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Petty Commodity Production in the Central Australian Art and Craft Industry

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Art and craft production is widely practised by Aboriginal people in remote communities today but the output of this industry is not, nor has it ever been, large. In Arnhem Land, for example, where the production of art and craft has long been significant, the percentage of total income derived from this source in one productive outstation community in 1974 was only 13% [ALTMAN 1987]. In the neighbouring regional centre of Maningrida it dropped to less than 1%.

The Federal government has sought to develop this industry because it provides one of the only avenues for Aboriginal people to make money in areas of Australia that have limited employment opportunities. In 1971, it established a marketing company, Aboriginal Arts and Craft Pty Ltd. to open up shops and galleries around Australia in order to promote sales. The main target in the 1970s and early 1980s was the tourist market. Since its establishment the Company has gone through several transformation but in 1982 when the research on which this paper is based was carried out, it had galleries in Adelaide, Perth, Cairns, Darwin and Alice Springs coordinated by a head office and gallery in Sydney. These galleries were supplied from a number of craft centres established in remote communities and run by craft advisers whose job it was and is to organise and market the production [PETERSON 1983].

The first gallery to be established by the Company was the Centre for Aboriginal Artists and Craftsmen (CAAC) in Alice Springs in 1974. It is a pleasant art gallery located in the middle of the town and was the main gallery in the area, catering to both domestic and foreign tourists. Prices were moderate and the artefacts sold were largely souvenirs although the gallery stocked some fine art. The CAAC gallery was run by a general manager, an accountant and part-time clerks. It faces a public park which functions as a gathering place for Aboriginal people including those who come to sell their products to the Centre on weekdays. While most of the gallery's stock was sold to it directly from the community craft centres many individual artists and crafts people brought their work to the shop door to sell. In such situations prices were settled by the staff according to a prepared price list for on-the-spot cash. The CAAC maintained a door purchase ledger in which it recorded for each transaction, the date, name of the seller, their domicile, the type of artefact or artefacts, the unit price and the quantity. Although the ledger does not record gender or total sales price both of these can be

established from the information in it. This paper will consider the nature of the economic activity of the shop door sellers to the CAAC gallery.

THE CAAC LEDGER 1981-1982

For the financial year 1981-1982 the ledger records door sale transactions involving 4,475 pieces worth \$A 14,063. Artefacts costing less than \$A 10 comprised 86% of purchases and 99% of artefacts were purchased by the Centre for less than \$A 30. Most of these items retailed for less than \$A 50. A comparison of these figures with data from community craft centre purchases in Arnhem Land (Table 1) shows that the centre at Yirrkala which has a tourist shop in the nearby town of Nhulunbuy bought a similar large quantity of cheap tourist products up to \$A 5, while the other two locations which have no nearby town emphasise more expensive higher quality products.

Twelve types of artefacts are recorded in the ledger (Table 2) the most important of which are small carvings of animals, necklaces of seeds, boomerangs, the smaller, so-called, sand paintings and watercolours and weapons of various sorts. I will examine the sales in each of these categories.

Small carvings: this type of artefact comprised the most common purchase by the CAAC. During the year they purchased approximately 3,000 carvings with a total value of \$A 6,617. The unit price varied from \$A 0.50 to \$A 100 with the average being \$A 1.70 and the mode \$A 2. More than 90% of the purchases cost less than \$A 3. Although the overall tendency was to a low price other minor concentrations occurred at two price levels: \$A 10-11 and \$A 15-20 (Table 3). This indicates that moderately priced products were also common. The carvings were usually of lizards, snakes, echidnas, birds or music and digging sticks. They were roughly chopped from a eucalyptus root and polished using a file before patterns were burnt on them with a hot poker. Oil or butter was often applied to large and expensive carvings. The price was determined by size and the majority of sellers of

Table 1. Cumulative percentage of occurrence of prices of artefacts recorded in Alice Springs, Yirrkala, Maningrida and Elcho Island Craft Centre ledgers.

\$A	Alice Springs	Yirrkala	Maningrida	Elcho Island
0 - 5	71	34	15	4
- 10	86	54	57	19
- 20	97	68	81	58
- 30	99	81	90	76
- 40	99	86	92	84
- 50	99	88	94	89
- 60	99	90	95	92

Number of artefacts (Alice Springs=969, Yirrkala=971, Maningrida=5042, Elcho Island=1424)

Table 2. List of artefact: quantity and price in CAAC ledger between May 1981–April 1982.

