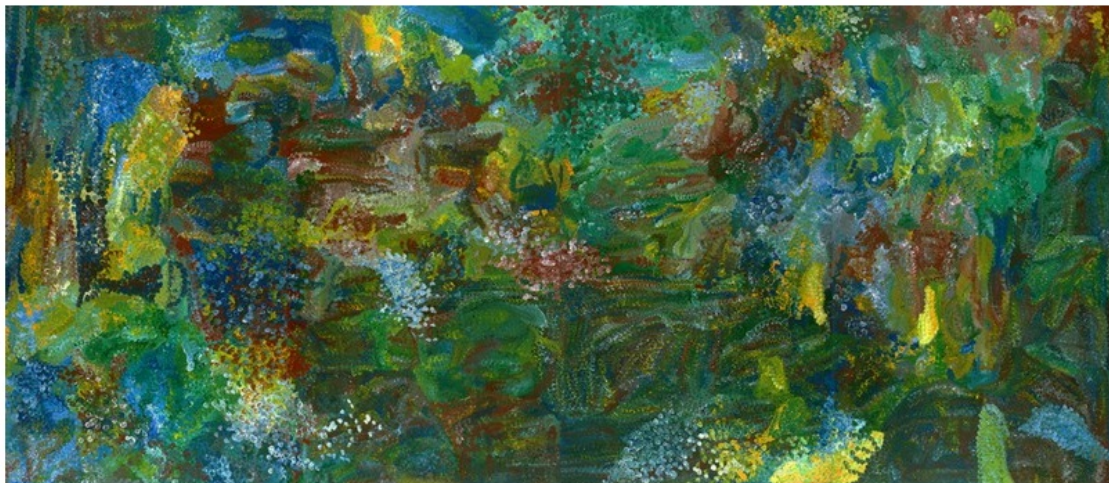


Emily Kame Kngwarreye's *Earth's Creation I* resets the bar for Indigenous Art at Auction

By Jane Raffan, on 17-Nov-2017

Some auctioneers promise to move heaven and earth to guarantee consignments and secure sales. CooeeArt directors Adrian Newstead and Mirri Leven actually travelled through time and space to ensure the sale of Emily Kame Kngwarreye's *Earth's Creation I* at their inaugural MarketPlace auction, held last night in their Paddington pop-up gallery.



Some auctioneers promise to move heaven and earth to guarantee consignments and secure sales. CooeeArt directors Adrian Newstead and Mirri Leven actually travelled through time and space to ensure the sale of Emily Kame Kngwarreye's *Earth's Creation I* at their inaugural MarketPlace auction, held last night in their Paddington pop-up gallery.

And sell it did, for the record-breaking price of \$2.1 million dollars (including BP), establishing a new record for an Australian woman artist (held previously by the same work), and equalling the hammer price of the all-time record for Indigenous art, both set in 2007 before the fallout of the GFC[1].

Postponed from Tuesday 14 November after a slew of technical problems with the Fine Art Bourse (FAB) online auction platform[2], the 16 November event moved from the hallowed glass, brass and marbled upper foyer of Chifley Tower to their upbeat white-walled and art-filled space on bustling Oxford Street, Paddington.

Originally promoted as a cloud-based sale with the hammer falling in Hong Kong, the auction morphed into traditional mode after it became apparent that Tim Goodman—CooeeArt's partner in the sale—couldn't guarantee that the technical problems that befell the original cloud-based FAB sale two nights earlier would not reoccur.

In the cloud scenario, Goodman's role carried the rather futuristic sounding mantle of 'Caller' — relaying bids received across the ether, and recording those taken in the room on the FAB auction system. At the original event his calling was apologetic, with the sale halted after lot 1, when it became clear things were awry. Last night he reverted to seasoned Auctioneer, and keyboard and internet page refreshes gave way to humble paper and wood: the auctioneer's book and gavel.

Goodman wielded the hammer for around two and half hours, coaxing bids from the room of approximately 40 people and from an array of phones, no doubt including bidders who had showed up at the first outing, where there were around 60 people in attendance. The internet wasn't rejected altogether (and who in their right mind would these days?), with the sale benefitting from a last-minute listing through *Invaluable.com*, which drew another 26 bidders from amongst those registered, two of whom were active on a quarter of the sale's 84 lots[3].

