The Development of Tourist Art and Souvenirs — the Arc of the Boomerang: from Hunting, Fighting and Ceremony to Tourist Souvenir

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the history and development of tourist art and souvenirs and discusses the reception of such artefacts, alongside works of fine art, within the museogallery system. Beginning with the relationship between cultural tourism and anthropology, it identifies common links between ethnographic artefacts, works of fine art and souvenirs collected in Australia during the latter half of the 20th century. Approaching these objects from the discipline of art history, this research takes as its priority the formal qualities of the artefacts and charts the transition of the boomerang, among other Aboriginal artefacts, from functional tool designed for hunting, to a marker of people and place made for sale as a tourist commodity. Other questions addressed in this research are as follows: What, other than size and price, attracts tourists to certain souvenirs and not others? Where is their final resting place and what meaning is attached to them through the narrative appended by the maker and by the consumer? How is it effected by the resulting location of display? Copyright © 2008 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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INTRODUCTION: SOUVENIRS AND THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL GAZE

The study of tourist art and souvenirs finds its antecedence in the academic fields of anthropology and art history (Graburn, 1976). Despite the foresight of Graburn and his edited collection of enduring papers from a range of authors, the serious study of souvenirs has, until recently, existed behind the veil of art history, anthropology and other disciplines. The range of interested scholars from diverse disciplines is most clearly demonstrated in the recent text Unpacking Culture — Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds (Phillips and Steiner, 1999). In addition to excellent contributions from the co-editors representing the perspectives of the two central disciplines, key papers from this text include an anthropological perspective from Littlefield Kasfi r’s ‘Samburu Souvenirs: Representations of a Land in Amber’, and the more art historical view from Batkin in ‘Tourism Is Overrated: Pueblo Pottery and the Early Curio Trade 1880–1910’.

Other scholarly work engaging with this subject, at various times and to varying degrees, include anthropological texts from Berndt’s (1964) Australian Aboriginal Art, Tuckson’s introduction to the same text, Black’s (1964) Old and New Aboriginal Art and more recently, Morphy’s (1991, 1998) investigation of Aboriginal art and knowledge.

into Collecting in the European Tradition, spends some time discussing the nature of souvenirs in the context of museum collections, while Stewart (1984) provides a useful insight into the consumption of souvenirs and aspects of miniaturisation in On Longing.

What these scholars share is an engagement with artefacts and objects that have been collected as a result of institutional and/or independent exploration, travel and tourism. The objects collected have then been assessed and organised using the criteria that are foremost in the individual disciplines. These criteria are often found to be contrary but are, in many ways, also equally complimentary. This is best exemplified in the curatorial contrast demonstrated by the presentation of same or similar artefacts in art galleries, anthropological museums and souvenir shops. For the anthropological museum, the display of the object is preceded by the knowledge of its use and fit within the culture of origin; it is the apparent information available in the object that attracts the scrutiny of the anthropologist or ethnographer.

In 1964, Ron Berndt, renowned anthropologist from the University of Western Australia, lamented the influence of tourism and tourist kitsch on the development of Aboriginal art (Berndt, 1964). Berndt’s quest for authenticity is typical of many anthropologists of that era. This ‘debased form’ of Aboriginal art is at the core of this project and represents the historical grounding of this inquiry, in which the positive aspects of such modified art production and its external influences are explored.

Similarly, Tuckson (1964), in the preceding chapter of Berndt’s essentially anthropological text, draws attention to the contortions made by Aboriginal artists to satisfy the demands of such a market. Tuckson identifies the role of mission settlements as central to the introduction of the profit motive, noting the values by which art was subsequently promoted. But most importantly, he recognises the significance of size and uniformity as fundamental structural developments in the definition of tourist art.

For the art gallery, the formal and aesthetic qualities of the object are paramount. Tourist art and souvenirs, however, rest somewhere in between, in that it is the aesthetic and decorative quality of the object that attracts the tourist’s eye, while the object’s ability to refer to the experienced site and culture is of equal importance. These innate qualities bring together the aesthetic and informative gaze around the commercial exchange that takes precedence in the souvenir shop. In so doing, the souvenir describes a unique range of objects and artefacts designed for the purpose of satisfying an equally unique way of seeing.

