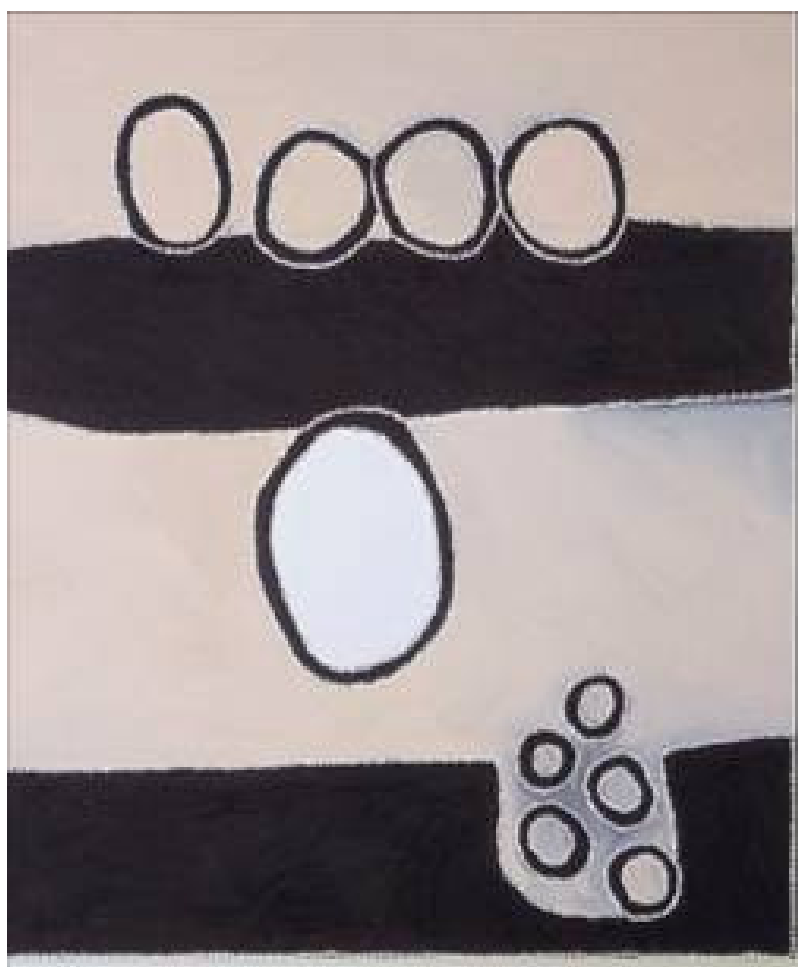


PADDY BEDFORD

Education Kit



Paddy Bedford *Cockatoo Dreaming* (2002)
ochres and pigment with acrylic binder on Belgian linen, 180 x 150 cm
Private collection. Image courtesy Jirrawun Arts
© The Estate of Mr P. Bedford

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The MCA acknowledges the recent passing in Kununurra of the artist and senior Gija Elder Mr Paddy Bedford. The Museum has consulted closely with the artist's family and with Jirrawun Arts, of which Mr Bedford was a founding member. We acknowledge and respect the wishes of the family who have provided permission for us, on the occasion of the MCA exhibition, tour and publication of Mr Bedford's work, to share publicly sensitive aspects that would normally be culturally inappropriate during sorry business. This includes the display of the artist's work, film and audio recordings, images of the artist and the use of his name.

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INTRODUCTION

This education resource kit has been produced to support the regional tour for the Museum of Contemporary Art exhibition, *Paddy Bedford*.

The aim of this kit is to offer an insight into Mr Bedford's career as an important Aboriginal artist. It examines key works in the exhibition, provides background information to the artist, and explores major themes in his painting practice.

This resource is intended for use by teachers and students of school and tertiary groups. The kit will also be valuable as a guide for Indigenous community audiences, Museum education staff, and the general visitor. This material can be used in addition to the information in the *Paddy Bedford* exhibition catalogue and the exhibition wall text.

The kit was written by Ken Watson. Since September 2005, Ken has been the Gallery Director/General Manager of Jirrawun Arts, and was previously the Assistant Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at Art Gallery of New South Wales.

HOW TO USE THIS KIT

The kit can be used in a range of ways by education groups, and for individual study and research.

Key words are defined in the Glossary. Add to this Glossary as you discover words or themes during your exploration of the exhibition. There is also an extended Glossary and extra Gija vocabulary in the exhibition catalogue.

Use the images, focus questions and activities to assist with pre-visit preparation, as a guide during the gallery visit, and to develop post-visit activities and assignments. Teachers are advised to adapt this information to suit their students'

needs or integrate aspects of the kit into existing classroom units of study.

The kit is specific to the exhibition visit to assist students and teachers to engage with and respond to actual works on art, but can also be used after the exhibition is closed or as a distance learning resource to extend the life and geographical reach of *Paddy Bedford*.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Teachers are encouraged to adapt syllabus links from the list below to suit the curriculum of their school's state. Use this list as a starter for planning or talk to Education staff at the MCA or other *Paddy Bedford* venues for lesson ideas.