The sale of the Emily (Lot 54 🎯) (the only lot not open to bidding online) was greeted by ecstatic applause, and no doubt relief, which triggered a wave of mild hysteria throughout the crowd, many of whom were solely there to witness the occasion. A couple of lots later, Goodman had to quell the noisy rabble with the admonishment, "this is a serious auction, not a social event!"

Goodman is recorded as being thrilled at the result, despite the setbacks for FAB: "This has been an extraordinary journey ... The brokering of this stunning painting with my colleagues at Cooee has been one of the highlights of my forty-year career in the auction industry." [4]

The FAB CooeeArt MarketPlace sale was heralded as a disruptor to the traditional auction model [5], in particular with regards to the buyer's premium, which has skyrocketed to 20% plus on the hammer price through most auctions holding in-room sales. Clearly, on a \$2 million-dollar painting the difference between a 5% and 20% buyer premium is a significant factor when considering bidding limits.

The buyer, Tim Olsen, acquired the work for a client. Having recently opened a gallery in New York, it is unclear where the client resides. Newstead isn't fazed whether it's Australia or the US, or anywhere else for that matter. "It has been granted an export permit and we are delighted that it will go to a place where it can be appreciated by Australian and international audiences and enhance the standing and reputation of the entire Aboriginal arts, community and culture." [6]

The top five works after the Emily included Yannima Tommy Watson's, *Wipu*, 2015 (Lot 72 🎯), which sold on the night for \$63,000 (est. \$75-100K); Queenie McKenzie, *Dreaming Places - Gidja Country*, 1996 (Lot 39 🎯), which made \$52,000 on referral (est. \$60-90K), along with Rover Thomas Julama's, *41 to 42 Well*, 1996 (Lot 34 🎯), which also sold on referral for \$22,000 (est. \$25-35K). Dorothy Napangardi's, *Salt on Mina Mina*, 2008 (Lot 22 🎯) went for \$20,000 as an after-sale (est. \$30-40K), while Emily Kame Kngwarreye's *Sacred Grasses*, 1994 (Lot 2 🎯), was amongst the most hotly contested works on the night, selling for \$17,000 against its estimate of \$10-15,000.

Big spenders aside (Olsen was the buyer of other lots, including 51, 70 and 73, as well as a number of high valued referrals), Adrian Newstead is keen to point out that the differences in the CooeeArt MarketPlace model are all about attracting new buyers to the Aboriginal art market. "The people I started selling Aboriginal art to 40 years ago were in their 30s, 40s and 50s when they started collecting. They're now in their 70s and 80s and are selling. If the Aboriginal art industry is going to continue to grow and prosper and provide jobs for Aboriginal people, we need to find new 30 somethings that get excited about it, and it's worth getting excited about it. It's the most diverse and attractive art being produced in Australia today." [7]

Another impost on buyers is the Resale Royalty, which is levied at 5% of the hammer on pertinent works (applied to the commercial resale and second transfer of ownership of works bought from 9 June 2010). The offshore status of FAB sales removes this impediment, as there is no reciprocal legislation in Hong Kong (it exists in Europe and elsewhere). That said, in a policy move designed to contribute to the welfare of the Aboriginal arts communities represented in the sale, despite misgivings about the effectiveness of the legislation, CooeeArt decided to make it a condition of consignment that vendors pay the royalty, which was applicable on about ten works in the sale, as most works were fresh to the market in line with consignment policy.

Along with payment of the Resale Royalty to the artists, the group of APY Lands works (lots 44-49, and 78-84) was offered without reserve to raise funds for the Western Desert Dialysis Appeal project, the Purple House, which acts to ease the dialysis crisis in remote communities. This core generated over \$30,000 for the cause, and had the added benefit of introducing the work of a number of emerging artists to the secondary market.