Artefact	Frequency	Value			
		Total	Min	Max	Mode
Bark painting	1	18	—	—	—
Bull roarer	7	60	8.0	10	8.0
Boomerang	587	3349	0.2	30	6.0
Batik	2	40	20.0	20	20.0
Carving	2934	6617	0.5	100	2.0
Dance board	6	43	6.0	8	7.5
Kardach shoes	1	10	—	—	—
Necklace	661	1573	1.0	24	2.0
Painting (card)	169	2150	0.5	60	20.0
Shield	6	113	20.0	55	20.0
Spear	69	176	1.5	20	1.5
Woomera	36	455	2.0	15	4.5
Total	4475	14603	—	—	—

such carvings to the Centre were women.

Necklaces: these totalled 661 pieces, worth \$A 1,573. Seeds or calyces of eucalyptus are woven onto string to form a necklace. The unit price varied from \$A 0.75 to \$A 8, and the average was \$A 2.40, which was slightly higher than for carvings. The mode was \$A 2. More expensive products like table runners and handbags were also produced by similar techniques. Their prices were \$A 20 or more. Most sellers were women from Alice Springs.

Boomerangs: these totalled 584 pieces, the third largest category and were worth \$A 3,349. The average unit price was \$A 5.70, much higher than the previous two items, although the minimum was \$A 0.20 and the mode \$A 2, resembles those of small carvings. Another concentration is between \$A 6–\$A 7 and \$A 9–\$A 12, and quantities at \$A 12, \$A 15, and \$A 20 (Table 3). This shows that qualitatively different types were produced. Toy or miniature boomerangs costing less than \$A 5 were sold mostly by women, whereas standard size practical boomerangs costing \$A 6 or more were brought in by men.

Paintings: these totalled 119 pieces worth \$A 2,150. The average was \$A 17.50. There were three types of paintings. One was the Ernabella pattern used on cards and bookmarkers. These were sold by women and were cheap at \$A 0.75–\$A 2.75. The other two types are Papunya sand paintings and watercolours of the Hermannsburg type. They were sold by males.

Sand paintings usually cost \$A 15 although the maximum price paid was \$A 60. Since large and expensive paintings were sold exclusively by the Papunya Tula Artists Community (PTAC). Those being sold to CAAC were smaller and of lower quality that could not meet PTAC standards. The situation was similar in respect of batik work and the Ernabella Craft Shop.

Table 3. Prices and numbers of artefacts in CAAC ledger between May 1981–April 1982.

Price	Carving	Boomerang	Painting
0.20	0	8	0
0.30	0	4	0
0.50	124	7	0
0.75	190	0	7
1.00	349	28	13
1.25	12	0	0
1.50	622	23	13
1.75	92	3	0
2.00	755	60	3
2.50	306	24	2
2.75	33	0	0
3.00	202	36	0
3.50	23	9	0
4.00	69	36	1
4.50	6	28	0
5.00	18	37	4
6.00	9	66	0
6.50	2	0	0
7.00	6	57	4
7.50	0	14	0
8.00	8	24	8
8.50	0	3	1
9.00	1	44	0
10.00	16	53	2
11.00	32	3	0
12.00	0	9	9
13.00	0	0	1
14.00	0	0	3
15.00	7	4	10
18.00	12	0	4
20.00	4	4	9
22.00	1	0	2
25.00	0	2	5
30.00	0	1	6
60.00	0	0	1
100.00	1	0	0
Total	2900	587	108

Watercolours were produced by Aranda men living in Alice Springs. They worked in the landscape style of the famous artist Albert Namatjira. The paintings are highly stylised and done according to a set of rules and a combination of several

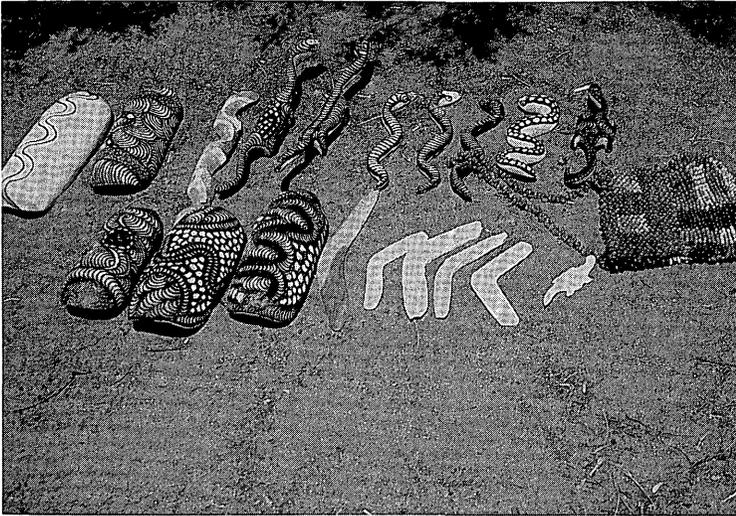


Photo. 1. Some wooden artefacts produced for sale.

