

Chapter 3

The benefits of Indigenous art

3.1 The Indigenous visual arts and craft sector provides very significant economic, social and cultural benefits.¹ These benefits extend to Indigenous individuals and communities, and the wider Australian and international community.

3.2 Indigenous art has been said to be 'Australia's greatest cultural gift to the world' and 'our most profound, significant and important cultural export'.² The cultural benefits of the sector have been described as 'immeasurable'.³ Indigenous cultural activities have been described as 'unequivocally the one area of its [Australian Government] greatest success'.⁴

3.3 The Myer Report, commenting on the benefits, noted that:

Just as the sector as a whole provides enormous benefits, cultural, social and economic to the community, so too are Indigenous artists able to bring these advantages both to their immediate communities, and to Australian society in general.⁵

3.4 The multi-faceted and often unquantifiable nature of many of these benefits was highlighted in evidence:

Pride, self esteem, maintenance of culture, transmission of culture, inter-generational learning, meaningful activity, purposeful life, creative achievement, recognition from peers; recognition from national and international art media, provision of much of our nation's 'corporate identity'; provision of 'Australia's greatest cultural export' and other social and spiritual benefit are difficult to quantify. But they should not be discounted even in the most rational market economies. This is an industry that cannot and should not simply be measured in statistical economic data.⁶

1 Professor Howard Morphy, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, pp 69–71; Ms Hetti Perkins, Senior Curator, ATSI Art, NGA, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 52; Mr John Oster, Executive Officer, Desart, *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2007, p. 21.

2 Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator Amanda Vanstone; Peter Garrett MP, quoted in Matt Price, 'Blacks' art "our greatest cultural gift"', *The Australian*, 29 November 2005.

3 ANKAAA, *Submission 63*, p. 10.

4 Ms Marion Scrymgour, NT Minister for Arts and Museums, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2007, p. 4.

5 Myer Report, p. 52.

6 Ms Christine Godden, *Submission 41*, p. 2.

Economic benefits

3.5 The economic benefits of the sector are substantial although difficult to quantify mainly due to the lack of comprehensive data. Economic benefits accrue to the nation, the individual artists and their communities, the arts industry and related business sectors.

3.6 As outlined in chapter two, Professor Altman estimated in 2002 that the national value of Indigenous visual arts sales was between \$100 million and \$300 million.⁷ More recent estimates place the value of the sector at \$400–\$500 million.⁸

3.7 The Northern Territory and the states benefit economically from the sector. In the Northern Territory (NT) the sector has been described as being of 'crucial importance'.⁹ The NT government stated that it is difficult to estimate the economic benefits of the sector to the Territory with 'a mass of different statistics on sales figures ranging from \$6.9m–\$12 million in direct sales from NT art centres to a gross sales figure of \$50 million'.¹⁰ The NT government noted however that one organisation recently estimated that art centres and related retailing of Indigenous art and craft in central Australia equals or exceeds the value of the local pastoral industry.¹¹

3.8 A range of data gives some indication of the importance of the sector in the Northern Territory:

- One study in 2002 estimated that arts and craft centres in 2002 generated \$10 million of sales annually.
- Northern Territory tourism statistics estimated that in 2000-01, \$28 million was spent by visitors to the NT on Aboriginal art. A six year trend analysis suggested that this figure is below sales in 1995-96 and that expenditure on Aboriginal art peaked in 1997-98 at approximately \$50 million.
- The ABS in its 1999-2000 Commercial Art Galleries Australia survey estimated that \$11 million worth of art was sold retail in the NT by 41 outlets, including Aboriginal art centres. While a figure on Aboriginal art was not provided it was stated that almost all of this came from Aboriginal art sales.

7 Jon Altman, *Developing an Indigenous Arts Strategy for the Northern Territory: Issues Paper for Consultations*, 2003, p. 9 (hereafter 'Developing an Indigenous Art Strategy'). See also Australia Council, *Submission 38*, p. 16.

