broad explanation and reasoning; the work will typically demonstrate an understanding of the course on a basic level.

**Grade D:** Passable performance showing a general and superficial understanding of the course’s topics; work lacks satisfactory insight, analysis or reasoned explanations.

**Grade F:** Unsatisfactory performance in all assessed criteria. Work is weak, unfinished or unsubmitted.

Grade Conversions

This course uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Numerical Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94 to 100</td>
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<td>A-</td>
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<td>87 to &lt; 90</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>67 to &lt; 70</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>65 to &lt; 67</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0 to &lt; 65</td>
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Submission of Work

Assignments (excluding in-class presentations and exams) must be submitted electronically via NYU Classes. It is the student’s responsibility to confirm that the work has been successfully been uploaded. In the unlikely event that a submission to Classes fails, students must immediately submit the work to the Academic Programs Coordinator via email before the original submission deadline accompanied by an explanation of the issue. All in-class presentations and exams must be completed during the scheduled class time. An assessment component is considered completed when the student has met all the terms for that assessment component as outlined by the instructor.

An assessment component completed after the deadline without an agreed extension receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100-point scale (for the assignment) for each day the
work is late. Work completed beyond five weekdays after the due date without an agreed extension receives a mark of zero, and the student is not entitled to feedback for that piece of work. Because failure to submit or fulfil any required assessment component will result in failure of the course, it is crucial for students to complete every assignment even when it will receive a mark of zero.

**Plagiarism Policy**

The academic standards of New York University apply to all coursework at NYU Sydney. NYU Sydney policies are in accordance with New York University’s plagiarism policy. The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

It is a serious academic offense to use the work of others (written, printed or in any other form) without acknowledgement. Cases of plagiarism are not dealt with by your instructor. They are referred to the Director, who will determine the appropriate penalty (up to and including failure in the course as a whole) taking into account the codes of conduct and academic standards for NYU’s various schools and colleges.

**Attendance Policy**

Study abroad at Global Academic Centre is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centres is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students' semester grades. The class roster will be marked at the beginning of class and anyone who arrives after this time will be considered absent. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence.

For courses that meet once a week, one unexcused absence will be penalised by a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade. For courses that meet two or more times a week, the same penalty will apply to two unexcused absences. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure.

Faculty cannot excuse an absence. Requests for absences to be excused must be directed to the Academic Programs Coordinator. Students must provide appropriate documentation for their absence. In the case of illness, students must contact the Academic Programs Coordinator on the day of absence. They must provide medical documentation to Academic Programs Coordinator within three days of the absence in order to be medically excused. The note must include a medical judgement indicating that the student was unfit to attend class/work on the specific day or dates of the absence. Faculty will be informed of excused absences by the Academic Programs staff.
Classroom Expectations

This is a seminar subject and requires the active participation of all students. It also requires engaged discussion, including listening to and respecting other points of view. Your behaviour in class should respect your classmates’ desire to learn. It is important for you to focus your full attention on the class, for the entire class period.

- Arrive to class on time.
- Once you are in class, you are expected to stay until class ends. Leaving to make or take phone calls, to meet with classmates, or to go to an interview, is not acceptable behaviour.
- Phones, digital music players, and any other communications or sound devices are not to be used during class. That means no phone calls, no texting, no social media, no email, and no internet browsing at any time during class.
- Laptop computers and tablets are not to be used during class except in rare instances for specific class-related activity expressly approved by your instructor.
- The only material you should be reading in class is material assigned for that class. Reading anything else, such as newspapers or magazines, or doing work from another class, is not acceptable.
- Class may not be recorded in any fashion – audio, video, or otherwise – without permission in writing from the instructor.

Diversity, Inclusion and Equity

NYU is committed to building a culture that respects and embraces diversity, inclusion, and equity, believing that these values – in all their facets – are, as President Andrew Hamilton has said, “…not only important to cherish for their own sake, but because they are also vital for advancing knowledge, sparking innovation, and creating sustainable communities.” At NYU Sydney we are committed to creating a learning environment that:

- fosters intellectual inquiry, research, and artistic practices that respectfully and rigorously take account of a wide range of opinions, perspectives, and experiences; and
- promotes an inclusive community in which diversity is valued and every member feels they have a rightful place, is welcome and respected, and is supported in their endeavours.

Religious Observance

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. Students must notify their professor and the Academic Programs Coordinator in writing via email one week in advance before being absent for this purpose.

Provisions to students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in a class are encouraged to contact the Moses Centre for Students with Disabilities at (212) 998-4980 as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For more information, see Study Away and Disability.
Required Texts

It is a course expectation that you have done the required reading and have prepared sufficiently to discuss them in class.


