

EXPLOITATION OF ABORIGINAL ARTISTS IN ALICE SPRINGS TOWN CAMPS 2006.

Incidents of unethical dealings between independent operators and Aboriginal artists.

Interstate Dealers Trespassing on Aboriginal Town Camp Land.

The new Tangentyere Artists art centre began in late 2005 to service the artists living in Alice Springs town camps by providing an Aboriginal owned good practice art program. On many occasions throughout 2005/2006 it has been brought to our attention that independent interstate operators are trespassing on town camp land without permits to take advantage of independent Aboriginal artists. Before Tangentyere Artists began, town camp artists were aligned with other art centres such as Jukurrpa Arts, Warumpi Arts and Sand Over Arts, that have recently closed down, thus leaving artists open to unscrupulous dealers. Many artists have also worked privately or were previously associated with remote community art centres but have moved to Alice Springs for family or health matters. The artists currently aligned with Tangentyere and therefore supported through an ethical practice have talked of the “quick paintings that man wants us to do”. The artists often don’t know the names of these ‘fly in / fly out’ dealers, but are supplied with very poor quality canvas, paints and brushes, are paid a small amount of money or other supplies to have the canvas finished usually within half a day. Having been from camp to camp, these dealers often leave town within 24 – 48 hours of arriving, therefore making it very difficult to approach them and discuss their operating practice.

Tangentyere Art Centre Coordinator denied access to Backyard Operation.

In March this year I was invited by an interstate art supplier to visit (what he thought was another) Aboriginal art centre in Alice Springs, but in fact it was a back yard dealer operating behind the sign of another (non-existent) business name. Once arriving to find nothing but a high barbed wire fence and locked gate in front of the premises that appeared to look non-operational, we were about to leave before someone came to the gate. My companion, the interstate art consultant went to the gate and was greeted in a friendly manner for his pre-arranged appointment. However, once he indicated that he had the Tangentyere Art Centre Coordinator with him, the body language and gestures of the dealer made it very clear that they did not want me to come in, to which I didn’t. A later discussion with our consultant exposed that there were 12-15 artists sitting down painting inside the building, being fed lunch, watching television, and no information to who the artists were but knowledge of the work regularly traveling to Sydney and Melbourne galleries.

Artists represented by unethical dealers.

In June this year one of our long-standing artists voiced some concerns she was having with a private dealer she was also painting with. The man who offered a hotel room for

her to stay and paint in long-term had made a verbal arrangement with the artist that once the paintings she produced were sold he would retain 50% of the sale price and the artist would receive the other 50%, less the accommodation costs. At the time this seemed very attractive to the artist as she had a safe and comfortable place to stay and was away from the drinkers in her home camp. Once I did the sums with artist and told her at \$100per night she will owe the dealer (or hotel) \$700 a week, she quickly realised that she was in a lose/lose situation. The artist withdrew her arrangement from the dealer but forfeited all the paintings she had done for him.

Liesl Rockchild
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Tangentyere Artists