Few academics and writers have, until recently, recognised tourist art as worthy of serious study. However, in the mid-1960s, as the artefacts of Aboriginal Australia began to emerge to a receptive Western audience, a clear distinction between Aboriginal art and tourist kitsch was established. The intention was to discriminate between genuine artefacts that showed evidence of traditional use and were worthy of public and institutional collection and those crafted trinkets produced for profit within the Western economic system.

In the same period, Roman Black, another anthropologist, described the array of Aboriginal souvenirs available to tourists as a ‘breath of fresh air’ concluding that ‘here at last is something that is different, that is typical of the country, that is good’ (Black, 1964, p. xxi). Just as Tuckson documents the shaping of indigenous art to suit the dictates of transportation, so Black is equally alert to the principle that a souvenir must be ‘typical’ of the visited site. In this, Black is less critical of tourist art in his introduction, preferring to focus instead on the aesthetic freshness and difference of Aboriginal-derived decoration and design. The contrast between the gazes of Black, Berndt and Tuckson is apparent. Black’s perspective is much closer to that of the tourist in that he is visiting the country for the first time. It is true that Black and Berndt both engaged with the art of Aboriginal people from an anthropological perspective but there is, in Berndt’s tone, an underlying desire for purity and authenticity in the art and culture of Aboriginal people. On the other hand, Black’s view from afar welcomes the influence of trading routes and the exchange of ideas across clan and tribal boundaries and across the ocean.

The distinction between art and souvenirs may also be found in the current records of the Berndt Museum at the University of Western
Australia. Here, a small number of artefacts have been catalogued as souvenirs made for exchange with the anthropologist that was engaged in the study and collection of artefacts. Examples include the following Multifunction Boomerang (Figure 1).

This catalogue entry (2464.00) and two others (2463.00 and 688.00) from the Berndt Museum, situate the collector — in this case, the anthropologist Lucich — in the role of the primary tourist, for this artefact has been produced, or at least adapted, as a personal gift for the anthropologist. An adaptation by the maker that points to the transition of the artefact from a tool ‘used for hunting, fighting and fire making’ (Berndt Museum catalogue, 1963) to one with the artistic representation of people and place as its priority. However, artefacts catalogued in this way, from this period, are rare.

The first attempt to remedy this rather jaundiced perspective and define the category of ‘tourist art’ as a genuine and unique artistic expression and style occurred over ten years later, with the publication of Nelson Graburn’s (1976) ground-breaking Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World. In this text, Graburn establishes a structure of art production that locates souvenirs and tourist art as an identifiable genre of art within the general field of art practice.

Graburn’s initial problem was to identify how tourist art was distinct from what was then referred to as ‘primitive’ art. He managed this by invoking the concept of a ‘Fourth World’, which he describes as the ‘collective name for all aboriginal and native peoples whose lands fall within the national boundaries and technobureaucratic administrations of the countries of the First, Second and Third Worlds’ (Graburn, 1976, p. 1). Then, in contrast to Berndt’s insistence on authenticity, Graburn argues that such artefacts are no longer produced autonomously but are modified for the consumption by outsiders. Here, the author recognises the impact of colonialism and the modifications that have occurred and are demonstrated in the above example from the Berndt Museum.

Graburn identifies points of divergence between ‘primitive’ art and tourist art, between anthropological artefacts and souvenirs: first, that the myth of isolated cultural purity is anathema within the context of tourist art; second, that cultural identification and specificity is tenuous within the Western framework of national boundaries; and third, that tourist art is produced for the consumption of visitors from other cultures, that is, the tourist.

