MEDIA RELEASE

Paddy Bedford retrospective opens at UQ Art Museum

‘I find that I like his work more than any other Aboriginal painter I can think of.’ Sebastian Smee, art critic for The Australian


Lightning Creek 2005
ochres and pigment with acrylic binder on composition board
80 x 100 cm
Private collection
© The Estate of Mr P Bedford
Image courtesy Jirrawun Arts, Kununurra

The first major solo exhibition of one of Australia’s most respected artists, Paddy Bedford, opens at The University of Queensland Art Museum on Friday 16 November 2007. The exhibition is organised and toured by the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Sydney.

‘Mr Bedford is recognised and admired for his remarkably sparse paintings of country, Dreaming stories, and the dark aspects of Kimberley history – paintings which resonate with gentle sophistication in one instance, and playful colour in another,’ said UQ Art Museum director Nick Mitzevich.

‘We recognise this artist as a senior Gija lawman who touched the art world for a mere eight years – albeit with a depth of facility and knowledge built on a lifetime of ceremony – whose paintings speak to us in a profound way,’ he said.

Demonstrating Bedford’s powerful command of painting, the exhibition covers the span of his practice, tracing the development of his motifs and techniques over the eight years of his career.

Paddy Bedford was a Gija elder from the Warmun region of the north east Kimberley and was born around 1922 on Bedford Downs Station. The artist passed away in Kununurra in July 2007. As a senior law man, he had been involved in painting as part of ceremony all his life, although he only began painting for exhibition in 1998, at the age of 76, after fellow artist Freddie Timms set up the Jirrawun Aboriginal Art group at Rugun (Crocodile Hole).

Despite his relatively brief career, Bedford’s artistic output was remarkably prolific and consistently innovative, which is evident in his absolute facility with the medium and his subject matter. He was one of only eight Indigenous Australian artists to have been selected to create a site-specific work for the Musée du Quai Branley in Paris and is represented in a number of major Australian and international collections.

Bedford’s body of work is arguably one of the most concentrated and compelling in contemporary Australian painting. He experimented freely with colour, form and pictorial space in his paintings, ranging from his early, densely patterned panels of red, yellow and black ochres, to his recent, expansive canvases in black and white, interspersed by vivid gouaches on paper.

Bedford’s paintings depict the bones of the landscape in which he spent a lifetime. They combine important family dreamings, such as emu, turkey and cockatoo, with country he travelled in his days mustering cattle: from hills, creeks, caves and waterholes, to roads, homesteads and stock camps. The paintings often act as visual accounts of oral histories, relating the interaction of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Kimberley. These histories are conveyed in a beautifully austere and minimal visual language, the elegance of which often masks turbulent or violent events.

Bedford continued and developed the distinctive ‘Turkey Creek’ or ‘East Kimberley’ style of painting. His expanses of plain ochre ringed by white dots, sparse lines and bold, rounded shapes recall the minimal approach of artists such as Rover Thomas, Queenie McKenzie and Jack Britten.

A major publication accompanies the exhibition, featuring essays by art historian Michiel Dolk and Aboriginal academic and commentator Marcia Langton. It includes the key stories for
Bedford’s paintings as recounted by the artist himself, a Gija glossary, information detailing the sites in Bedford’s work by Kimberley linguist Frances Kofod, and an index of Bedford’s work since 1998.

A spoken-word audio guide, sponsored by Acoustiguide, provides visitors with additional insights into the artist’s work. It includes the late artist telling some of the Dreaming stories that are depicted in his paintings.

[ENDS]

**Exhibition dates:** 17 November – 2 March 2007  
**Venue:** UQ Art Museum, University Drive, St Lucia  
**Hours:** 10.00 am – 4.00 pm, Tuesday to Sunday  
**Parking:** Free parking on weekends

**MEDIA CONTACT:** Peter Liddy  
Operations Manager  
The University of Queensland Art Museum  
Phone: 07 3365 3046  
Email: p.liddy@uq.edu.au

This exhibition is supported by the Contemporary Touring Initiative through Visions of Australia, an Australian Government program and the Visual Arts and Crafts Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments.

**Major Sponsor**

**Audio guide sponsor**

The Museum of Contemporary Art is assisted by the NSW Government through ARTS NSW and by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and the Visual Arts and Crafts Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments.