

Aak Keenkanam: From The Beginning

5 July to 2 September 2023

An exhibition of paintings & sculptures from the Wik & Kugu Arts Centre



Bruce Bell, *Howling Ku'*, 2023, ochre on wood, 40cm x 41cm x 17cm. Image courtesy of The Wik & Kugu Arts Centre.

LONDON, 5 July, 2023 - JGM Gallery presents *Aak Keenkanam: From The Beginning*.

Located in Aurukun on the west coast of Queensland's Cape York Peninsula, the Wik & Kugu Arts Centre is renowned for its sculptural tradition and its artists' striking representations of Country. Included in the exhibition are paintings and sculptures by Alair Pambegan, Leigh Namponan, Keith Wikmunea, Flora Woolla, Bruce Bell and Lex Namponan.

"Aak" is a Wik-Mungkan word that encapsulates the meanings of "Land", "Country" and "Home". In combination with "Keenkanam", which signifies ancient times in Wik-Mungkan culture, the term can be understood as "Land from the beginning". What this exhibition conveys, then, is a reverence for Wik-Mungkan land, culture and ancestral wisdom.

In Pambegan and Woolla's work, the subject matter is evenly interspersed across the surface of the canvas, imbuing their arrangements with a sense of order and interconnectedness. Pambegan reinforces this by angling his subject matter - the fish - at 0, 45 and 90 degree angles, a figurative rigidity which is also present in the *Ku'* (dogs) of Keith Wikmunea, Lex Namponan and Bruce Bell. Tails point directly up and teeth are bared horizontally or at exact diagonals, compositional decisions that nullify their aggressive posture and, far from instilling fear, endear us to these creatures. This is reinforced by the playful representative style which expresses, amongst other things, a fondness for the subject matter and the natural world in general.

The ostensible ferocity of the *Ku'* is further negated by rounded claws and vibrant colour combinations. Despite this, a tension lingers in these sculptures and there is a spectral sense of arrested energy and movement. This approach, where seemingly opposite elements are reconciled - aggression and impotence, wood and fur, rigidity and poise - is key to the dynamism in much of the work.

Metamorphosis, a central concept in many Dreamtime stories, is another prevailing theme in this exhibition. According to First Nations Australians from Aurukun, the *Ku'* travelled from the Northern Territory to the Cape York Peninsula where, at the mouth of the Knox River, it transformed into the *Nyjingkuchen* (Freshwater Shark), another recurring subject for many artists from the Wik & Kugu Arts Centre.

Jennifer Guerrini Maraldi (Director of JGM Gallery) says of the exhibition that "... this is an exquisite selection of works from the Wik & Kugu region which we are honoured to exhibit, for the first time, outside of Australia."

Exhibiting artists include: Alair Pambegan | Bruce Bell | Flora Woolla | Keith Wikmunea | Lex Namponan | Leigh Namponan.

For further information and press enquiries, please contact the gallery at info@jgmgallery.com or + 44 (0) 207 228 6027.

Opening Reception:

Wednesday, 5 July, 6:00pm - 8:00pm

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