GRABURN’S TYPOLOGIES

Having established these broad, yet defining, parameters for the production of tourist art, Graburn presents a number of artistic typologies that define various styles and developmental stages of what we have come to know as souvenir production. Those most pertinent to the contemporary study of tourist art and souvenirs are Traditional or Functional Fine
Art summarised as traditional art forms that incorporate changes in their form and method of production, including some European symbols, but do not effect the symbolic expression of the artefact. This is demonstrated in Figure 2, in which the traditional boomerang form has been retained, as has the symbolic decorative cross-hatch design. It is in the production technique that some variation occurs. Whereas, prior to colonialism, the recessed cross-hatching was executed with stone or bone tools, it is highly probable that in this instance, the decoration was achieved with the use of a metal or glass cutting device.

Commercial Fine Art is described as artefacts produced for possible sale but that retain culturally defined aesthetic and formal qualities. For example, the coolamon is a wooden vessel, initially used for collecting seeds and berries for food. Today, these artefacts are produced specifically for the tourist market in a number of sizes, with varying degrees of skill and are augmented with various traditional designs, such as the dot painting pattern (Figure 3).

While Tuckson made note of the importance of size and portability, reduced scale and miniaturisation is a key focus of Stewart’s (1984) text On Longing, in which the author also dedicates some time to the analysis of souvenirs. This text deals ostensibly with why such things are collected, that is the consumption of souvenirs. Stewart recognises how souvenirs sustain an authentic experience and how they are vital in documenting unrepeatable events, such as the once-in-a-lifetime visit to an exotic location. She also quite rightly asserts that souvenirs achieve this record through their ability to invoke narrative, and she argues convincingly that it is through the attached narrative that the souvenir substitutes a notion of continued consumption. However, she warns that the meaning of the object is never fully understood. In this, Stewart is alert to the vagaries of narrative and its propensity for artifice over time. She goes on to highlight how, as a

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Figure 2. Multifunction Boomerang, wood with inscribed relief, 81 cm. Collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Cat. M3683.

Figure 3. Mary Rose Nangala, Coolamon, 2000, acrylic paint on wood with pokerwork detail on reverse, 63 × 18 cm. Private collection.
fragment of the site or event, the miniature operates in this system of memory and nostalgia, in that, as a fragment, it comes to represent the whole through the agency of narrative.

What remains, in the instance of the coolamon, both miniature and decorated, and, as we shall discover later the boomerang, is the retention of the traditional form and design (Brokensha, 1987; Isaacs, 1992), while the meaning invested in the dot painting decoration is unlikely to be completely understood by the consumer as tourist and therefore, the implicit narrative contained in the decoration will remain sublimated to that which is developed by the consumer. That is, in Stewart’s terms, one of ‘continued consumption’.

Souvenirs are objects of repetitive production made when poverty, the profit motive and the satisfaction of the consumer are given priority over and above the artist’s aesthetic standards. It is the repetitive production process that sets these artefacts apart from the former categories and, according to Graburn, it is this that most clearly defines the souvenir. The reliance on repetitive manufacture for this definition is problematic, as too is the notion of poverty, which is assessed from the perspective and principles of Western economic development, imposed upon a different or alternative system of production. Unlike ‘Traditional or Functional Fine Art’, where the artefact is produced with no mind for its commercial exchange, or ‘Commercial Fine Art’, where the ‘eventual sale’ of the artefact crosses the mind of the maker, ‘Souvenirs’ are produced within a fully established capitalist exchange system, in which the sale of the artefact is the sole intention. In the examples below (Figure 4), from the Keringke Arts Centre, mass produced pots and plywood model boomerangs are augmented with individual local designs, where each design is unique and applied by hand with reasonable care and attention. However, there can be no argument that such artefacts are manufactured with the profit motive in mind, and that the intention of the work is, at least in part, to allay what Graburn calls the ‘economic competition of poverty’. The introduction of a cash economy, tied closely to art production, is documented in Williams’ (1976) study of the development of the souvenir trade at Yirrkala, Arnhem Land, from 1935 to 1970, who, like Tuckson, points first to the establishment of the Methodist Mission settlement...
as responsible for the introduction of a cash economy and subsequently the marketing of Aboriginal arts. Williams states that the art objects produced for sale during this period consisted mostly of intricately carved wooden pipes, sculpted effigies of birds and animals, stone axes, wooden spears, painted spears and throwing sticks, boomerangs, didgeridoos and occasionally bark paintings. With the growing sales of these items, Williams (1976, p. 276) writes that, the mission station soon redefined its role to that of art dealer and goes on to say that:

The increasing demand for Aboriginal art that began in 1964 has continued to be principally the result of orders from business firms catering to tourists in Australian capital cities. These orders are preponderantly for inexpensive objects, mostly small carvings and suitcase size bark paintings.