The multi-vendor auction featured works from twenty private collections, amongst them a core of nineteen works from Jacquie McPhee (lots 8-16, and 55-64), illustrated in the WA collector's recently published book, *The Greatest Passion of All*. The collection sold 63% on the night (and all but three works have cleared today), with a small work by the highly sought-after Daniel Walbidi performing best. *Kirriwiiri*, 2008 (Lot 8 🎯) made \$10,000 (est. \$7-9K), while a large work by Walbidi, *All the Jila*, 2006 (Lot 12 🎯), reached \$15,000; a bargain against its estimate of \$18-25K. Freddie Timm's elegant *Moat Creek Yard*, 2007 (Lot 55 🎯), equalled the best price from this core, making

its upper end estimate of \$15,000.

Outbid on a Walbidi work from the McPhee collection, APY Lands aficionado collector Patrick Corrigan snapped up a good-sized work from the Purple House group by Jimmy Baker (Lot 45 🎯) for \$3,500 (est. \$6-10K). The best price achieved amongst this core was for Maringka Baker's stylish *Pukara*, 2007 (Lot 46 🎯), which made \$4,000 (est. \$8-12K).

Most works from amongst the charity lots sold under the low-end estimate (7 from 13), and those that performed best were highly decorative and affordable entrée works, such as Mona Shepherd Mitakki's *Husband and Wife Story*, 2011, (Lot 49 🎯), which made \$1,700 against its estimate of \$800-1,200. Art dealer Adam Knight came rushing into the room last minute due to a delayed flight, and managed to clear up the tail end, buying four lots (78, 79, 81 and 83).

It appears most bidders on the Purple House charity lots were after works they wanted, rather than wanting to support the charity per se. And this was true of the sale as a whole, which featured an array of buyers from across the spectrum: collectors, dealers, art consultants and domestic buyers all responded to the appeal of individual works. In the last category, Jim Elliott, Arkie Whiteley's widower, bought a small wandjina bark (Lot 36 🎯) for \$1,900.

The sale cleared 68% by lot on the night, and a rush of after-sales delivered final stats of 87% by lot. With four significant works amongst the accepted referrals, the sale tally climbed to \$2,725,800, including a Buyer Premium of 5%, which represents a clearance rate by value of 72%.

New secondary market records were set for 19 individual artists including Emily Kngwarrye, the East Kimberly painters Patrick Mung Mung and Mabel Juli, and the highly regarded 1980s Tiwi carver Marie Celine Porkilani, who was a contemporary of Kitty Kantilla.

Goodman has commented that the sale of the Emily "will go a long way to breathing life back into the Aboriginal art market." [8] While this remains to be seen, Newstead notes that the MarketPlace sale generated a lot of goodwill from both vendors and buyers (if not from competitors, as Goodman has suggested [9]), and will become a feature on the season's calendar. If the affectionate jocularly and warmth evident in the room was anything to go by, the CoeeeArt MarketPlace sales will be both serious auctions and social events.

Top Ten prices (aside from *Earth's Creation I*):

Lot 72 - Yannima Tommy Watson, *Wipu*, 2015, \$63,000 (est. \$75-100K)

Lot 39 - Queenie McKenzie, *Dreaming Places - Gidja Country*, 1996, \$52,000 after-sale (est. \$60-90K)

Lot 34 - Rover Thomas Julama, *41 to 42 Well*, 1996, \$22,000 after-sale (est. \$25-35K)

Lot 22 - Dorothy Napangardi, *Salt on Mina Mina*, 2008, \$20,000 after-sale (est. \$30-40K)

Lot 02 - Emily Kame Kngwarreye, *Sacred Grasses*, 1994, \$17,000 (est. \$10-15K)

Lot 74 - Rover Julama Thomas, *'Bubba' Dog Dreaming*, 1996, \$17,000 (\$25-35K)

Lot 33 - Bobby West Tjupurrula, *Tingari Cycle*, 2002, \$15,500 (est. \$15-18K)

Lot 55 - Freddie Timms, *Moat Creek Yard*, 2007, \$15,000 (est. \$13-15K)

Lot 12 - Daniel Walbidi, *All the Jila*, 2006, \$15,000 (est. \$18-25K)

