

Yiwarra Kuju: The Canning Stock Route

National Museum of Australia

Opened 2010, touring 2012



The importance of country

We wanna tell you fellas 'bout things been happening in the past that hasn't been recorded, what old people had in their head. No pencil and paper. The white man history has been told and it's today in the book. But our history is not there properly. We've got to tell 'em through our paintings.

Clifford Brooks, Wiluna, 2007

This ground-breaking exhibition tells the story of the Canning Stock Route's impact on Aboriginal people, and the importance of the Country that surrounds it, through the works of senior and emerging artists and the stories of traditional custodians. It is a story of contact, conflict and survival, of exodus and return, seen through Aboriginal eyes, and interpreted through their voices, art and new media.

The Aboriginal people of Australia's Western Desert lived in their homelands for thousands of years. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the expansion of the Western Australian mining and pastoral industries led to the surveying of a track along which cattle could be driven from Kimberley stations to markets in the south. This track became known as the 'Canning Stock Route'.

In July and August 2007 nearly 70 artists travelled up the stock route on a six-week return to Country. Over 100 canvases were produced on that expedition, and more stories and artworks have since been added to the collection, which was acquired by the National Museum of Australia in 2009. The process supporting the development of the exhibition has shown the vitality of contemporary Australian cultural expression and created a lasting legacy of expertise and documentation from the indigenous communities involved.

The exhibition, a joint initiative between the National Museum of Australia and FORM, which was shown at the National Museum of Australia from July 2010 to January 2011, is now touring to Perth and Sydney. The exhibition, supported by a rich public events program, which includes interpretive tours by Aboriginal curators and filmmakers and outdoor projections of short films and photography, will be on show in Perth at the time of the CHOGM meeting and as part of the Commonwealth Festival which follows.

A virtual exhibition, education kits and other resources are available online at:

www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/yiwarra_kuju/