basic patterns. The male artists brings an average of 1 or 2 pieces per sale and obtains an average of \$A 17 per sale.

Weapons (shields, spears, woomeras): these totaled 111 pieces and were worth \$A 744. The average, except for lower priced products of around \$A 1.50 for the cheap spear type was above \$A 10. Most sellers were males. Weapons were formally typical local products of the area and made by men for either souvenirs or museum collection. The sellers and producers were old people in the community who had both the knowledge and skill to make them. Low priced souvenir type weapons were sold by women.

Other: commercial sale of sacred objects has been banned since 1972. The occasional sale of these banned items, may suggest that some people need money in an emergency when they sell the real artefact or produce badly made miniature copies under the pretext that the goods were of no significance now.

SELLING PRICE

On presentation of a number of items, more than half of the sellers received less than \$A 25 and 75% under \$A 40. The concentration between \$A 15 and \$A 20 indicates that it is the usual amount that people are expecting to receive on each selling occasion (Table 4).

Among the low income group the least amount received is \$A 1 and there are 26 cases under \$A 5. The highest yield among named individuals was \$A 587. Many kinds of items are involved in such cases but high income sellers are usually from remote settlements.

The data shows a difference in the objects sold by males and females (Table 5).

Table 4. Rate of income per sale in CAAC ledger.

\$A	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
— 5	26	7.7	7.7
— 10	35	10.4	18.1
— 15	35	10.4	28.5*
— 20	63	18.8	47.3
— 25	43	12.8	60.1**
— 30	27	8.0	68.1
— 35	14	4.2	72.3
— 40	18	5.4	77.7***
— 45	15	4.5	
— 49	3	0.9	
50 —	10	2.7	
60 —	10	2.7	
70 —	8	2.4	
80 —	5	1.3	
90 —	6	1.6	
100 —	10	2.7	
200 —	3	0.8	
300 —	2	0.5	
400 —	2	0.5	
500 —	1	0.2	

*: 1st. quartile, **: 2nd. quartile, ***: 3rd. quartile.

Table 5. Main artefacts at one selling.

	C	N	B	W	P	BC	BP	CN
Female	97	39	5	0	0	3	0	3
Male	18	6	38	3	88	11	4	0
Total	115	45	43	3	88	14	4	3

C: carvings, B: boomerangs, N: necklaces, P: paintings, W: weapons.

Paintings were always sold by males and realised an average income from sales of \$A 23. Usually only one piece was sold. Weapons were sold by males on 38 of a total of 43 sales.

Of a total of 115 sales of carvings, regarded as female work by Aboriginal people, 97 cases were sold by women, and 39 of a total of 45 sales of necklaces were made by them.

Selling of a number of items occurred more frequently than that of a single item. This is indicated by the high priced transactions where over \$A 100 was paid out. Several producers brought in items of varied size and quality for sale in a single transaction.

SELLERS

Of a total of 341 sellers, males comprised 180 and females 161. By domicile, 41 lived in Alice Springs and 94 were from other communities. The domicile of 151 is unrecorded. Most of the unrecorded people are thought to have been from Alice Springs. Communities mentioned are Ayers Rock, Amata, Docker River, Ernabella (the highest frequency of all), Fregon, Papunya, Pipalyatjara, Yuendumu, and Mt. Denison (Figure 1). These communities are scattered widely over a vast area indicating the high mobility of Aboriginal people in this region.