In this way, Aboriginal art from the northern tip of the Northern Territory came to represent the broad expanse of Australia and to serve as markers of an engagement with a very different place. This demonstrates the ability of the souvenir to stretch the truth of the tourist engagement, or to enable a sense of continued consumption. Above all, it is the demand for suitcase-sized objects, that is objects of reduced scale, if not miniaturised, that clearly defines these objects as souvenirs.

Reintegrated Arts is summarised as comprising of new art forms developed by indigenous people, from introduced materials and methods. It may be argued that most, if not all, indigenous souvenirs, such as the example pictured in Figure 5, conform to this description through the use of introduced materials and techniques or methods that have enabled the work to meet commercial needs. The Pokerwork art of Central Australia is a superb example, where traditional patterns are burnished onto the surface of the artefact by the use of heated lengths of fencing wire (see Hume, 2002, Isaacs, 1992, Kleinert et al., 2000, and Keeping Culture, 2000).

Assimilated Fine Arts is summarised as the use of Western form and composition by indigenous peoples. Graburn cites Namatjira as a prime example here, illustrating his claim with Namatjira’s Western style painting Ghost Gum of Temple Bar (1943). Graburn points out that Namatjira’s painted landscapes are clearly rendered in a Western style.

These last three categories were exemplified in the exhibition The Dreamtime Today: A Survey of Contemporary Aboriginal Arts and Crafts (Kintore Gallery, 1986), in which, alluding to the transition of the traditional art of predominantly hunter/gatherer communities, from transitory or ephemeral object into markers of people, place and time, in the introductory essay of this catalogue, Megaw (1986) remarks upon the difficulties confronted by museums and art galleries in the collection and conservation of these artefacts.

This catalogue makes further note on the relationship between tourism and Aboriginal artefacts with reference to a number of exhibits. One entry dates this relationship as beginning in 1945 with the initial figurative carving of a human figure atop a traditional Tiwi Island burial pole, stating that these artefacts soon realised a ready market within the tourist trade (Maughan, 1986). In line with Tuckson’s lament and the qualifying feature of Graburn’s ‘Souvenir’ category, the quality of the finished paper is said to not only differ in its traditional representative style but also that such artefacts are produced with the use of an introduced palette and rendered with less care, leaving the audience with no doubt that the work was produced for the tourist market.

Figure 5. Topsy Tjulita, Lizard, undated, wood with pokerwork detail, variable dimensions, [Source: Maruku Arts & Crafts].

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Decorated utilitarian objects, as well as symbolic and ceremonial artefacts, are also included in the sweep of this exhibition, Cat. No. 55 being a painted coolamon, made expressly for sale. Like the coolamon featured in Figure 6, this example and Cat. No. 63, a decorated boomerang, provide examples of artefacts that demonstrate how the enhancement of traditional tools with traditional designs increases their visibility and value within the cash economy of the tourist market. This is best typified by Cat. No. 71, a woomera attributed to Albert Namatjira (Figure 6) and recorded as ‘made for the tourist market’.

Morphy (1998, p. 376) also cites the work of Namatjira when claiming that prior to the emergence of ‘Contemporary Aboriginal art’ during the 1970s, all Aboriginal art was allocated to the devalued category of ‘tourist art’. Morphy tells us that Namatjira was proud to be a major contributor to the field of tourist art during the 1930s and 40s, producing a number of artworks, including pencil drawings for anthropologists and artefacts with pokerwork engravings made for sale. Namatjira is possibly the earliest and among the finest examples of an artist who worked in both the souvenir and fine art market at the same time. This is something that only a few formally trained Western artists are today bold enough to do, but it is a practice that is widespread among Aboriginal artists. According to Morphy, the Aboriginal art of this war period, typified by the work of Namatjira, marks the establishment of a tourist art industry in the Central Australian Desert region, an industry that Morphy suggests was already firmly established during the interwar period in Southeast Australia. The artefacts produced rested somewhere between popular art and tourist souvenirs and consisted of various objects such as carved emu eggs, decorative feathers, flowers and applique bark pictures, while the craft of boomerang making was now directed expressly towards the tourist and souvenir industry.