Visual Arts/Creative Arts (including Drama and Dance)

- The role of the Curator
- Working in series, developing a Body of Work
- Exposure to a range of artistic practice
- Contemporary Aboriginal art, Kimberley regional artistic practice
- Diversity of media and techniques
- Art and politics, art and current events, art and personal histories
- Cultural Frame
- Methods of museum display and installation
- Music and performance in contemporary culture

English

- Response to visual stimuli
- Analysing visual texts
- Using Literacy strategies with Visual Arts
- Oral and research skills
- Creative writing and response
- Critical essays and reviews
- Learning and applying Gija language

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Society and Environment

- Artworks as commentary about interconnectedness between humans, society and surroundings
- Social issues presented from a particular community's point of view
- Visual arts as a reflection of contemporary culture
- Visual arts as a reflection of cultural or personal identity

Australian History

- Postcolonialism, colonialism and contact including massacres, frontier wars, Aboriginal responses to dispossession
- Aboriginal Histories
- Primary industries—Agriculture and Industry
- Contact history, knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal peoples
- History as a reflection of differing viewpoints from an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspective; study of History from one person's experience
- Contributions of past and present peoples to our shared heritage
- Recent changing rights and freedoms

Science and Technology

- Ecology—plants, animals and the ecological processes of the Kimberley region
- Geology of the Kimberley region
- Geography—mapping, journeys and travel

Maths

- Space and geometry
- Measurement—scale, converting linear measurement, area, coordinates
- Symmetry
- Pattern

ESL/NESB

- Developing a visual arts vocabulary list
- Written and oral responses
- Cultural identity and issues in the visual arts
- Indigenous cultures and histories

EXHIBITION INTRODUCTION

Paddy Bedford's paintings are a combination of modern materials and traditional pictorial conventions, contemporary experience and ancient belief systems. Born around 1922 on Bedford Downs Station in the remote East Kimberley region of Western Australia, Bedford began painting on canvas and board in 1998. His artistic practice from then until his recent passing in 2007 was remarkably prolific and consistently innovative. A senior lawman of the Gija people, he painted as part of ceremony all his life, and brought this wealth of symbolic, historical and technical knowledge to bear on his art.

Bedford's paintings relate the narratives of his mother's and his father's country, combining the Dreaming stories of the cockatoo, bush turkey and emu with the topography of the land he regularly traversed as a stockman, including rivers, roads, rocks and waterholes. Bedford also created paintings based on accounts of the often brutal interaction between Aboriginal people and white settlers in the early years of the 20th century, the repercussions of which continue in the Kimberley today.

With their large fields of flat colour edged with white dots, Bedford's works connect to what has been described as the 'East Kimberley' or 'Turkey Creek' painting movement. This style emerged in the late 1970s and was made famous by artists such as Rover Thomas, Queenie McKenzie and Paddy Jaminji. While his bold compositions of stark, rounded shapes have provided a consistent structure for his paintings, Bedford also always experimented with colour, form and pictorial space, with rapid and regular shifts occurring in his work.

This exhibition aims to demonstrate Mr Bedford's powerful command of painting, and traces the development of his motifs and techniques over his career. It includes a series of Bedford's early, densely patterned panels of red, yellow and black ochres; a selection of his more recent black and white canvases, with their dramatic play between positive and negative space; and a range of his

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vivid gouache works, their fluid lines and bright colours revealing a spontaneous, playful dimension to the artist's practice. Together they present a unique vision, drawing upon the specifics of Bedford's country and its history as well as connecting to the wider artistic and social concerns at play in Australia today.

Paddy Bedford introductory wall text, written by Russell Storer.

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Paddy Bedford
Born c. 1922. Died 2007.

I know the law and my paintings have law.
 Paddy Bedford

Frances Kofod, 'Jirrawun Artist's Stories', *Paddy Bedford*,
 exhibition catalogue, MCA, Sydney, 2006,
 p. 25

Paddy Bedford was a man of Jawalyi skin who was born at Bedford Downs Station in the East Kimberley. His English name was given by station manager Paddy Quilty, who, on hearing the newly born child cry at the birth tree, said, 'Is it a boy or a girl? Well name him Paddy after me'. Paddy Bedford grew up on Bedford Downs where he learned to work as a cattleman for the usual rations and tobacco. His sister, Liddy, married Timmy Timms at Greenvale Station just north of Bedford Downs when they were very young. Bedford also sometimes worked with his brother-in-law on Greenvale and on Bow River Station after Greenvale became part of Bow River. As well, he spent time working on Texas Downs and Tableland Stations. Like all his contemporaries, Bedford combined stock work for the pastoralists with development of knowledge of traditional law and ceremony. He was famous as a dancer, and for being able to dodge spears in a fight.

A couple of years before Mr Bedford's birth, a group of his Gija and Worla relations had been murdered by strychnine poisoning in retaliation for the killing of one milking cow near Mt. King, an emu dreaming place on Bedford Downs. After the murders, the people moved out to the government station at Violet Valley, but by the time of the artist's birth they had been persuaded to return to work at Bedford Downs.

In 2000, together with fellow artist, the late Timmy Timms, Bedford revealed the existence of

a *Joonba*, a song and dance cycle telling the story of the Bedford Downs killings that had not previously been shown to outsiders. The artist

had been a singer and dancer in many performances of this *Joonba* when he was a young man. The song and dance cycle together with oral histories by the two artists formed the basis for the Neminuwarlin Performance Group's production *Fire, Fire Burning Bright*. This performance premiered at the Perth International Arts Festival in February 2002 and was staged at Victoria's State Theatre as part of the Melbourne Festival in October the same year. Paddy Bedford was a generous sponsor of both productions.

When young, Paddy Bedford and Timmy Timms were taken to Bungarin, the leprosarium near Derby. They had not contracted leprosy, but stayed at Bungarin for a few years before returning to the East Kimberley. During this time, Bedford met the late Emily Watson, the mother of three of his children, Kathy, Phillip and Patricia. Kathy was born at Bungarin and the others were born in Derby. His other daughter, Theresa Morgan, whose mother was a Worla woman from Oombulgarri, was also born in Derby. Bedford's older brother's daughter, Mary-Lou Bedford, whom he considers to be his daughter in the traditional way, was born at Bedford Downs. When Bedford returned to the East Kimberley, he continued to combine stock work with ceremonial life, making long trips between Bow River, Fitzroy Crossing, Derby and Oombulgarri in connection with law business.

Bedford worked for a short time in Wyndham for the Main Roads Department, helping to build part of the Gibb River Road and the road to Moolchalabra Dam. Following recovery from an injury sustained while shifting heavy rocks, Bedford returned to Bedford Downs where he worked until the time a station manager killed all the camp dogs and he and his Gija wife, the late Topsy Bedford, and all remaining Gija workers left for good and moved to Warmun (Warrmarn, Turkey Creek).

As a senior law man, Paddy Bedford was involved in painting as part of ceremony all his life. He began painting on canvas for exhibition after Freddie Timms established the Jirrawun

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Aboriginal Art group at Rugun (Crocodile Hole) in 1998. Bedford's paintings combine important family dreamings such as emu, turkey and cockatoo with roads, rivers, the living areas for traditional life and stock camp life, stock-yards and country visited while mustering.

Two of Paddy Bedford's works, *Emu dreaming and Bedford Downs massacre* and *Two women looking at the Bedford Downs massacre burning place* were included in the exhibition *Blood on the spinifex* at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne in 2002–03. Bedford's work was central to *True stories*, the Art Gallery of New South Wales's 2003 exhibition of East Kimberley art. From this exhibition, the gallery made a special purchase for its Yiribana Collection of the *Jirrawun suite* of twenty-three gouaches, including fifteen by Bedford.

Paddy Bedford was one of eight Indigenous Australian artists commissioned by the Musée du quai Branly, which opened in 2006 on the banks of the Seine in Paris. One of Bedford's paintings, *Thoowoonggoonarrin* (2006) has been reproduced as a permanent installation on a wall of the new museum.

© Paddy Bedford and Jirrawun Arts

SELECTED EXHIBITION HISTORY

Solo exhibitions

2005

Paddy Bedford—Heart of blackness, William Mora Galleries, Melbourne

2004

Paddy Bedford—rolling the swag, William Mora Galleries, Melbourne

2003

Paddy Bedford—walking the line, GrantPirrie, Sydney

2002

Paddy Bedford—significant paintings, GrantPirrie, Sydney

2001

Paddy Bedford, Raft Artspace, Darwin

2000

Paddy Bedford, Chapman Galleries, Canberra
Paddy Bedford, Martin Browne Fine Art, Sydney

1998

My country, William Mora Galleries, Melbourne

Group exhibitions

2005

Beyond the Frontier Sherman Galleries, Sydney

2004

2004, National Gallery of Victoria
Talking about abstraction, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, University of New South Wales College of Fine Arts, Sydney

Spirit and Vision, Sammlung Essl, Klosterneuburg, Austria

2003

Journey to now: John Kaldor art projects and collection, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

True stories: Art of the East Kimberley, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Jirrawun jazz, Raft Artspace, Darwin

2002

Blood on the spinifex, the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne

Commissions

2004 - 2006

Musée du quai Branly, Paris

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Country

Paddy Bedford's father's country in the north of Bedford Downs happens to form an adjoining estate to his mother's country in the south. A map of sites and associated Dreaming stories indicates the range of significant sites in his homeland, with which he remains identified. The campsites where he first stayed with his parents, uncles and relations, he later frequented when mustering cattle with fellow stockmen. His mother, who died in middle age, was buried in her own country not far from Wirwirji, or Tea Hole, a deep waterhole of 'living water' used for watering the bullocks.

Beyond figuring one's social affiliations within the complex web of skin-names, memorising their relation to names of Dreaming sites and the corresponding stories and songs in one's country is a pre-requisite of cultural identity and competence. The allegorical nature of such stories may yield a multiplicity of interpretations, which spatially interconnect sites in country. For instance the Emu Dreaming in Paddy Bedford's father's country forms part of an ancestral path connected to the Bush Turkey site, more than twenty kilometres to the north, or at least one day's walk along the escarpment of the Durack Ranges. Paddy Bedford's paintings frame each site separately. Emu and Bush Turkey may be considered as a pair in this context.

Michiel Dolk, 'Are we strangers in this place?', *Paddy Bedford*, exhibition catalogue, MCA, Sydney, 2006, p.21

Paddy Bedford's Mother's, Mother and Uncles', and Father's country.

Paddy Bedford inherited the right to tell Dreamings and stories connected to his Father's, Mother's and Uncles' country. The sites listed below appear as locations in his paintings, and in the titles of the works.

Father

Barangen – Bedford Downs
 Bemberrawoonany – Brumby Spring
 Garnanganyjel – Mount King
 Garnkoorbany – Jack Flood
 Goordbelayin – Bedford Downs massacre site
 Jamelayigoon – Fig Tree Hole
 Jawoonarrany – Queensland Creek
 Jawooraban – McPhee Hole Cockatoo Dreaming
 Jimbirlan – Dicky Spring Dreaming
 Lerndijwaneman – Lightning Creek Turkey Dreaming
 Mardarrnginy – Gum Hole II
 Merrmerri – Queensland Creek
 Ngarrmaliny – Police Hole on Foal Creek
 Thalngarrwany – Saddlers Jump Up

Mother

Barlooban – Motor Car Yard
 Biriyalji – Fish Hole
 Garndiwarl – Dingo Dreaming
 Gawarnji – Maxine Plain
 Gerlinggengayin – Blue Dress
 Gernawarliyan – Camel Gap
 Girlingmanji – Twenty Mile
 Goonyoorban – Eagle Hawk Bottle Tree
 Gooweriny – Mad Gap
 Janterri – Dolly Hole
 Jinanggany – Cattle Creek
 Joogoomoorndin – Carola Gully
 Joowarringayin – Donkey Spring Devil Dreaming
 Manjalngarriny – Dingo Springs
 Merrewoon – Fish Hole II
 Wirwirji – Tea Hole
 Yoowangeny – Mud Springs

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Mother and Uncles'

Boonoonggoowirrin – Middle Brand
 Doowoonan – Old Bedford
 Jiljin – Red Pocket
 Langaban – Jack Amble Bore
 Mendoooorrji – Medicine Pocket
 Thoonbi – Ord River

Focus questions and activities

Primary Level

Pre-visit

Look at maps of the East Kimberley. Locate Bedford Downs Station, Warmun (Turkey Creek), Kununurra and Wyndham on the map.

Find pictures that show the landscape of the East Kimberley and the occupations of the people who live there.

What are landscape paintings? Collect some examples from books or magazines.

How do different artists represent the landscape? Research artworks that represent your local area. Identify which artists use aerial perspective, and which use linear perspective (incorporate a horizon line).

Compare a range of maps such as street directories and topographical maps that incorporate contour lines. Observe the different systems and codes used by each map.

In the gallery

Look at how Paddy Bedford painted the East Kimberley landscape. Which elements of the landscape did Bedford include most often? What elements are rarely used?

Post-visit

Make your own map of the East Kimberley based on the map in this resource and on a map or atlas or globe at school.

Paint your favourite landscape. Make a key which shows how humans, animals and ecological aspects interact and coexist.

Paint the landscape that you live in. Develop symbols to show information about social aspects important to you. For example, places where members of the community gather, where your friends or relatives live, or the location of significant monuments to human endeavour. Include water as Bedford's works often feature this.

Make a model of an imaginary landscape. Incorporate symbolic information about legendary deeds carried out by people or creatures.

Record onto tape a verbal description of a journey to and from school including details of the built and natural environments. For example, describe the route from your home to your school. Include well-known human-made sites as well as any prominent geographical features such as hills or waterways. Encourage use of conventions such as North, South, East, West, and right, left, etc. This activity could then be used as a review at the end of a unit of work where students carry out a second verbal description and include additional information such as land formations and plant types previously unnoticed.

Learn as many Aboriginal words as possible for plants, animals and places in your local area. Compile a glossary.

Write a poem based on a journey, for example a recent holiday you and your family undertook. Include details about the built and natural features in the regions through which you pass, as well as, for example, a variety of weather conditions experienced along the way.

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Identify the Aboriginal language spoken in your local region. Investigate the local community to find out if there are people who continue to use the language.

Secondary Level

Pre-visit

Locate Bedford's Father's, Mother's and Uncles' Country on a map of the region. You could use the detailed map on page 131 of the exhibition catalogue.

Can you visualise Paddy Bedford's Father's country in relation to his Mother's country?

How can ideas relating to the concept of 'My Country' be described in text, prose or poetry and visually, in an artwork or performance?

Using various resources such as maps, internet, books, explore the geography and climate of the East Kimberley.

Research the history of the East Kimberley since gold mining and pastoral activity began in the late 19th century until the present day. Make a timeline of key events.

Look at various ways of representing the landscape in maps and paintings from different cultures, such as Aboriginal, European and Asian. What are some differences and similarities?

How do Aboriginal ideas of personal identity connect to the landscape?

Research other East Kimberley artists, such as Freddie Timms and Rover Thomas, and compare their work—visually and thematically—to Mr Bedford's practice.

In the gallery

Use the map which depicts Bedford's Mother's and Father's country to locate the areas portrayed in his paintings.

Describe the materials and techniques used by Bedford in his paintings.

Study three different Dreamings described in Paddy Bedford's painting.

What do we learn about contemporary issues in Australia through Bedford's work?

Post-visit

Discuss the concept of 'Country' in relation to Bedford's life and work. What is your concept of 'Country'? How does this impact on your own artwork?

Research map-making and the technique of topographical and aerial perspective. Make a map of your local environment using maps from local Council or the Library as source material.

Visualise 'your' Country and make a 2-dimensional or 3-dimensional representation of it. Vary the perspective.

Research the influence Aboriginal people are reported to have had on an animal or plant species. Compare a contemporary human population's impact on an animal or plant species in your local area. Identify what can be done to assist the animal population in the future, rather than continue to deplete numbers, or threaten their extinction. For example, you could nurture species of *Grevillea* that provide nectar for native parrots.

After watching the video in the exhibition, research contemporary dance styles performed by Aboriginal people today, for example the Bangarra Dance Theatre, www.bangarra.com.au

What are some primary industries currently carried out in the Kimberley region?

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Summarise the impact and contributions these industries, for example mining and agriculture, have on the economy, the natural environment and the human populations of the region.

In her *Paddy Bedford* catalogue essay, *Goowoomji's World* (p. 99), Marcia Langton quotes from several official reports about conditions in the East Kimberley and asks the question:

It is challenging to write about the grinding poverty, violence and racist exclusion in which so many Aboriginal people in the east Kimberley live, and yet at the same time to communicate the beauty and grandeur of their lives. Australians are accustomed to media depictions that on page one of the newspaper heartlessly recount the latest violent death of an Aboriginal person, and on page ten, lyrically describe the artwork of a 'revered' elder. How can their lives be brutal and beautiful at the same time?

What exactly do you think Langton is trying to convey in this statement? What do you think Langton means by the 'beauty and grandeur of their lives' and why is it a 'challenge' to write about this? Discuss as a class.

Can you explain how this situation has come about? Discuss how you could represent this paradoxical feeling in the mediums of painting, sculpture or installation.

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Dreamings

Dreamings are an essential part of Aboriginal contemporary life. The Dreamings in this kit are in the words of Mr Bedford.