8 NT Government, *Submission 57*, p. 9; Aranda Aboriginal Art, *Submission 83*, p. 2.

9 Ms Marion Scrymgour, NT Minister for Arts and Museums, *Committee Hansard* 20 February 2007, p. 2.

10 NT Government, *Submission 57*, pp 9–10.

11 NT Government, *Submission 57*, p. 10.

- In 2002 ANKAAA surveyed 18 of its member art centres (almost all in the NT) and estimated that in 2001-02 their gross estimated turnover was \$6.23 million.¹²

3.9 In Victoria, Arts Victoria stated that the sector is 'very active...and is exhibiting strong potential for growth'.¹³

3.10 Data indicate that investment in arts infrastructure generates positive financial returns to artists. Professor Altman has calculated the ratio of artists' incomes generated by each dollar of operational subsidy to arts centres and found that the returns to artists ranges from 1:1.5 to 1:4.3.¹⁴ Altman noted that 'while the ratios are highly variable, they all indicate that a positive return is generated from every dollar of operational support'.¹⁵ Professor Altman also noted that Indigenous artists reinvest in their arts centres at the rate of 40 per cent (based on 40 per cent sales commission).¹⁶ Altman pointed out:

This is a statistic that is often overlooked in arguments about public investment and Indigenous dependency and debunks some of the long-standing myths – community-controlled arts centres are in fact underwritten by a public/private funding mix.¹⁷

3.11 There are also a number of indirect or spin-off benefits of the Indigenous arts sector. These include domestic and inbound tourism, as well as less recognised natural and cultural resource management activities that generate biodiversity benefits.

3.12 In the Northern Territory, in 2001-02 the Travel Monitor survey indicated that 13 per cent of interstate visitors and 27 per cent of international visitors to the NT came 'to experience real Aboriginal culture'. Some 58 per cent of international and 48 per cent of interstate visitors included Aboriginal art or cultural activities as part of their Territory visit. This translated into an estimated \$38 million expenditure on Aboriginal art and \$31 million on cultural tours.¹⁸

3.13 In Queensland, cultural tourism also plays an important role. In terms of domestic cultural tourism, data show that in 2004, the state recorded 47 000 visitors to Aboriginal art, craft and cultural displays.¹⁹

12 *Developing an Indigenous Arts Strategy*, p. 9.

13 Arts Victoria, *Submission 70*, p. 3.

14 *Developing an Indigenous Arts Strategy*, p. 12.

15 *Developing an Indigenous Arts Strategy*, p. 12.

16 Art centres operate on an average commission rate of 30-40 per cent. See Desart, *Submission 49*, p. 7.

17 *Developing an Indigenous Arts Strategy*, pp 12–13.

18 *Developing an Indigenous Arts Strategy*, p. 13.

19 Queensland Government, *Submission 58*, p. 7.

3.14 There are additional unrecognised benefits associated with contemporary arts practice where this is undertaken by Indigenous people in remote areas. The use of natural resources by artists is itself positive, because it provides incentive for Indigenous people to use their ecological knowledge to manage these resources sustainably. There are other environmental spin-offs generated by people residing on their country – for example, the maintenance of customary fire regimes that reduce fires that destroy raw material inputs to the arts.²⁰

3.15 Indigenous people themselves benefit financially from the sale of their arts and craft. However submissions noted that the success of Indigenous art does not necessarily translate into major economic benefits or better living standards for many Indigenous artists.²¹ The Northern Territory government noted that 'Aboriginal artists and craftspeople on the ground earn a small part of the overall "take", despite the fact they are the obvious lynchpin of the industry'.²²

3.16 In terms of economic benefits, in 1987-88 it was estimated that 2504 Indigenous artists in the Northern Territory earned \$3.6 million, an average of \$1437 per artist. Data provided by ANKAAA for 2001-02 indicates that an estimated 2650 artists in its region earned \$3.68 million, an average of \$1388 per artist. Professor Altman noted that this figure is 'remarkably similar' to the figure for 1987 - 88, despite the CPI increasing by 45 per cent over the same time period.²³

3.17 Economic benefits also arise from the income stream generated into communities that would otherwise rely on CDEP and welfare payments.

3.18 Not only do individual artists derive an income through selling their art, other community members also benefit. Especially in remote areas, the concept of sharing is significant. Artists share their cash income with family members, as well as consumer goods they have purchased with their arts income, such as motor vehicles. In this way, the money derived from the arts is distributed within the community.²⁴

3.19 In remote communities, in particular, income derived from art sales is often the only source of non-government income and this money supports communities economically:

The production of art in remote communities like Maningrida is often the only non-government money coming through the community and art has an enormous economical impact. For example, in the financial year 05/06,

20 *Developing an Indigenous Arts Strategy*, pp 13–14.

21 Australia Council, *Submission 38*, p. 16; Victorian College of the Arts, *Submission 39*, p. 1.

22 NT Government, *Submission 57*, p. 10.

23 *Developing an Indigenous Arts Strategy*, p. 14. See also Professor Jon Altman, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 79.