THE ARC OF THE BOOMERANG

The souvenir has been shown to be an unstable artefact that confounds many attempts to categorise it by institutional terms and the boomerang is a case in point. The analysis of souvenirs is therefore best achieved by mapping the path they travel from production to resting. This proposition, I believe, is at the root of Graburn’s categories, in that it is the shifts and alterations in the artefact groupings that distinguish one category from the other. This is informed and influenced by the qualities and characteristics invested in the work by the producer and consumer, that is, the changes resulting from the tourist’s tastes and the response of the producers that contributes to the movement of the artefact’s perception from anthropological artefact to souvenir. Through the following case studies, I will highlight the qualities of the souvenir object that bring about this restlessness and categorisation and, in turn, describe their path. I will locate the causes of these changes, whether they are occurring as a result of new technologies, cultural influences, or consumer demand.
In the case of the boomerang, shape is the key design feature. It is unique in this respect and that is a huge advantage in its operation as a souvenir. It may be made from anything, embellished in any manner, and only has to retain its unique form to be recognised for what it is.

I want to begin with four boomerangs selected from the collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

Catalogue number M4238 (Figure 7) measures 80 cm from tip to tip and is hewn from a heavy durable timber, most likely Mulga or River Red Gum. It is decorated with a traditional striated pattern that runs the entire length of the artefact. The patterning is like a continuous wave form of eight incised lines, with each wave striation separated by areas of sparse cross-hatching. On close inspection, it appears that the lines of the wave pattern are cut two at a time, perhaps with a tooth edged cutting device. Known cutting devices include stone flints, animal teeth and introduced materials, such as glass and steel. Like the earlier boomerang from this collection (Figure 2), it is virtually impossible to discern what particular cutting device was used. There appears to be no symmetry in the inscribed design but rather an increase in the density of cross-hatching as the eye travels from left to right along the concave curve. It may be assumed from the traditional design, execution and patina of use that this particular boomerang was produced for authentic purposes, being hunting and/or ceremonial use and that its rightful understanding, in keeping with its mode of collection, and storage within the museum’s ‘Other’ cultures collection, is as an anthropological artefact.

The provenance of the next boomerang (Figure 8) suggests that it was collected from the Northern Territory or Eastern Queensland.
It is somewhat lighter in weight than the other examples and the decorative design is organised more openly along the 81 cm length of the artefact, while all the striations are shallower than in the previous examples. Unlike M4238 (Figure 7), it is divided roughly in half by a row of four striated lines. This boomerang is also divided along its length by an extremely narrow, almost grass-like skein, resulting in a quartered division of the surface. Three of the quarters feature a shuttle or narrow leaf design supplemented with simple cross-cut lines like those of a tally. The bottom right quarter on the convex edge does not follow this shuttle patterning, but instead features two continuous parallel lines in wave form.

Unlike the previous boomerang, the tips of this artefact are neatly clipped, which suggests the use of an introduced tool or cutting device. However, indentations along the edge may suggest some authentic use. In Graburn’s terms, the three above boomerangs demonstrate the ‘Functional or Traditional Fine Art’ category because of the likely use of an introduced cutting technique.