Emu Dreaming

The emu came travelling with people from the west, from Tableland Station country, they came along through the gaps in the hills. Then the emu got stuck when she came down the hill there (at Mount King). She was stuck like that then when the turkey kept going. The turkey went on through the gap down to the open country and made camp. The emu got stuck for good because she took a sulk when the turkey stopped. If that had not happened we would have been walking in constant daylight, day after day. Good job the turkey made the law for us so that we can make camp at night.



Paddy Bedford *Emu Dreaming* (1998) ochres and pigment with acrylic binder on Belgian linen 122 x 135 cm Hassall collection, Sydney
Image courtesy of Museum of Contemporary Art.
Photograph by Jenni Carter
© The Estate of Mr P. Bedford



Paddy Bedford *Garnanganyjel Emu Dreaming (Emu Dreaming and Bedford Downs massacre)* (2000) ochres and pigment with acrylic binder on Belgian linen 150 x 180cm.
Korman collection, Perth. Image courtesy Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne © The Estate of Mr P. Bedford

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Cockatoo Dreaming

The 'white cockatoo' came from the east, he came back from Melbourne and met a large group of people walking. He got up early and came from the east. He walked up from the direction of Melbourne where he had been staying.^[1] He met a large number of men. He stopped them and spoke to them. 'Where are you all going?' he asked. 'Oh, we are going south', [they said]. 'You are not Gooniyandi'^[2] people. Where will you stay? You should all stay right here', [he said to them]. They were stopped from going any further there at Jawooraban. It was the 'white cockatoo' who blocked their way.

The large group of people all walking together were heading south. They wanted to go south but the 'white cockatoo' stopped them. They all sat down there when he told them, 'You are not Gooniyandi', and he blocked their way. He came walking from over there. He met up with the big group of people. He climbed up from the river to the top of the hill when he was coming from the east. The big group of people wanted to go keep going a long way. This outsider, this 'white cockatoo', came and stopped them. He had a song. He sang and they all sat down. They all sat down then. They did not go. They stayed there for good. It was in dreamtime. This happened in dreamtime. Well this is what I paint. It is from my father's country. My father's country comes right down here to Lerndijwaneman.



Paddy Bedford *Cockatoo Dreaming* (2002)
ochres and pigment with acrylic binder on Belgian linen
180 x 150 cm
Private collection Image courtesy Jirrawun Arts
© The Estate of Mr P. Bedford

^[1] In Melbourne, William Mora and Tony Oliver took Mr Bedford to visit a place near the Melbourne Cricket Ground where trees carry marks left by the original inhabitants of that place before the arrival of Europeans. Bedford recognised it as the place where the cockatoo began his journey.

^[2] The Gooniyandi people's country is south and west of Gija country.

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Lerndijwaneman— Lightning Creek Turkey Dreaming

The place where we have landed is the place where the bush turkey walked to when she left the emu (at Mount King). She left everyone behind and came to Lightning Creek. She made camp here in this place. She walked here and made her camp here. She slept and she ate food. She ate that little fruit called *gawoorroony*.

'I will stay here camping', she said. She spoke using those words. Because of those words we sleep at night. She is the one who made camp for all of us. She is the one who brought sleep into existence for us in dreamtime.

Lightning Creek is called Lerndijwaneman, 'the place where he made stone spear heads'. A man used to flake the stone to make the spear heads when he was staying here. That is why they named this place Lerndijwaneman. It is from the dreamtime. It was the nightjar who used to make spear heads here when he was a man. When he was making the spear heads the turkey came looking around here. She went to sleep on the red ground here. Because the turkey did that we all sleep at night.

'Paddy Bedford's Stories', transcribed and translated by Frances Kofod, *Paddy Bedford*, exhibition catalogue, MCA, Sydney, 2006, p.80

Dreamings—general focus questions

Primary Level

Write a list of all the different animals you can find in the paintings.

What animal represents you? Choose an animal and make a painting series or a cartoon. Paddy Bedford placed the Emu and the Bush Turkey in the same painting—you could combine two animals in each image.

Secondary Level

Select one of the Dreamings Paddy Bedford painted. Choose the story of the Cockatoo, the story of the Emu and the Bush Turkey or the Bedford Downs Massacre. Look carefully and see how Bedford described the story in different ways in his paintings.

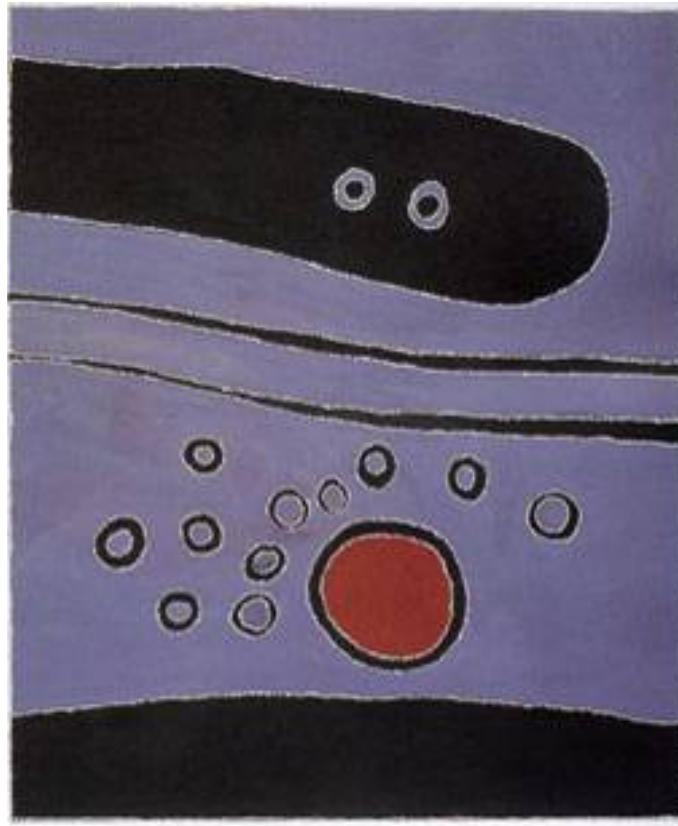
How do the paintings differ from each other?