24 Lockhart River Arts and Cultural Centre, *Submission 67*, p.1; Ms Monique Weemstra, *Submission 22*, p. 1.

more than \$1.1 million was distributed to artists in the Maningrida region. Art is a major success story for Maningrida people, and the self esteem, wellbeing and growing confidence of the artists cannot be overvalued.²⁵

In smaller communities for example Nyapari, there is no school, no shop, no clinic, the office is rarely open and the ONLY thing for people to do there is visit or work in the Art Centre. Although the economic return may be quite low (as the average earning is less than \$2000 pa) the cumulative effect on the community can be important...Because of the communal nature of Aboriginal culture their earnings are distributed widely according to family and cultural custom.²⁶

3.20 As noted above, the economic benefits that accrue from the Indigenous visual arts and craft industry are not limited to Indigenous people. Other Australians across the visual arts and craft industry, along with other related business sectors, such as tourism, retailing and publishing, are significant beneficiaries in terms of jobs and profits.²⁷

Social benefits

3.21 Activities in the visual arts and craft sector provide significant social benefits to Indigenous people. Participation in the visual arts enhances social cohesion within communities, promotes health and well-being and provides a range of benefits across many sectors of Indigenous society:

To be an Indigenous artist or artisan is quite a different calling than to be an artist in the European tradition. These social benefits manifest themselves in the communal nature and place of art in the lives of Indigenous people and in the lives of individual Indigenous artists. The function of art and craft extends beyond aesthetic pleasure – it is embedded in daily life, family connection, traditional law as well as in dreaming lore and spirituality. For many Indigenous artists, visual art and craft is not seen as a commodity but rather as something akin to a family member – it represents a multi-layered connection to the past, present and future. The social role of creating visual art and craft is also primary to the social benefit and meaning of art and craft activity in the community context.²⁸

Benefits to Indigenous groups

3.22 The medium of visual arts has been successfully used as a form of expression for many different groups within the Indigenous community. The visual arts have provided, in particular, an avenue for the advancement of Indigenous women – in

25 Maningrida Arts and Culture, *Submission 51*, p. 2.

26 Desart, *Submission 49*, p. 10. See also Lockhart River Arts and Cultural Centre, *Submission 67*, p. 2.

27 NT Government, *Submission 57*, p. 10; Professor Jon Altman, *Submission 11*, p. 4.

28 Victorian College of the Arts, *Submission 39*, p. 1.

personal development and self esteem, financial independence and empowerment within their communities. Many Indigenous women have excelled in the visual arts including Emily Kame Kngwarreye and Dorothy Napangardi.²⁹ The art-coordinator of Ampilatwatja art centre, which was formed by a group of senior women of the area, noted the benefits that involvement with the arts has provided:

I have watched with a sense of pride these very traditional women go out into the world and share with an open heart all that is precious to them. I have also enjoyed watching the heartfelt response and the affection and growing understanding of not only their culture but also who they are as people.³⁰

3.23 Indigenous youth have also benefited from involvement in the arts. Arts projects focus on connecting young people to their Aboriginal identity and emphasise cultural maintenance. One project *Big ones, little ones* involves Indigenous school children producing artworks from schools around Australia and exhibiting their art alongside established Indigenous artists. The visual arts are also practiced by older Indigenous members of their communities.³¹

3.24 Visual arts have also been used as a form of expression for Indigenous people with disabilities. Some Indigenous artists with disabilities have accessed programs to further encourage their artistic abilities. The programs have provided a vehicle to express themselves, improve their self-esteem and provide a means to support themselves financially.³² An example of this approach is the Mwerre Anthurre Artists, an artists' collective in Alice Springs, which focuses on art skills development for artists with disabilities.³³

3.25 Art programs in prisons and detention centres often provide an avenue for Indigenous prisoners to achieve better appreciation of their own culture through the arts and to develop a means of employment when they leave the prison system.³⁴

Health benefits

3.26 Engagement in arts activities can have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians. Research indicates that involvement in creative

29 T Janke, *The Social and Cultural Benefits of Indigenous Visual Arts*, October 2006, Attachment to Australia Council, *Submission 38*, pp 21–23 (Hereafter referred to as the Janke study). The committee acknowledges the comprehensive nature of this study in examining the social and cultural benefits of the sector.

30 The Artists of Ampilatwatja, *Submission 20*, p. 1. See also Lauraine Diggins Fine Art, *Submission 26*, p. 3.

31 Janke study, p. 24.

32 Janke study, pp 23–24.

33 ACGA, *Submission 82*, p. 5.

34 Arts Law Centre of Australia, *Submission 36*, pp 5–6. See also NSW Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council, *Submission 37*, p. 2.

activities can contribute to better health outcomes and stronger communities.³⁵ Art has been used for healing Indigenous patients suffering from a range of physical and mental ailments. One example is the Art Therapy class in Sydney, a project supported by the Redfern Aboriginal Medical Services, for Indigenous women who suffer from a mental illness.³⁶

3.27 The visual arts have also been used to educate Indigenous people about health issues. An example of a successful health art education project is Johnny Briscoe's Caterpillar Dreaming spirit painting, *Anumarra – Working for Health*, 1979 which became a symbol for the Aboriginal health worker program in central Australia.³⁷

The benefits of art centres

3.28 Arts centres and organisations provide strong social and cultural functions. Desart noted that 'it is well understood that the role of an Art Centre goes far beyond the production of artworks, and exercise a charter that amounts to a social responsibility in their own communities'.³⁸

3.29 The multi-faceted role of art centres was emphasised during the inquiry:

The Art Centre provides, firstly, a focus for the maintenance of culture of the region. It is a place where artists can congregate, check each other's progress, seek opinions, joke and argue among themselves, paint, eat biscuits and drink tea, socialize...acquire social skills, and generally escape from the often difficult conditions of community life. The simple fact that these spaces exist is a social benefit that must not be underestimated.³⁹

The role of Art Centres incorporates the economic, social and cultural, all of which provide significant benefits to Indigenous artists and the community. For many artists the making of artwork represents their culture, connection to country and their identity.⁴⁰

3.30 As noted above, art centres often provide many social benefits which are not directly related to the arts. These services include assistance with health and medical, family, education, legal, transport and financial management issues. Arts centres also provide a safe and supportive environment for artists and their families.⁴¹ Providing services such as these contributes to the social and physical health of community members, including artists.

35 WA Department of Culture and the Arts, *Submission 18*, p. 2.

36 Janke study, p. 20.

37 Janke study, p. 19.

38 Desart, *Submission 49*, p. 10. See also Ms Gloria Morales-Segovia, Assistant Manager, Warlukurangu Artists, *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2007, p. 37.

39 Mr Brian Tucker Accounting, *Submission 12*, p. 2.

40 ANKAAA, *Submission 63*, p. 9.

41 ANKAAA, *Submission 63*, pp 9–10; Ms Monique Weemstra, *Submission 22*, pp 1–2.

3.31 There are examples at Yuendumu, Kintore, Balgo, Blackstone and other communities with successful art centres where substantial contributions have been made to community facilities and programs such as dialysis units, swimming pools, youth programs, local festivals and sports events.⁴² Papunya Tula Artists provided the following example of the support provided to the local community:

Over the last six years, PTA has funded the establishment of a remote renal dialysis unit at the Kintore community. More than \$1 million was raised in 2000 at a charity auction...This year, the company made cash donations of over \$200,000, to support the ongoing running costs of the Western Desert Nganampa Walytja Palyantjaku Tjutaku Aboriginal Corporation, which is responsible for delivering the service to thirty-one patients.

In November 2005, PTA played a fundamental role in raising over \$900,000 for the construction of a swimming pool at Kintore community....These projects are just some of the significant positive changes that PTA has been able to deliver to the community. As well as these major projects the company provides numerous other forms of assistance on a daily basis.⁴³

3.32 Arts centres provide many cultural benefits through the sale of artworks, developing artists' skills, cataloguing and archiving artworks, collating artists CVs and culturally significant stories and documenting art techniques.

3.33 The production of art and craft works goes together with transferring cultural knowledge. In addition, the provision of arts and craft activities enables Aboriginal people to reside on their traditional lands and to engage in diverse customary activities and cultural practices – 'enabling Aboriginal people to reside on country by developing a strong arts sector contributes to maintaining Aboriginal culture and stimulating participation in other customary activities too'.⁴⁴

3.34 Indigenous arts organisations, while having a strong role in rural and remote areas, also have strong social and cultural functions in urban areas. In Sydney, for example, the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative plays an important role in supporting Indigenous artists and bringing the Indigenous community together for functions and special events.⁴⁵

Cultural benefits

3.35 Indigenous artists express their culture, identity and connection to the land and their community through their art. The visual arts sector provides cultural

42 Desart, *Submission 49*, p. 10.

43 Papunya Tula Artists, *Submission 14*, p. 2. See also Aranda Aboriginal Art, *Submission 83*, p. 4.

44 Ms Monique Weemstra, *Submission 22*, p. 2.

45 Arts Law Centre of Australia, *Submission 36*, p. 6. See also Dr Diane Mossenson, WA State Chairman, ACGA, *Committee Hansard*, 23 February 2007, p. 7.

maintenance and promotion of traditional culture for many Indigenous people and communities. ANKAAA stated that the 'cultural benefits are immeasurable in providing cultural activities, dialogue and maintenance within the community'.⁴⁶

3.36 The Victorian College of the Arts emphasised the centrality of the visual arts in maintaining culture:

The Indigenous visual arts and crafts sector is absolutely central to cultural sustainability for Indigenous Australia and cultural diversity in the wider Australian community. The sector is a living demonstration of the continual connection to land, family, dreaming, culture and place that dates back many millennia. Arts practice is a fundamental part of the way of life for Indigenous artists and communities.⁴⁷

3.37 Indigenous artists, by drawing on this cultural heritage, strengthen their culture through the practice of their visual arts:

The visual arts funding and programming provided in the Indigenous visual arts sector has allowed cultural expression to strengthen and develop...The visual arts sector has facilitated the handing down of information and skills from generations. Along with this comes the reinforcement of cultural obligations such as the honouring of traditional styles. Artists engage with elders to learn important cultural stories.⁴⁸

...Indigenous 'art' is perhaps the prime contemporary medium for senior people to explore, document and share often profound cultural knowledge (of creation, country and family) and as such offers not just reinforcement of that knowledge but also a very significant guard against its loss through non-transmission to younger generations...the Inquiry should be mindful of the intangible value of Indigenous art and craft in preserving irreplaceable cultural knowledge.⁴⁹

3.38 Professor Morphy also noted that Indigenous artists are 'well trained in Indigenous contexts':

This is vitally important, because most Aboriginal artists in remote areas do not come out of nowhere, they come out of generations of art practice, which in their own lifetimes leads to intensive training before they will be producing work for sale or in public context. That does not happen everywhere, but certainly in all the areas of Arnhem Land in central

46 ANKAAA, *Submission 63*, p. 10. See also Mr Djambawa Marawilli, Chairperson, Association of Northern Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2007, p. 18.

47 Victorian College of the Arts, *Submission 39*, p. 1.

48 Janke study, p. 3.

49 Ananguku Arts and Culture, *Submission 46*, p. 3.

Australia that I know, artists come from almost their own Indigenous schools of art.⁵⁰

3.39 The land, customary practices and other cultural elements are the foundations of Aboriginal art in many different ways – especially in remote communities:

...the fact that the Aboriginal arts and craft sector is often founded on the customary sector and based on the land and its spiritual and cultural value, is what makes Aboriginal art unique and attractive for the market. Hence, cultural aspects increase the competitive advantage of Aboriginal arts and contribute to the commercial opportunities of the arts industry.⁵¹

3.40 Dr Mossenson noted that maintaining strong culture is 'integral to the continual success of the Aboriginal art industry':

...we will soon witness in some areas of the country the death of the last custodians of traditional songs, ceremonies and dances. As a result artwork that we currently revere today will be produced in a different form and with different cultural integrity. It will, I suspect, be all the greatly diminished as artwork and as a record of culture.⁵²

3.41 Another submission noted that without a thriving Aboriginal culture, upon which Indigenous art is based, Australia would lose 'much of its shine and consequent dollars'.⁵³

3.42 The practice of art making within communities is part of the continuum of ceremonial practice, reinforcing people's connection with traditional lands, ancestral beliefs and ritual. It also provides opportunities for the transmission and reinforcement of cultural knowledge to younger members of the community.⁵⁴ The Australia Council characterised Indigenous visual arts and culture as 'a bridge between generations, ensuring as much as possible that custodial information is not lost'.⁵⁵

Visual art is an expression of belonging and connection with long ago traditions and spiritual beliefs. The painting of creation and dreaming stories is a manifestation of this cultural and spiritual expression. Expressions of Indigenous visual art, like other forms of art, depict an ongoing connection and relationship with land and sea. In this way, art is like a clan motifs or insignia representing legal custodianship.⁵⁶

50 Professor Howard Morphy, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 70.

51 Ms Monique Weemstra, *Submission 22*, p. 2.

52 Dr Diane Mossenson, *Submission 78*, p. 3.

53 Ms Isabelle de Beaumont, *Submission 71*, p. 1.

54 Janke study, pp. 7–8; Caruana Fine Art, *Submission 31*, p. 2.

55 Australia Council, *Submission 38*, p. 17.

56 Janke study, p. 7.

3.43 A key issue for Indigenous communities is the reality that as older artists and community members pass away, culture is lost including stories of cultural significance, dance and language.

People often talk about the elders passing away and the culture being lost. Aboriginal people are very distressed about the loss of culture and it is always a priority...that the young people be trained in their own culture.⁵⁷

I am concerned about the possibilities for the generation of elders that I met to be able to pass on this very ancient culture to the next generation, their children and grand children...Aboriginal Art thrives on love for a particular area of land called 'country', the artist's country. You take that away and the art loses its roots as well as the specificity and power that captures so much international attention and acclaim.⁵⁸

3.44 The expression of Indigenous visual arts helps to promote the diversity of Indigenous cultural groups. The visual arts provide a means for clans and regions to express their own distinctive styles, and to develop their own diversity.⁵⁹ The visual arts also play a role in uniting Indigenous across clan groups. Arts events such as exhibitions and forums act as community events where Indigenous people can interact socially and culturally.⁶⁰ Visual arts and craft activities also provide a vehicle for the expression of Indigenous political and related concerns to the wider community.⁶¹

3.45 As well as providing cultural benefits to Indigenous people, Indigenous visual arts also provide cultural benefits to the wider Australian community, facilitate cultural diversity, and provide a 'bridge' to non-Indigenous Australians so that they can appreciate and learn about Indigenous culture.⁶²

3.46 Indigenous art makes a significant contribution to the culture of the nation. Desart noted that 'it provides the nation with a rich cultural foundation and contributes to the cultural fabric in this country where we value many diverse heritages'.⁶³ One witness noted that:

Indigenous art has had an important role in introducing to the broader community the significance of Aboriginal culture. For many it has been the first chance of a dialogue with Indigenous Australia.⁶⁴

57 Desart, *Submission 49*, p. 10. See also ANKAAA, *Submission 63*, p. 10.

58 Ms Isabelle de Beaumont, *Submission 71*, p. 1.

59 Janke study, pp 4–5.

60 Janke study, pp 12–13.

61 For a further discussion see Janke study, pp 10–12; Australia Council, *Submission 38*, p. 17; Queensland Government, *Submission 58*, p. 13.

62 Mbantua Gallery, *Submission 24*, p. 4; Professor Jon Altman, *Submission 11*, p. 5.

63 Desart, *Submission 49*, p. 10.

64 Mr Christopher Hodges, *Committee Hansard*, 23 February 2007, p. 5.

3.47 Indigenous art is well represented in the many public arts institutions and their exhibitions programs and is widely represented in many facets of Australian life:

Aboriginal visual art iconography is omnipresent. Aboriginal imagery is instantly recognisable and is used in everything from our money, our national architectural icons, and in corporate identity and advertising. This art and culture formed the centrepiece of the Opening Ceremony at the 2000 Sydney Olympics and more recently has graced the most important new public building in France. We submit this is a national treasure which must be nurtured and supported.⁶⁵

3.48 The NT government commented on the effect of the visual arts on the wider community:

There have been considerable social and cultural benefits for the Northern Territory population as a whole as a consequence of the increased prominence of Aboriginal visual arts and crafts, with that prominence being seen as a distinctive social and cultural marker for all Territorians.⁶⁶

3.49 Australia is also increasingly defined and promoted internationally in terms of Indigenous art and culture, as evidenced in projects like the Musee du Quai Branly commission in Paris. Indigenous art has been described as providing 'Australia's greatest cultural export'.⁶⁷

Conclusion

3.50 The committee was shown strong evidence of how the Indigenous visual arts and craft sector provides substantial economic, social and cultural benefits. Indigenous individuals and communities as well as the Australian community and the international community share in these benefits and are enriched by them.

3.51 Indigenous visual arts provide a means of cultural expression and are a vehicle for the maintenance and transmission of culture. The visual arts are used to promote health and well-being. They improve the lives of Indigenous women and provide self esteem to young Indigenous people. The benefits of Indigenous arts and craft go beyond the purely economic and the quantifiable to enrich and sustain Indigenous culture, and promote this ancient culture to the wider Australian community and to the world.

65 Desart, *Submission 49*, p. 10.

66 NT Government, *Submission 57*, p. 12.

67 Ms Christine Godden, *Submission 41*, p. 2.