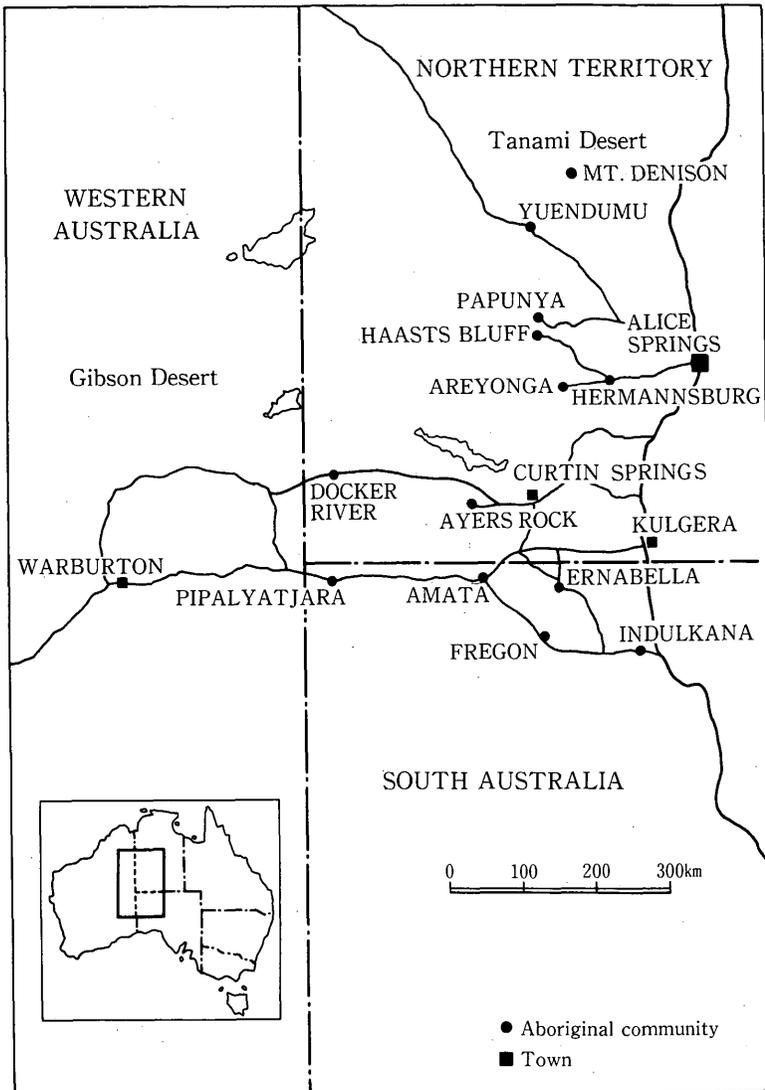


Figure 1. Map of the study area.

For people in the central desert the opening of the CAAC gallery provided increased opportunities to sell products for better prices. The Company originally tried to establish a system whereby people would sell the products to their local community craft centre which would then wholesale them to the CAAC gallery. But conflict between the Company and the local community craft centres over the attempt by the Company to control the centres and exercise a monopoly over all selling resulted in the Alice Springs gallery, which needs a supply of low or moderate price artefacts for souvenirs, being forced to open the door to individuals to bring in products. This ran counter to the head office's policy in the sense that it encouraged a more free market situation. Such confusion seems to have worked in favour of the people who lived in remote communities and who when in Alice Springs often had need for extra income. Besides their own community craft centre they could visit those in other communities and in the towns. They could also go to private galleries, souvenir shops and if they were lucky deal with generous tourists directly. Among these alternative selling possibilities, the CAAC gallery in Alice Springs had become one of the favourite outlets owing to its predictable buying policy.

HIGH INCOME SELLERS

Women of Ernabella

In the record of the CAAC ledger the most active sellers were people from the Ernabella Community. Sale prices ranged from \$A 2 to over \$A 400 and averaged \$A 70.80. On eleven occasions, totalling over 20% of the door sales from people in that community, more than \$A 100 was received (Table 6). As the purchasing

Table 6. Selling prices by domicile, CAAC ledger.

	AL	AC	ER	FR	PA	PI	YU	N-R
0 -	3	0	2	0	0	0	2	43
10 -	10	3	2	1	3	1	1	63
20 -	16	2	8	2	6	1	2	17
30 -	6	1	4	1	3	0	4	9
40 -	4	1	6	2	1	1	3	3
50 -	2	0	5	0	0	0	0	2
60 -	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	2
70 -	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	1
80 -	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	4
90 -	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	4
100 -	0	0	11	1	0	0	0	3
Total	41	7	53	7	13	3	12	151

AL: Alice Springs

AC: Ayers Rock community

ER: Ernabella

FR: Fregon

PA: Papunya

PI: Pipalyatjara

YU: Yuendumu

N-R: Not recorded

policy of the gallery was for low-cost souvenir products, some Aboriginal people were clearly bringing in a large quantity of small items.