How would you describe the use of 'dots' as a compositional device in the paintings? What 'perspectives' can you see in these paintings? Where is the viewer situated?

In the story as told by Mr Bedford, Emu and Bush Turkey became the protagonists in the creation of night and day. Notions of 'activity/work' and 'rest' are also implied. Can you see night and day reflected in the paintings? Describe how you think this idea is expressed.

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Bedford Downs Massacre



Paddy Bedford, *Two Women looking at the Bedford Downs Massacre burning place* (2002)
ochres and pigment with acrylic binder on Belgian linen, 180 x 150 cm.
Private collection. Image courtesy Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne
© The Estate of Mr P. Bedford

Well this is the place where my old boss killed lots of people at one time, the killing place near the Emu Dreaming at Mount King. The wagon brought them along the road to this place. When they stopped here, the white man looked at them and said, 'You all cut wood now. Cut quickly, heap it up and then you'll have dinner'. They cut wood here, there and all around. Then they ate poisoned food and staggered around dying. Then the fire was lit.

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Tony Oliver and Frances Kofod, *Blood on the Spinifex*, exhibition catalogue, Ian Potter Museum of Art, 2002, p.24

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The site of the killings at Bedford Downs known as *Goordbelayin* ('a place where many were killed at one time') lies below and within sight of the Emu Dreaming on Mt King (*Garnanganyjel*), near the source of the Ord River.

The historical circumstances of these events can only be briefly summarised here. The ostensible reason for the killings was retribution for the spearing and eating of a bullock that had strayed into a men's camp. The men were consequently rounded up and despatched in chains to Wyndham Police Station. Instead of being summarily tried and sent on to Rottnest Island, they were allowed to return to Bedford Downs, each with a 'ticket' around his neck. Unable to read, the men interpreted the tickets as an official guarantee of safe passage. In the light of subsequent events the tickets could have been interpreted as a death warrant. [...] The men were assembled and sent on a dray to cut wood, whereupon they were poisoned and burned on the woodpile. [...] The massacre scene was witnessed by two women hiding in the spinifex on a hill above the site. [...] Their reports prompted the Aboriginal residents to flee Bedford Downs for Violet Valley.

Michiel Dolk, 'Are we strangers in this place?', *Paddy Bedford*, exhibition catalogue, MCA, Sydney, 2006, p. 27

Activities and focus questions

Primary Level

Pre-visit

Visit a local Aboriginal heritage site. In groups find a number of significant dates and create a timeline. Think about and discuss what life during this period would have been like.

Find three different maps which show the place you have visited. Look at a street directory, a train map and an atlas or Google Earth.

In the gallery

How has Mr Bedford shown where there is a very important place in his painting?

What are the colours and paints that Bedford used to paint with made of?

Post-visit

Use three colours to draw a map of your journey from home to school. Use simple shapes to describe things that you pass like a big tree, a park or a special building. Use one colour to show the most important places in your map.

Identify the benefits of living in a culturally diverse society and how to demonstrate peaceful resolution of conflict, for example, Harmony Day activities.

Invite representatives of community groups to participate in a forum on cultural diversity and how it has influenced their lives, eg. members could include sports person, actor, journalist, religious representative. Students can write letters of appreciation reflecting on the visit and how it has impacted on the sense of community in their school.

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Secondary Level

Pre-visit

What do you think could be some of the differences and similarities between oral and written histories? How well do you think the different ways of relating history succeed?

Research the recent controversy known as the 'History Wars', especially the contributions to the debate made by historians Henry Reynolds and Keith Windschuttle (Windschuttle challenged the established oral histories of various events). This controversy raises questions about hidden and sensitive stories, particularly within families or communities. Debate this issue as a class. See the References in this kit for newspaper articles to read.

Discuss some ways you could represent a tragic event in poetry, song, dance, painting or sculpture. Can you think of other examples such as paintings, plays or films that portray such stories? Consider stories about other cultures. Students could research or ask older family members about stories to do with their cultures.

Paintings of subject matter such as the Bedford Downs Massacre raise issues of historical accuracy and transparency and the way that Australian history has been recorded by white society in contrast to the way these events have been taught/passed down in Aboriginal culture. Discuss the positive and negative outcomes that could arise as a result of an art exhibition that reveals information that has not been documented in the 'mainstream'. You could curate an exhibition around this issue—discuss as a class which artists and artworks you would include.

In the gallery

Which of the Bedford Downs Massacre paintings in the exhibition is the most comprehensive in terms of the story?

Can you locate the different components of the story, such as the trees that were chopped down, women hiding, massacre site or the pile of logs?

Watch the DVD of the jooonba performance *Fire, Fire Burning Bright* in the exhibition. The accompanying notes to this performance in 2000 stated, "Only when the truth about Australia's past is recognised by non-indigenous people can there be real peace and friendship between black and white". Discuss this quote in relation to the revealing of the Bedford Downs Massacre.

Post-visit

Research the Jirrawun artists' exhibition *Blood on the Spinifex (2002)*. How do you think this exhibition contributed to a more inclusive reporting and understanding of events that are politically and historically important to Gija people and, by implication, to all Australians?

Are some subjects taboo or too sensitive to portray as an artwork? Which ones?

If you could translate a personal/family event into some kind of artwork how would you do this?

What 'sensitivities' do you think you would have to negotiate in order to facilitate the production of the artwork/performance?