Supplemental Texts

- Margo Neale, *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*
- Hetti Perkins, *Art and Soul*
- Hetti Perkins, *One Sun One Moon*
- Shirley W. Wiencke, *When the Wattles Bloom Again: The Life and Times of William Barak, Last Chief of the Yarra Yarra Tribe*, 1984
- Hetti Perkins and Jonathan Jones *Half Light: Portraits from Black Australia*,
- Pamela McClusky and Wally Caruana, *Ancestral Modern: Australian Aboriginal Art*, Seattle Art Museum
- Catherine Summerhayes, *The Moving Images of Tracey Moffatt*
- Margo Neale (ed.) *Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye*
- Jane Lyndon (ed.) *Calling the Shots: Aboriginal Photographies*. Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014

Week 1  What is Indigenous Art? A Journey to Recognition.

Wednesday 31 January

Petronella Vaarzon- Morel & Matt Poll
Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:


Homework Assignment:

Research the Indigenous peoples from your hometown or city and write one or two paragraphs based on your findings. Please be prepared to present and discuss briefly on the bus (Wk 2).

### Week 2  The Memory of Place: Aboriginal rock engravings of Sydney and Murujuga

**Wednesday 7 February**

**Matt Poll**

**Required Reading and Viewing:**


**Recommended Reading:**


**Required field trip/excursion: Guided tour of Aboriginal rock art sites at Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park**

This excursion will be instead of the regularly scheduled class time at the Academic Centre. We will meet at the Academic Centre and a bus will take us to Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, which will take approximately 45 minutes. Depending on traffic, we may be a little late returning to Sydney. Please wear comfortable closed-toed shoes, as we will be walking on uneven, rocky and sometimes steep paths. A hat, sunscreen, sunglasses and a bottle of water are recommended for the field trip. This trip will be in lieu of class from 12:30 – 3:30pm.

**Homework Assignment:** Visit the Art Gallery of New South Wales and select and begin research on one work of art by an Indigenous artist that is currently on display. Most of the Indigenous works are exhibited in the Yiribana Gallery which is on the lower ground floor of the Gallery. You will need to take the escalators down three levels to reach the Yiribana Gallery. This research will form the basis of a 12 minute talk that you will deliver in front of the selected work and in front of your class mates in Weeks 11 and 12. Please email Matt and cc Petronella your selection by 14 February to avoid duplication and to ensure that
the work will still be on display for our presentations. Every day at 11am, the Art Gallery of New South Wales offers free-guided tours of its Indigenous collection in the Yiribana Gallery, departing from the main Information Desk. Consider joining one of these or other free-guided tours. Please note that Indigenous art is hung throughout the Gallery and isn’t just on the lower ground floor.

**Week 3  First Citizen: Albert Namatjira and the Hermannsburg School**

*Wednesday 14 February*

Petronella Vaarzon-Morel

**Required Reading:**
- Brenda L Croft “Albert’s Gift,” in *Australian Aboriginal Art*, Issue 1, 2009, pp. 70–75.

**Selected Reading:**

**Media:**
- [http://bighart.org/project/namatjira/](http://bighart.org/project/namatjira/)  The Namatjira Project

**Week 4 Papunya: Genesis and Genius**

*Wednesday 21 February*

Petronella Vaarzon-Morel

**Required Reading:**

**Selected Reading:**
- Fred Myers, “Representing culture: The production of discourse(s) for Aboriginal acrylic paintings”, *Cultural Anthropology*, 6, 1, 1991, pp 26–62. (2 students to collaborate on presentation)

**Recommended Reading:**
- Geoff Bardon, “The Money Belongs to the Ancestors.” in *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius,*
**Week 5  Marking country, social relations and self: artistic practices in Warlpiri and Anmatyer communities**

**Wednesday 28 February**

Petronella Vaarzon-Morel

**Required Reading:**


**Selected reading**


**Assignment due: Review of a current exhibition of Indigenous art around Sydney: 4-5 pages; (15%)**

**Week 6  Northeast, Central, and Western Arnhem Land: Contact, Collections and Cultural Practices**

**Wednesday 7 March**

Petronella Vaarzon-Morel

**Required Reading:**


We will be meet at the Maritime Museum, 2 Murray St, Darling Harbour, Sydney.