Background information on art and craft production at Ernabella is plentiful because I have been visiting the Ernabella community regularly since 1980, and Keiko Tamura has carried out field research there on the women's craft industry for six months from January 1983 [TAMURA 1985].

Ernabella was established as a Presbyterian Mission in 1937 in Pitjantjatjara country in northern South Australia close to Northern Territory border. From Alice Springs it takes 5-7 hours to reach by car either passing Kulgera on the Stuart Highway or Curtin Springs on the Ayers Rock tourist road before 150 km of dirt road.

Ernabella mission started the craft industry as early as 1949. In the early days of the Mission, the main products were weapons such as spears and shields, which later developed into the production of 1/5 scale miniature sets. Women who had no such marketable items were taught to produce spun items including rugs and wall hangings. During this period the distinctive "Ernabella Design" was developed. It is characterised by butterfly-like designs particular drawn by women and used to decorate various products. Women also produce large mural sized versions of these designs.

In the late 1960s to early 1970s, women were encouraged to produce carvings. The industry was promoted enthusiastically by one craft adviser at Amata, a community close to Ernabella and was a big success resulting in the sale of \$A 20,000 worth of carvings in 1970-71. The industry slumped next year at Amata when the adviser left the community, but the technique spread throughout the Pitjantjatjara community including to Ernabella. Today women often gather in the community plaza and produce carvings while chatting or more often at home while family life goes on around them [HILLIARD 1968].

According to the sales record at the Ernabella craft centre, the sale of carvings increased dramatically from 1972 which coincided with a decline in the male craft industry. Around this time batik technique was introduced and a whole new industry established in the community using the Ernabella Design. It is noteworthy that the rise of such an important industry coincided with the many changes in government policy towards Aborigines from 1973 and its subsequent generous grants to promote Aboriginal arts and crafts.

Ernabella Arts Corporation was established in 1975 and organised female batik artists as wage workers. At the same time it played a major role as a buying agent of craft products.

The Ernabella Arts Corporation had fourteen registered active producers: 4 were male old-age pensioners; 4 were female old-age pensioners; 4 were female workers in the batik craft room who made extra money selling carvings; and the remaining two were younger women who worked independently. However, the actual number of people producing items for sale was much larger, with the Ernabella craftroom ledger recording the names of 50 sellers of which 43 were



Photo. 2. Batik artist (Ernabella).

female in 1982.

In the CAAC ledger book, a woman from Ernabella appears 24 times, especially during May to November 1981 visiting almost every week (Table 7). The number of products she sold was huge and on one occasion she brought in as many as 79 pieces for which she received \$A 182.

The items were almost always small animal carvings. This woman brought in 323 pieces during one period of 60 days from Sept. 28–Nov. 27. Such quantities of items could not be produced by one person alone and clearly reflect the production of a number of people. To obtain the raw materials, group excursion must be planned, the use of a car organised and the hard labour of digging the river gum roots shared. Then follows a long process of hatching, scraping and polishing before the design is burnt onto the surface.

Episodes Tamura recorded at Ernabella provide a clue to help in explaining why the Ernabella people took their products to Alice Springs instead of selling them at their own community craft centre. She records that an Aboriginal woman had to visit Alice Springs to take her daughter to the hospital. At that time she took with her carvings worth \$A 100 at Ernabella and sold them to the CAAC gallery for \$A 120 making an extra 20%. Tamura reported that women were very keen for such retail information and were always talking about where the best outlet for their products was. She reports that the places in order of preference were the Alice Springs CAAC gallery, the Amata Community Craft Centre, and the Ayers Rock tourist shop.

When other woman heard of the success of the woman who had sold her artefacts in Alice Springs some of them started to ask her to sell their products in Alice Springs for them. This she did and brought back radios, cassette players and clothing rather than money, which may have increased the appreciation of the city sales. Looking at this circumstance it may be possible to say that this

Table 7. Selling records of an Ernabella woman to CAAC shop.