The final boomerang from the collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery also features clipped tips, but it is the decoration on the surface that says most about this artefact’s production purpose. The inscribed design on the front surface of this artefact is fully developed in what amounts to a realistic figurative style, depicting single and double ovate leaves and on the right hand end, a stem or trunk with eight leaves branching from it. The longitudinal extent of the figurative floral is divided by diagonal cross-hatching, while the incisions are deep, clean and by and large uniform. This boomerang, with its floral design and deep regular cuts, suggests, more than any other example from this collection, that it was produced with the aid of introduced tools and for the consumption of the colonial eye. Like the boomerang from Berndt Museum, it can be assumed that this artefact was produced for exchange with colonial Australians or, perhaps, as a type of proto-souvenir for there is evidence of technical alterations and the inclusion of European derived symbols. From the study of the above selection, it may be understood that the Tasmanian Museum’s anthropological collection has, like many other State and National museums, ceased to collect boomerangs that show greater alteration from traditional form (Figure 9).

I now want to look at the more recent production of boomerangs in the photographic documentation contained in the After 200 Years: Photographic Essays of Aboriginal and Islander Australia Today (Taylor, 1988). This documentation shows the varied meanings that the boomerang has to contemporary Aboriginal people and demonstrates the different motives behind the making of boomerangs in recent times.

The following plates show images of a number of boomerangs; some are complete, others are in various stages of production. By studying the characteristics of these artefacts, it is possible to deduce the purpose of their production and intended resting place or market. In some cases, the accompanying text provides most of the information required.

For instance, in the caption to the illustration titled Tasman Snider Carving A Boomerang Outside His Home In Mantaka Watched By Leroy Diamond And Fleur Hobson (Figure 10), the central subject, Snider (1988), states that the main benefit from the scene played out is that...
of educating the young. He explains how he learnt to make boomerangs in the same way that the boy in the photograph is learning by sitting around and watching. The role of this boomerang can be understood to have an educative priority that sustains the character of indigenous culture and social cohesion within. There is no mention or allusion to the souvenir market or any other purpose for its production. This boomerang is not then identified as a souvenir by its maker but is more distinctly an ethnographic artefact. It does, however, rest in the ‘Traditional’ or ‘Functional Fine Art’ category, is made with non-traditional tools and has the potential to be recognised as a souvenir by a visiting tourist.

The second example drawn from this text (Figure 11) is the triptych Boomerang Making at

Figure 10. Maureen Mackenzie, Tasman Snider Carving A Boomerang Outside His Home in Manatuka Watched by Leroy Diamond and Fleur Hobson, 1988, black and white photograph (Source: Taylor, 1988).

Yaruman. In these illustrations, the boomerangs are first roughed out with a tomahawk. The result of this process is shown in the second image. The third photograph shows a group of Aboriginal men working on the boomerangs at various stages of production. It is the supporting caption that provides the best

Figure 11. Jon Rhodes, Boomerang Making At Yaruman, 1988, black and white photographs (Source: Taylor, 1988).
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insight into their purpose, telling us that, ‘We used to use them for hunting in the olden times but now we use them mostly for Law business’ (Jampijin, 1988, p. 45).

It can be understood from this statement that a shift has occurred in the intention of the tool from hunting weapon to a tool for cultural organisation and cohesion. There is, however, a further potential shift in the purpose of these artefacts that moves them into the tourist art market, as Jampijin informs us that occasionally, he and his friends sell these boomerangs for up to $20 in the nearby towns of Halls Creek, Broome or Kununurra.

There is no mention of decoration in this statement, so it must be assumed that the transition from a tool for hunting and law business to souvenir occurs with the boomerangs in the same condition. If this is the case, then these artefacts seem to retain their ‘culturally embedded aesthetic and formal standards’ and rest more closely to the category of ethnographic artefact rather than souvenir, as they have been produced first for use within the culture of their production, albeit for ceremonial purposes only.

However, as anthropological artefacts, such boomerangs are unlikely to demonstrate any evidence of their use within the culture of origin. Therefore, their inclusion in such a category is tenuous. Boomerangs made with this dual intention are likely to rest somewhere between Graburn’s second category of ‘Traditional or Functional Fine Art’, and the third, ‘Commercial Fine Art’ as the level to which ‘eventual sale’ is the intended purpose of their production cannot be gauged.