Illustrated are two paintings that relate to the Bedford Downs Massacre. What are the differences between the paintings? Why do you think this is? What facts is the artist conveying in each painting?

Study Mr Bedford's paintings of the Bedford Downs massacre story. How else could this story be visually represented?

Select an historical or contemporary event or an incident that you feel close to personally or that interests you and create an artwork that uses minimal information or abstract forms to represent the event.

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Technique

*I have painted mother's and father's country.
Now I am just painting.*
Paddy Bedford

Michiel Dolk, 'Are we strangers in this place?', *Paddy Bedford*, exhibition catalogue, MCA, Sydney, 2006, p.25

Paddy Bedford's practice is notable for its technical and formal experimentation which, along with his telling of stories of Country, results in a unique and easily recognisable body of work. The exhibition *Paddy Bedford* shows the artist's exploration of colour, form, composition, pictorial space, surface texture, motif and materials.

Notes on Paddy Bedford's painting technique:

- He worked on pre-primed, stretched canvas and paints with brushes.
- He painted outside, with the canvas placed on the ground, flat on a table, or rested on a milk-crate and rotated to face him.
- The artist had assistants to help with preparing paints, mixing colours and giving him canvases.
- He worked to set canvas sizes, the largest being 150 x 180cm. The act of painting is quite physical, and the canvas size was limited by his arm's reach.
- He painted the black first, followed by other colours. Dotting is done last.
- The artist didn't do preparatory sketches but worked direct onto the canvas.
- He used commercial black acrylic paint (traditional black charcoal is too transparent) but used ochre for reds. He added in brick dust (known in the community as 'grog') to acrylic binders and pigments to give texture to the painting surface.

Focus questions and activities

Primary Level

Pre-visit

Looking at the Jirrawun Arts website, make a list of the materials East Kimberley artists use in their paintings. When you are visiting the exhibition, cross-check which of these are used by Paddy Bedford.

Locate the East Kimberley region on a map or globe. How far is this from your school or your town? Have any members of your class been to this region? As a class, discuss what the differences in landscape, colour and light would be between the East Kimberley and your area.

Make an illustrated timeline of Mr Bedford's career, focusing on the formal development in his work. Make sure you put in when he made key series or key artworks.

In the gallery

Look at one painting from a distance. Can you see the brush marks? Move closer, no closer than one metre from the painting, and describe the painting including the brush marks and surface texture.

What colours did Paddy Bedford use? As you move through the exhibition, list the colours. How would you describe the colours that Paddy Bedford used? Are they warm or cool colours? On a colour wheel, investigate if the colours are complementary colours. In pairs, on a piece of paper track the stages of Bedford's use of colour during his painting career.

Look at one wall of works, for instance the works in gouache on paper or a wall of earlier works with ochre. Compare and contrast the use of patterning and symmetry in the paintings. Identify as a class which were Bedford's preferred compositions.

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Post-visit

Develop a word bank of adjectives to describe different aspects of the painting. Make a table with words to describe tone, texture, line and patterns, for instance, 'thick' or 'crooked' to describe a type of line used by Bedford.

In the exhibition, listen to the audioguide. Also, look carefully at the surface of the paintings. When you get back to school, select one key work and write a paragraph on what you think are the key steps the artist used to make this painting.

Bedford developed an artistic vocabulary of lines to represent creeks, bush tracks or roads, and to divide areas of land from water. Develop your own set of symbols and motifs to represent a landscape or journey relevant to you, for instance, your trip to school, a family holiday, or the trip from your bedroom to your backyard.

In small groups, make a series of works exploring the idea of journey. Following the trip to and from the exhibition, come up with a list of symbols for the excursion to the gallery, for instance a simple train track if you came by rail. Using these symbols, and utilising the central or 'frame within a frame' compositions used by Mr Bedford, make some two-colour collages or paintings telling the story of your journey. Make sure you consider positive and negative space.

Secondary Level

Pre-visit

Research Paddy Bedford's practice by looking on the internet, in newspaper or magazine articles, and by reading the *Paddy Bedford* exhibition catalogue. Artworks look very different in reproduction from when you see the actual work of art in a gallery context. As a class, discuss what do you think the works will look like—consider issues of scale, surface texture and colour.

Bedford had a well-defined range of subject matter that he painted. Identify his main subjects,

and make a list, or make thumb-nail sketches, of his key symbols or motifs for each subject.

Research other artists and their work from the East Kimberley. Paddy Bedford painted for Jirrawun Arts. Other East Kimberley artist's organisations are Warmun Art Centre and Waringarri Aboriginal Arts. Devise a summary document or short essay which compares and contrasts different artist's styles or approaches.

In the gallery

Paddy Bedford began painting in 1998 using the wet-on-dry method of painting. In 2003, he began to use the wet-on-wet technique. Identify paintings using the wet-on-dry and wet-on-wet techniques. What differences can you see through using each technique? Why do you think he changed his technique?

Can you see a development of the artist's style in this exhibition? How has the exhibition installation emphasised this? Write a short summary of what you feel are the five key points of Mr Bedford's stylistic development.

Compare and contrast the developing use of colour in the exhibition. In your VAPD, note the different colours (and treatment of areas of colour) in key series. How would you describe the use of colour in the paintings on canvas in contrast to the gouache paintings? Adapt some of Paddy Bedford's exploration of colour and brushstroke into your own Body of Work.

What sort of emotions do Mr Bedford's paintings evoke? Do particular bodies of work evoke humour, sadness, excitement, exhilaration? Which ones? Explain why.

Describe the way Paddy Bedford divided up the picture plane. Do some small thumb-nail sketches to help you remember. Look at other aspects of his composition, for example: central line division, 'frame within a frame'. Bedford depicted an innate 'geometry' and 'geography', both of which are constantly represented/reinterpreted in his paintings. What

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relationship, if any, do you think this 'geometry' has to the artist's country?