Lot 71 - Gloria Petyarre, *Bush Medicine Leaves*, 2002, \$15,000 (est. \$15-18K)

Lot 04 - Freddie Timms, \$14,000 (est. \$12-15K)

Lot 18 - *Gope Board*, Papuan Gulf, PNG, \$14,000 (est. \$5-7K)

Lot 40 - Patrick Mung Mung, *Purnululu*, 2007, \$14,000 (est. \$15-22K)

Lot 06 - Trevor Nickolls, *Spirit '98*, 1998, \$12,000 after-sale (est. \$14-18K)

Lot 23 - Owen Yalandja, *Yawk Yawk Spirits*, 2014, \$12,000 (est. \$12-15K)

Lot 50 - Kitty Kantilla, Parlina Jilamara (Old Designs), 1996, \$12,000 (est. \$15-18K)

Lot 07 - Jan Billycan, Kirriwirri, 2005, \$11,500 (est. \$10-14K)

Major Unsold Lots

Lot 25 - Minnie Pwerle, *Awelye Atnwengerrp*, 2004, \$25-35,000

Lot 26 - Bill Whiskey Tjapaltjarri, *Rockholes Near Olgas*, 2008, \$45-55,000

Lot 27 - Emily Kame Kngwarreye, *Wild Flowers*, 1995, \$90-130,000

Lot 30 - Naata Nungurrayi, *Marrapinti*, 2010, \$30-40,000

Lot 31 - Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, *Mount Wedge*, 1985, \$90-120,000

Lot 52 - Yannima Tommy Watson, *Pikarli*, 2008, \$45-55,000

Lot 57 - Naata Nungurrayi, *Untitled*, 2009, \$22-26,000

Lot 66 - Nyurapayia Nampitjinpa (Mrs Bennet), *Untitled*, 2011, \$90-120,000

Lot 75 - Jack Dale Mungenen, *Gulwarmedan*, 2008, \$35-45,000

[1] Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri's, *Warlugulong*, 1977, sold in 2007 for \$2.4 Million dollars, including a Buyer Premium of 20% on hammer. Emily Kame Kngwarreye's, *Earth's Creation I*, 1995, sold for \$2.1 million, including a Buyer Premium of 5%.

[2] Andrew Taylor, SMH, 16 November 2017, <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/auctioneer-cries-foul-as-computer-problems-crash-multimillion-dollar-art-sale-20171115-gzm96j.html>

[3] After the FAB auction crash, it was reported that the sale had registered bidders from at least ten international countries. Sam Buckingham-Jones, *The Australian*, 14 November 2017, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/emily-kame-kngwarreye-sale-postponed-after-auction-meltdown/news-story/498e55b57d0598ddca267316fdd85edc>

[4] SBS, 17 November 2017, <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2017/11/17/aboriginal-art-21m-auction-breaks-record>

[5] Andrew Burke, *Financial Review*, 3 November 2017, <http://www.afr.com/lifestyle/arts-and-entertainment/art/fine-art-bourse-aims-to-shake-up-art-industry-with-lowcost-auctions-20171103-gze4ko>

[6] *National Indigenous Times*, 15 November 2017, <https://nit.com.au/masterpiece-breaks-record/>

[7] Claudianna Blanco, *NITV News*, 14 November 2017, <http://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/nitv-news/explainer/who-really-benefits-multi-million-dollar-aboriginal-art-trade>

[8] SBS, Op.cit.

[9] Taylor, Op.cit.

Sale Referenced: Aboriginal & Oceanic Works of Art, CooeArt MarketPlace , Sydney, 16/11/2017

About The Author

Jane Raffan runs ArtiFacts, an art services consultancy based in Sydney. Jane is an accredited valuer for the Australian government's highly vetted Cultural Gifts Program, and Vice President of the Auctioneers & Valuers Association of Australia. Jane's experience spans more 20 years working in public and commercial art sectors, initially with the AGNSW, and then over twelve years in the fine art auction industry. Her consultancy focuses on collection management, advisory services and valuations. She is the author of *Power + Colour: New Painting from the Corrigan Collection of Aboriginal Art*. www.artifacts.net.au.

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