

My name is Ali Cobby Eckermann. I am currently employed as the Art Centre Coordinator at Titjikala, in Central Australia. I am a Yankunytjatjara woman, and have been involved in the arts in Central and South Australia for 10 years.

I wish to share an incident that I witnessed yesterday in Alice Springs.

While having conversations with an art retail supplier in Alice Springs I noticed a young man shopping for canvas. I observed that he was carrying a roll of canvas, and presumed this was a piece of art. My conversation was halted as the retailer served the customer.

As he was making his purchases at the counter he rolled the artwork out on the floor. He wanted to discuss the quality of the paint and technique with the retailer. It was a large artwork, approx 1 x 1.5 metre. The painting was striking, and I recognised the work immediately by a female Warlpiri artist. This artist had been successful in winning one of the categories in the 2006 Telstra MAGNT Awards, so I had seen images of her works at that time.

This young man showed documentation of the works, 5-6 handwritten A4 sheets of paper. He chatted away and seemed to brag that he had bought the painting for \$150. I was so shocked! He said that he couldn't believe it, that he thought she would want about \$500 but only asked for \$150. I couldn't help myself – I told him he should be ashamed of himself, and suggested the artist was probably asking for \$1,500. He quickly refuted my comment, his defence that she only asked for \$150. We asked how long he thought it would take her to paint that large canvas. He replied about 1 week. I asked if he would work a weekly wage of \$150. He left the shop.

I have seen this young man before, in the process of discussing artworks for potential purchase, with other artists. His father owns a second hand clothes shop in Alice Springs, and I have observed these discussions whilst browsing through the store.

This is just one example of how obvious, often and open sad and shonky dealings with Aboriginal artists occur in Alice Springs. Many businesses have a 'side line'

- befriending poorly educated people, providing them with a basic service but in a way to making them feel privileged and special,
- maintaining the basic fundamentals of 'friendship' with traditional Aboriginal people who are not used to relationships outside their family and kinship groups,
- using these pretences to purchase artworks at very meagre and reduced prices. This is not about caring concerns for Aboriginal people, but a bartering enterprise to obtain artworks by renowned artists at amazing ridiculous and shocking prices. This is reinforced by the fact that if you are NOT a well known artist you do not receive this treatment.

It is well known in town by most sections of the community that artists are offered accommodation, plus food, to stay in motels free of charge – for paintings. Many motels have close connections with a prime gallery interstate (or in one case New Zealand). It is SO common that these art purchasers audibly justify their behaviour, that without them the Aboriginal people have nothing. Their justification of their

actions is blatant, and sadly, in their view, they are doing nothing wrong. This practice is so entrenched in Alice Springs that peer and social gatherings occur at coffee shops, where again conversations are easily overheard bragging of the latest acquisition of 'bargain prices' paid for artworks by well known Aboriginal artists.