

Gallery promotes 'other Namatjira'



PROMOTED in the 1950s as 'the second Namatjira', Joe Aliminidjin Rootsey was one of the first Indigenous people in

Queensland to be recognised as a contemporary artist. He is now the subject of a major retrospective exhibition at the Queensland Art Gallery.

Art gallery director Tony Ellwood said Rootsey's contribution to Queensland's art and cultural history had gone largely unrecognised, but the gallery had been researching and collecting his work for nearly two decades.

He said visitors to 'Joe Rootsey, Queensland Aboriginal Painter 1918-63' would 'enjoy up to 80 watercolours and sketches

by Rootsey and his contemporaries that brought to life the intense colours of Queensland's far north'.

"These paintings are windows on to another Australia – Rootsey's own country which is the lands around Barrow Point and Cape Melville National Park, north of Cooktown in Cape York," Mr Ellwood said.

A member of the Amu Wuringu clan, Rootsey's artistic leanings were discovered by chance by medical social worker Joan Innes Reid when he was hospitalised in north Queensland from 1954-56 with tuberculosis.

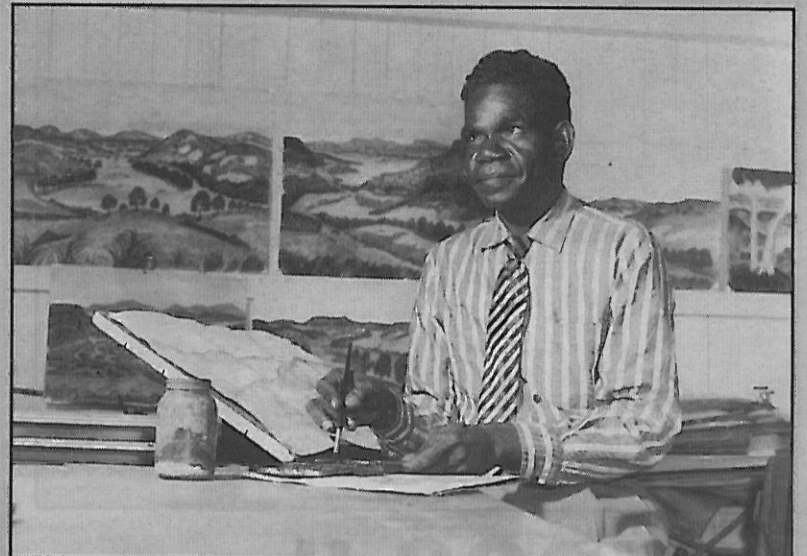
In the book which accompanies the exhibition – the first publication on the artist – a 1957 newspaper clipping shows a smiling Joan Reid surrounded by Rootsey's artwork with the

accompanying headline 'An Aborigine painted these'.

In 1958, Rootsey began classes at Brisbane's Central Technical College, then the leading art school in Queensland, and he is believed to be the first Aboriginal person to be trained at a recognised art school.

His paintings attracted the attention of fellow artists, art authorities and a wide cross-section of the community, but his career and life were cut short when he died from tuberculosis in 1963, at the age of 45.

The exhibition runs until 3 October, and on Wednesday 25 August at 11.30am exhibition curator Bruce McLean will give a tour of the exhibition. For more information visit www.qag.qld.gov.au/rootsey



Joe Rootsey at Brisbane Central Technical College in the late 1950s. Image courtesy Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Brisbane.

Arts breathe life into Wheatbelt

By Perth Correspondent
KEN BOASE



ART, culture and sharing stories have come together in a powerful renaissance of the Nyoongar

communities of the Southern Wheatbelt region of Western Australia.

The Community Arts Network of WA (CANWA) launched the 'Strong Culture, Strong Community' program in Narrogin, south-east of Perth, during a special night of celebration hosted by Kimberley personality Mary G (Mark Bin Bakar).

The launch of the program included the second publication in the *Voices of the Wheatbelt* series, a photographic workshop and exhibition organised by CANWA and involving Nyoongar communities in the towns of Narrogin, Brookton, Wagin and Pingelly.

The *Our Place Our Stories* photo album explored the cultures of the communities through the lens of a camera, showcasing life in the communities in full colour and giving inspiration to many community members.

The program launch also featured a soundscape of the local community, as well as a presentation of Narrogin stories and performances by local youth hip-hop group New Balance and traditional dance by Olman and John Walley.

