NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

The 1st General Meeting of the Society for 1988 will be held in:

THE CONSERVATION CENTRE, 120 WAKEFIELD STREET, ADELAIDE

ON

MONDAY 28TH MARCH 1988 AT 8.00 PM.

AGENDA

1. Apologies:
2. Minutes of previous General Meeting:
   Minutes of the previous General Meeting, held in the Conservation Centre, 120 Wakefield Street Adelaide on 26th October 1987, having been circulated in this journal, to be confirmed.
3. Papers and Journals:
   Papers and journals received from other societies and organisations, since the last general meeting, will be tabled at this meeting.
4. Speaker:
   Ms. Dean Fergie, Research Fellow, S.A. Museum will address the Society. The subject of her address will be:
   "On the Face of It: The Cultural Construction of Gender in Contemporary Australia."
5. Supper will be served at the close of the meeting.

R. Allison
Hon. Secretary
120 Wakefield Street
ADELAIDE SA 5000

NB.
Please return envelopes to Council members where possible, for reuse.
Yuendumu: Paintings out of the Desert

Christopher Anderson
Curator of Social Anthropology
South Australian Museum

Modern acrylic painting from central Australia, perhaps more than any other art, is the result of the interaction of Aboriginal people with white Australian society. This is not to say that with it there is any process of cultural convergence or worse, a bastardisation of cultural tradition. Rather, to the contrary, acrylic art reflects the strength of an on-going, unique and dynamic worldview, and at the same time, Aboriginal willingness to participate in and interact with the dominant system in which they now live.

The Aboriginal people of Central Australia have on several occasions over the last fifty years depicted aspects of their cultural and artistic heritage via introduced media. Anthropologists from the South Australian Museum collected, from the late 1920s onwards, thousands of crayon drawings from Aborigines in desert communities. In most cases they simply provided the materials and asked people to draw whatever they liked and the result was generally depictions of mythic actions, sites and country, using the traditional symbolic elements:
concentric circles, lines and dots. The Hermannsburg watercolour school is another example. Here we have the same content (sites and traditionally relevant bits of landscape), but this time presented utilising the European notion of perspective.

My point in mentioning these cases is to demonstrate that acrylic art is in one sense merely a new form of the same process which has been occurring since first contact.

As is well-known now, acrylic painting proper began in 1971 at Papunya, an Aboriginal settlement 250km northwest of Alice Springs. A young school teacher, Geoff Bardon, introduced some of the older men to European art materials and encouraged them to paint traditional motifs based on their totemic and land affiliations. Since the early 1980s acrylic painting has taken off in several other central Australian communities, most notably Yuendumu, Mt Allen and Balgo.

Acrylic paintings take their form and inspiration from ceremonial body painting and ground design. The ground designs are elaborately sculpted forms made of sand, coloured ochres, blood, hair, and sticks. In acrylic painting, as in body and ground
painting, a small number of symbols, including concentric circles, curved and straight lines and dots, have multiple meanings depending on the context. Particular configurations represent segments of myths or 'Dreamings' to which a particular person or group has rights. These stories and their depictions always refer to sites where mythic activity is believed to have occurred. The paintings are, in effect, sacred designs created for secular viewing. They are at the same time, both 'traditional' and, yet created for commercial use.

An exhibition entitled 'Yuendumu: Paintings out of the Desert' opens on 9th March at the South Australian Museum. The exhibition is a joint project between the Museum and the Yuendumu Aboriginal community through its Warlukurlangu Artists Association. Yuendumu is 300 km northwest of Alice Springs and is home for some 1000 Warlpiri and Anmatyerre people.

Following the success of their first attempts at transferring traditional body and ground designs to small canvas boards in the early 1980s, Yuendumu people, both men and women, began to paint in larger format and on stretched canvases. Their works found immediate success on the Australian art market. In 1985, they
formed Warlukurlangu Aboriginal Artists Association to handle the purchasing of materials, selling of paintings and organization of exhibitions. Since then, they have had exhibitions in all major cities of Australia, and their works are represented in public institutions such as the Australian National Gallery, the National Gallery of Victoria, the Australian Museum, the Art Gallery of South Australia and the South Australian Museum, as well as in major private collections. Yuendumu paintings are also now in several European and American collections and will be heavily represented in 'Dreamings: The art of Aboriginal Australia', the major exhibition mounted by the SA Museum to tour the US in 1988-89.

Yuendumu painters in the past few years have felt limited by the standard art gallery presentation of their works and have wanted to depict other aspects of the worldview to which the paintings refer. Work underway by the South Australian Museum at Yuendumu led Warlukurlangu to request that the Museum undertake a joint exhibition with them in Adelaide. The painters explicitly see the exhibition and related activities as being like the paintings: a way of demonstrating to non-Aboriginal people their relationships with the land and with each other and to teach others, something of the way they see the world. The Museum was seen as
an appropriate venue because of its facilities and because of its relationship with Yuendumu and its long history of involvement with the community and area. Francoise Dussart, from the Australian National University in Canberra, and myself were asked to assist with the exhibition due to our previous work as anthropologists at Yuendumu and because of our relationships with people there. David Kerr, also from the SA Museum, was asked to join the production team as designer for the exhibition.

The exhibition revolves around six large (2 metres square) paintings depicting Warlpiri sites and Dreaming events in the vicinity of Yuendumu. The paintings were commissioned and executed by over 30 painters at Yuendumu in November 1987. All aspects of production were documented by use of video, still photography and sound tapes. Stories relating to the paintings were collected and sites were visited to record other relevant cultural information. In the presentation of the paintings this material is used along with maps, and diagrams and artefacts from the Museum's collection in order to explicate the paintings (and the form in general) on several different levels. These include: as examples of 'high culture' aspects of Aboriginal life, and as representations of a network of sites, myths and actual people
(how landscape, myth and social reality merge in the paintings).

We also attempt to show something of the actual production of the paintings themselves and the social and political nature of this production. Warlukurlangu painters will participate in the opening of the exhibition and in activities related to it during the Festival, including Artist's Week.