Post-visit

Paddy Bedford started painting for exhibition when he was almost eighty. In the Western tradition that recognises artmaking as a career option, this seems late for an artist. Discuss the contrast between the roles of art for ceremony and art as commodity in European Australian and Aboriginal cultures.

Bedford's approach to painting landscape shifted from an aerial perspective to a more traditional linear view of the landscape. Discuss and examine the shift in perspective from earlier to later landscape works. Do sketches or preparatory paintings for two artworks based on one landscape or site—make one artwork that is based on linear perspective, the other from an aerial perspective. Carry out a third artwork that is a close-up, detailed view one part of the landscape or scene. Compare the results.

What is distinctive about Bedford's paintings in contrast to paintings by Rover Thomas, Queenie McKenzie, Freddie Timms and other East Kimberley painters? What are the similarities?

Experiment with some of Mr Bedford's techniques using your own subject matter. Practice the wet-on-wet painting technique, then compare this with the results you get through using wet-on-dry technique. Try different combinations of materials such as oil pastels and watercolour. Paint or collage an image using two or three colours, then repeat the same image using a range of colours. What effect does limiting the colours have on the finished work as opposed to the use of a range of colours?

What sort of emotions do Bedford's paintings evoke for you? Do particular bodies of work evoke humour, sadness, excitement, exhilaration? Which ones? Explain why. Describe how Paddy Bedford's paintings responded to his experience of the East

Kimberley landscape. Reference particular works to support your statement.

Explore the concept and use of positive and negative space. This was a strong visual aspect of Mr Bedford's painting practice. Select a painting in the exhibition that you think is a good example of the use of positive and negative space. Make your own series of works using these principles. Work in two colours, or try making a series of collages or gouache works.

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GLOSSARY

Bedford Downs: Cattle station situated in the East Kimberley, northern Western Australia.

Binder: A sort of glue used to ensure the paint sticks to a surface (whether it is a traditional surface such as rock, bark or a person's skin, or a more contemporary material such as canvas or paper). Traditionally spinifex gum or egg yolk, blood, saliva were used as binders. Nowadays the most commonly used binder is acrylic which is flexible and stable.

Bow River: Cattle station situated in the East Kimberley, northern Western Australia.

Composition: The arrangement of parts (shapes etc.) in a piece of art so as to form a unified whole.

Country: A specific place or area of land that Aboriginal people identify with. The 'bones of the landscape', consisting of rocks, hills, waterholes, creeks and caves.

Dreaming: Dreaming is like religion - it combines culture, beliefs and way of life and gives meaning to everything in the world. The Dreaming guides Aboriginal people and is linked to stories, language, art and actions.

East Kimberley: Area of Australia situated in the north east of Western Australia.

Fibreboard (MDF medium density board, also known as customboard): A building material composed of wood chips or plant fibres bonded together and compressed into rigid sheets.

Gouache is a heavy, opaque watercolour paint which has been used for centuries in fine art and also in design applications. Gouache forms an opaque reflective layer on the surface and is not a stain like most watercolour pigment.

Greenvale: Former cattle station situated in the East Kimberley, northern Western Australia.

Jirrawun Arts: A private company established in 1998 by Aboriginal artist Freddie Timms to represent and support Gija artists and Gija culture. The company is funded by the sale of works, and is artist-owned.

Joonba: Gija word to describe a song and dance ceremony that has been described as akin to opera. Corroboree is another word that could be used in place of joonba.

Land: For Aboriginal people, concepts of land relate to how an individual views land and land ownership and their place in it.

Map: A representation, usually on a plane surface, of a region of the earth or heavens.

Media: Any material that communicates information eg: pencil, camera, voice. Also can refer to a mode of art practice such as film or photography.

Medium: The materials used in a specific artistic technique.

Ngarranggarni: Dreaming stories of the Gija.

Ochre is a very finely textured natural rock coloured by minerals and oxides. Ochre is found near rivers, streams or valleys where the rock surface has been eroded. The ochre is ground into a fine powder and mixed with a fluid to bind it together. The use red ochre is often used to symbolise the blood of ancestral beings. Ochre is used by many Aboriginal artists in paintings or to decorate the body for ceremony.

Pigment: A substance used as colouring. Pigments are usually an insoluble powder, to be mixed with water, oil, or another base to produce paint or similar products. In addition to ochres the main pigments used in Aboriginal art are charcoal, fine white and coloured clay.

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Spinifex: A type of Australian grass which grows in sandy soils. Aboriginal people use the resin as glue.

Tableland: Cattle station situated in the East Kimberley, northern Western Australia.

Texas Downs: Cattle station situated in the East Kimberley, northern Western Australia.

Topography: A detailed, precise representation of a place or region.

Violet Valley: Cattle station situated in the East Kimberley, northern Western Australia.

Waringarri Aboriginal Arts: Art centre located at Kununurra in the East Kimberley.

Warmun Art Centre: Art centre located at Warmun (Turkey Creek) in the East Kimberley.

Wet-on-wet: painting technique where wet paint is applied onto an underlying layer of wet paint.

Wet-on-dry: painting technique where wet paint is applied onto an underlying layer of dry paint.

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Paddy Bedford exhibition audioguide. Features the artist telling key Dreamings in Gija, with English translation.

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<http://www.historians.org.au/discus/messages/4/7.html>

Art Centres/Artist Organisations

For media information and links to articles about Paddy Bedford and Jirrawun Arts:
www.jirrawunarts.com

Two other East Kimberley artist organisations are Warmun Art Centre and Waringarri Aboriginal Arts (email: waaknx@agn.net.au)

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