CANWA Managing Director Pilar Kasat said the event was important for local Nyoongar families and showed the power and importance of sharing culture

through various art forms.

"The highlight of the evening was having so many Noongar people from Narrogin and the surrounding towns of Pingelly, Wagin and Brookton who came together, laughed and shared in such a special night," Ms Kasat said.

"They have shown their support of our Strong Culture Strong Community program and CANWA looks forward to working with the communities of the Southern Wheatbelt for the next three years."

CANWA also helped create a series of cultural seats in a local Narrogin park, involving three boomerang-shaped park benches adorned with art by local members of the Nyoongar and wider communities.

The artworks, book launch and performances all helped in the healing of a troubled community weighed down by a spate of suicides in 2008 amid reports of racial violence in and around Narrogin.

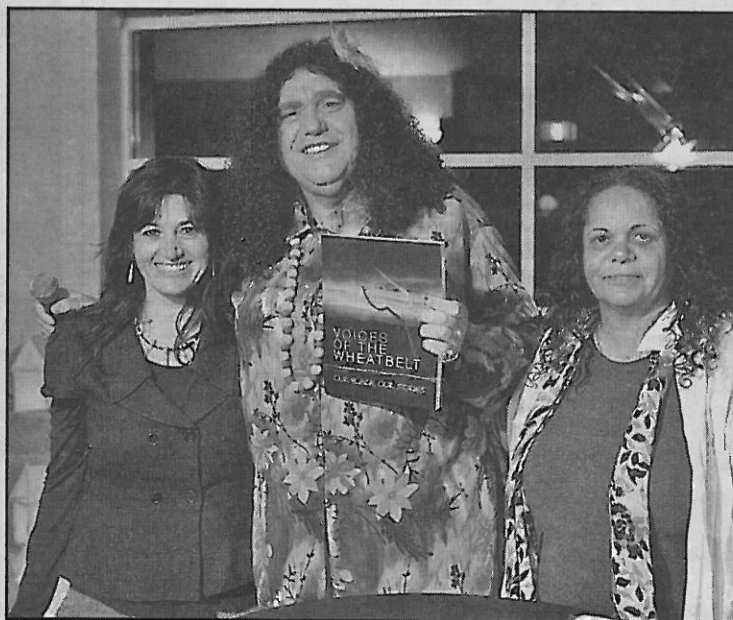
An inquest into the deaths, which was to have started this month, has now been called off by requests from the families reluctant to re-live the anguish of that year.

The latest event has firmly established CANWA as an important presence in the lives of the Nyoongar Wheatbelt communities, and has helped make Nyoongar culture a visible presence in the region.

Narrogin Aboriginal Reference Group Chair Priscilla Kickett said the launch of the Strong Culture Strong Community program had been an enormous boost to the community's morale, and she hoped the program was the beginning of happier times.



Terry Coles, Cleve Williams, Cedric Coles, Verna Mead and Merlene Mead, from Wagin, check out the *Voices of the Wheatbelt* photo exhibition in Narrogin.



CANWA Managing Director Pilar Kasat, left, with Mary G and CANWA Arts and Cultural Manager Geri Hayden in Narrogin.

Students invited to enter



SCHOOL students of all cultural backgrounds from NSW and the ACT are being

encouraged to enter Liverpool Casula Powerhouse's annual Indigenous art awards.

However, the adult category of the art prize is open only to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.

The theme for this year's Mil-Pra Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Aboriginal Exhibition and Art Award is 'Legends of the Dreaming'. Mil-Pra AECG President Trish Leverett said the group had been presenting the exhibition with Casula Powerhouse since 1992.

"It's played an important role in connecting a broad spectrum of Aboriginal artists while providing a space to talk about contemporary issues," she said.

Liverpool City Mayor Wendy Waller said she was proud of the partnership, which promoted contemporary Indigenous art in Western Sydney and beyond.

There are seven award categories, two of which are acquisitive:

- The Mil-Pra AECG Award (\$1000)
- Bruce and Caroll Kendall OAM Memorial Award (\$300)
- Mayor's Choice Award (acquired for the Casula Powerhouse collection)
- Maria Lock Award (acquired for the Casula Powerhouse collection)
- Liverpool Women's Services Award (\$500)
- KARI Award (\$200)
- Student Awards (primary and secondary).

Registration forms can be downloaded from www.liverpool.nsw.gov.au – click on the Casula Powerhouse link. Registrations close at 4.30pm on Monday, 16 August.