In the third example of a *Boomerang factory at Robinvale* (Figure 12), the proprietor is unequivocal about the trajectory of the product. He informs us that the factory was set up with a loan from the State bank and a grant from the Arts Board in Sydney, and that the products are designed for the export market. This clearly situates these boomerangs and other Aboriginal objects from the factory within the souvenir market. Unlike the previous example, there is no pretence of use within the Aboriginal culture; rather, they are produced with sale to tourist outlets as their priority. What is interesting about this image is the assistance supplied by the Arts Board in the production of work clearly intended for the souvenir market. Not only does this link art and business together but it also identifies souvenir production as art, fitting it snugly into Graburn’s notion of souvenirs as the art of one culture produced expressly for the consumption of another.

There is also a second and more complex shift found in this photographic essay, which...
has to do with the raw material. The proprietor is denigrating of plywood boomerangs but also speaks of the change from using Mulga wood to Red Gum. This change in wood might say one or two things regarding boomerang production; it might suggest that Mulga provides the best wood for boomerang production, having characteristics such as strength, advantageous growth patterns, lightness and ease of carving; or it might suggest that Red Gum is a more marketable timber, being renowned for its durable quality and reified as the best timber to be found along the Murray River, in the same way that Huon pine has become a highly sought after and fetishised timber in Tasmania for the crafting of small souvenirs. What can be assumed with some certainty is that the boomerang form may be carved from many different species of timber from around Australia and, indeed, the world. At the same time, ‘aesthetic standards’ are not necessarily compromised in the mass production of souvenirs. It is, in this respect, inappropriate to define souvenirs according to the reduction of culturally embedded aesthetic standards in favour of the need for profit.

I want to view one more example from the After 200 Years text before discussing the meaning of three boomerangs from the current souvenir market. In the photograph John Dixon Decorating a Boomerang For Sale at La Perouse (Figure 13), the artist is burnishing a pattern onto a souvenir boomerang. Unlike the previous images, this photograph contains some finished product. Here, it is possible to see the decorative design of tourist influenced Western imagery, including a map of Australia and numerous animal motifs, blended with more traditional symbols. From the pokerwork technique, the commercial intention and the use of Western imagery, these artefacts show characteristics that span Graburn’s second, third and fourth categories: ‘Commercial fine art’, ‘Souvenirs’ and ‘Reintegrated arts’, and fix Dixon’s artefacts, moreover, as genuine souvenirs.

In concluding this focus on the boomerang, I want to offer a suite of boomerangs collected during the course of this project. The first is an unassuming three-ply boomerang, of the type denigrated by the proprietor of the Robinvale factory.

Made by ‘Boomerangs Down Under’, this artefact (Figure 14) was purchased from a souvenir outlet in Alice Springs and is of symmetrical design, most likely formed on the bandsaw. It is light in weight and finished to a blond hue with a tough Estapol type finish. The label on the reverse states that it is ‘Handmade to Return’ and ‘Designed by Paul Bryden — Australian Champion’.

Figure 13. Peter McKenzie, John Dixon Decorating a Boomerang For Sale at La Perouse, 1988, black and white photograph (Source: Taylor, 1988).
This boomerang makes no allusion to authenticity and carries a rudimentary poker-work design on the tip of each wing that has no symbolic meaning, but is purely decorative. The priority of this artefact is to demonstrate the utility of its design, which is that it flies in an arc pattern and returns to the thrower. By achieving this, it offers the tourist, as the intended consumer, a practical demonstration of ancient Aboriginal technology.

The second example (Figure 15) is not really a boomerang at all but a model of a boomerang. It is also made from plywood and is only recognisable as a boomerang through its unique shape. It does not describe an arc when thrown, nor does it return to the thrower. It cannot be conceived as a lesser-known, non-returning type used for hunting in club fashion, as its size and weight would be of no use for this purpose. In reality, this artefact is a fridge magnet that utilises the familiar boomerang shape for the purpose of describing a stereotypical Aboriginal hunting scene on its painted surface. This truly decorative souvenir favours image over function and is implicitly aimed at ‘satisfying the consumer’ rather than ‘pleasing the artist’. It is, however, handpainted and so is not strictly a mass-produced artefact. Nevertheless, to the tourist, it is successful in bringing to mind a picturesque sense of Aboriginal Australia.