**SPRING BREAK: 12 – 16 March (Week 7)**
Week 8  Eulogies in Ochre: Art from the East Kimberley and the Tiwi Islands

Wednesday 21 March

Matt Poll

Required Reading:

Selected Reading:

In Class Media: Excerpts from Art and Soul, dir. Hetti Perkins; Putuparri and the Rainmakers, dir. Nicole Ma

Week 9  Alternative Models: Aboriginal Artists' Cooperatives and the Indigenous Avant-Garde

Wednesday 28 March

Matt Poll

Required Reading:

Selected Reading:
- Paul Chaat Smith “On Jimmie Durham, Native Identity, and Americans, the Forthcoming Smithsonian Exhibition”. Available at: https://walkerart.org/magazine/paul-chaat-smith-jimmie-durham-americans-nmai-smithsonian


Week 10  Daguerreotypes, Stereotypes, Prototypes: Reframing Indigenous Photography

Wednesday 4 April

Matt Poll
Required Reading:

Selected Reading:

Recommended Reading:
- Jane Lyndon (ed.) Calling the Shots: Aboriginal Photographies Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014

In-class media:
- Excerpts from Colour Theory with Richard Bell, Series 1 Episode 4, Nici Cumpston, (2013) dir. Richard Bell (25mins)

Week 11  Class Presentations

Wednesday 11 April

Matt Poll

We will be meeting at the Art Gallery of New South Wales for our presentations on an Indigenous work of art in the collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Assignment due: Presentation on a work of art: 10 minutes; (15%).

Week 12  Class Presentations

Wednesday 18 April

Matt Poll

We will be meeting at the Art Gallery of New South Wales for our presentations on an Indigenous work of art in the collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Assignment due: Presentation on a work of art: 10 minutes; (15%).

Week 13  Aboriginal Art on the Market: Circulation and Value in/through Auctions, Art Centres, Galleries, Museums.

Friday 27 April (Make-up Class for ANZAC Day)

Petronella Vaarzon-Morel
**Guest Speaker: Tim Klingender TBC**
(Tim Klingender, Former Director, Head of Aboriginal Art at Sotheby’s will come to class and speak to us about his experiences with Sotheby’s and the current state of the Indigenous Art Market. He will also discuss the resale royalty act, cultural heritage export licenses for Indigenous art and the importance of provenance research.)

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Reading:**

**Assignment due: Profile of an Indigenous art producing community 4-5 pages; (15%)**

**Week 14  Indigenising Museums: Repatriation, Activism and the Politics of Curation**

**Wednesday 2 May**

Petronella Vaarzon-Morel & Matt Poll

**Required Reading:**

**Selected Reading:**

**Week 15  Art: Culture, Visibility, and Survival**

**Wednesday 9 May**

Petronella Vaarzon-Morel & Matt Poll

**Required Reading:**

**Selected Reading:**
- Faye Ginsburg and Fred Myers, “A history of Indigenous Futures: Accounting for Indigenous Art
and Media.” *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 30, 2006, pp. 95–110. (2 students to collaborate on presentation)


**Homework Assignment.** Please bring a coloured print out, or alternatively, email me at least two days before class, one or two images of your favourite Indigenous works that you have encountered during the semester. This will fuel our final discussions in class and we will co-curate an exhibition in class and invite NYUS staff to attend.

**Assignment due: Final Research Paper due: Friday 11 May; (35%)**

### Your Instructor

For the past 8 years Matt Poll has worked as the Assistant Curator of the Macleay Museum Indigenous Heritage Collections at the University of Sydney, where he is also the Repatriation Project Officer. Matt’s current masters by research project seeks to further develop methods of understanding the ways contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island artists have used Museum collections, historic records and archival materials in the reconstruction of cultural identities. In particular, he is exploring how visual artists have developed auto-ethnographic methods of engaging with historical information outside of academic frameworks.

Petronella Vaarzon-Morel (M.A., Indiana University) is a sociocultural anthropologist whose interests include Indigenous relations to the land, personhood, identity, visual culture and human-animal relations. Over many years she has conducted ethnographic research with Indigenous groups in central and northern Australia for Aboriginal land and Native Title claims, and for a range of other issues in such areas as environment management, the ‘stolen generation’ and history. In collaboration with Warlpiri she co-authored the book *Warlpiri Women’s Voices*.

Her academic publications include articles and chapters in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes, and she has presented papers at national and international conferences. In 2012 she was the recipient of an Anthropology of Native Title Services (ANTS) Research Fellowship, at the University of Adelaide, and in 2013 a Research Writing Placement at the Centre for Native Title Anthropology, Australian National University. She is currently a Research Associate at the University of Sydney on the project ‘Re-integrating Central Australian community cultural collections’. Her pedagogic background includes a period teaching introductory anthropology at Indiana University, Bloomington.