This tendency towards image over function is also the priority of the third example (Figure 16). Made by Simon Rose, a descendant of the BirriGubba and Goreng Goreng people of Queensland, this boomerang is of traditional design, obtuse angle and hewn from dense timber. The finish is imperfect and shows some small chips along its sharp edges.

The centre of the curved face is decorated with an Aboriginal-style design, featuring a black emu with white outline, set against a sea-green background, augmented with orange, red and white dots. The dotted background lends itself to a notion of three-dimensionality in the scene, with two rows of white dots depicting the contours of hills, while the more generously spaced, central red band of dots provides the illusion of receding distance.

In his statement, provided on the reverse of this boomerang, Rose is unequivocal about the intent of his work, writing that his painting style is inspired by his culture’s relationship to the land and expresses his happiness.
at ‘...fostering an appreciation of indigenous people’ (Rose, 2000). Here, much like Snider and Namatjira, the purpose is to maintain a connection with place and culture. The artist makes a deliberate engagement with the tourist market and recognises its importance in maintaining his culture across trans-cultural boundaries. This boomerang demonstrates the traditional sculptural and painting skills of the artist and is truly the art of one culture made for the benefit of another.

CONCLUSION

Whether it be Yirrkala bark paintings, dot painted coolamons or boomerangs, a vast range of tourist art product has developed. Furthermore, some tourist art commands a high price, because of the quality of work, and is collected by art dealers, patrons, institutions and discerning tourists. It is repetitively produced for the consumption of the broad tourist market but ‘conform[s] to a preconception of what (art and craft) from that place is supposed to look like’ (Brody, 1976, p. 75). This development in indigenous art can be traced back to the initial alterations discussed by Berndt, Tuckson and Black and evidenced through the examples drawn from the Berndt Museum and Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, and is continuing. For instance, the establishment of the Keringke Arts Centre at Santa Teresa (Ltyentye Apurte), Alice Springs has followed a similar pattern and today, tourist art is produced in the same studio, in many cases, by the same artists as high price painted canvasses.

The following image (Figure 17) shows the interior of the Keringke Arts Centre, in which an enormous range of goods can be seen, from handpainted model boomerangs to dot painted pottery, and other household items, fashion silks and highly detailed traditional paintings. As with Aboriginal art from Yirrkala, the Catholic nuns of this former mission settlement also recognised the assimilatory potential of the arts and crafts and promoted them accordingly, modelling the work to the demands of the market. This sensitivity is still uppermost in the mind of the present coordinator and reflected in the ongoing development of printed silk, designed for the tourist and fashion market.

A consistent factor in the production of tourist art alluded to by Tuckson is that of size and price. Both Brody and Williams, together with Graburn in his field study of the development of Eskimo tourist art, cite the importance of uniform size to facilitate shipping and price sensitivity. Above all, the most vital definition of tourist art, demonstrated in the
above field studies and others, is that tourist art is 'produced by one group for consumption by another' (Graburn, 1976, p. 2; see also Ben-Amos, 1976; Lathrap, 1976; Maduro, 1976; Batkin, 1999; Inglis, 1999; Littlefield Kasfir, 1999; and Steiner, 1999).

The recent recognition of souvenired objects within museum collections and the increasing inclusion of tourist art in fine art galleries suggest one or two things. On the one hand, it suggests that the repetitive production entailed in the making of souvenirs and the need to overcome conditions of poverty does not necessarily result in a reduction of aesthetic standards. On the other hand, it may equally suggest that fine art galleries have begun to embrace the artistic commodities of tourism as genuine works of art on the basis that they are creative expressions of people and place (Hume, 2002). In both respects, the artist/craftperson and tourist, in particular the cultural tourist, as consumer are accorded improved status in the generation of the collective memory; this is especially so in regard to those few artefacts of early tourism discovered among museum collections.

REFERENCES


Rose S. 2000. Artist’s statement included on the reverse of the artwork.