Date	Item	Quantity	Income (\$A)	Min. price of items	Max. price of items
81 May 11	Car	51	92.2	0.75	2.0
81 May 20	Bom, Wum, Spr	15	100.0	4.0	8.0
81 Jun 5	Car	11	56.0	4.0	8.0
81 Jun 26	Bom	47	76.0	0.5	4.0
81 Jul 1	Car	16	27.5	1.5	2.0
81 Jul 2	Bom, Car	22	35.0	1.0	4.0
81 Jul 9	Bom, Car	29	81.5	1.0	8.0
81 Jul 24	Bom, Pnt	53	42.5	0.7	1.0
81 Jul 30	Car	27	22.0	0.5	2.0
81 Aug 3	Car	47	65.0	1.0	4.0
81 Aug 13	Bom, Pnt	37	100.4	1.0	8.0
81 Sep 4	Bom	12	37.0	1.0	15.0
81 Sep 28	Car	35	70.0	0.5	4.0
81 Oct 1	Car	23	48.0	1.0	6.0
81 Oct 9	Car	69	72.6	1.0	1.5
81 Oct 15	Car	42	73.6	0.7	2.5
81 Oct 21	Car	21	55.2	1.0	4.0
81 Nov 2	Car	31	63.2	0.75	4.0
81 Nov 9	Car	21	31.5	0.5	2.0
81 Nov 14	Car	54	115.4	0.5	15.0
81 Nov 27	Car	27	68.9	1.5	4.0
82 Feb 4	Bom, Car, Coo	79	182.0	1.0	8.0
82 Mar 22	Bom, Car, Wom	57	166.1	0.75	8.0
82 Apr 2	Nec	15	47.5	2.0	10.0
Total		841	1,728.9		

Bom: boomerangs, Car: carvings, Coo: coolamons, Pnt: paintings, Nec: necklaces, Wom: woomeras, Spr: spears.

entrepreneurial woman had started to work as a middleman. It is evident that she did not pursue the middleman role purely for profit.

Another episode occurred where an almost blind woman brought into the Ernabella centre over ten day carvings worth \$A 415. Again it would have been impossible for her to have produced such a large amount of carvings in such a limited time. Tamura thinks that they were a donation from other people to help her during special financial trouble and that the other cases of large sales to the Alice Springs shop mentioned above may have also include donated items to help a woman in general difficulties [1985].

I have observed similar practices when Ernabella artists visited Japan in 1983 and 1988. They were money-less until a few hours before departure from the community but had plenty by the time of departure. They bought a large volume of souvenirs in Japan as well as in Sydney and Adelaide on the return trip. This

kind of reciprocal behaviour reminded me of the Japanese custom where on the occasion of business or sightseeing tours abroad money is received as parting-gifts and reciprocated as souvenirs.

Another explanation of why they sold their products at Alice Springs instead of Ernabella may be made clear by a particular local situation. In 1981, the craft adviser at Ernabella was away for a year with the result that the accounting situation became chaotic and the craft centre stopped buying artefacts. The timing of the first sale mentioned above coincided with the leave of the craft adviser. Such local incidents may be important.

Old men

Among the Ernabella sellers the names of old men appear. As mentioned before, men in the early days were the producers of weapons and ceremonial objects. After the prohibition of selling tjuringa and bull roarers in 1972 the men produced only boomerangs, shields and spears. The policy of the mission and government communities in this area from 1973 onwards was to encourage men to work in wage labour and this contributed to the slump in the male-craft industry from this period.

Table 8. Selling records of two Ernabella men to CAAC shop.

Date	Item	Quantity	Income (\$A)	Min. Price of Items	Max. Price of Items
81 May 20	Bom	8	45.0	5.0	—
81 May 27	Bom	5	22.5	4.5	—
81 Jun 5	Car	48	39.0	0.5	1.0
81 Jun 10	Bom	16	41.0	1.5	2.0
81 Aug 8	Nec	1	2.0	2.0	—
81 Jun 15	Bom, Wom	17	83.0	2.5	6.0
81 Jun 10	Bom	7	30.5	3.5	4.5
81 Mar 22	Car	52	176.0	1.5	10.0
81 Mar 22	Bom	1	10.0	10.0	—
Total		155	449.0		

Date	Item	Quantity	Income(\$A)	Min. price of Items	Max. price of Items
81 Apr 28	Bom, Car	60	169.7	0.5	6.0
81 May 26	Car	20	54.5	1.5	6.0
81 Jun 4	Car	14	22.8	1.0	3.8
81 Jul 13	Car	139	496.2	0.75	11.0
81 Jul 22	Bom, Car	169	140.5	0.5	2.0
81 Feb 10	Car, Coo, Wom	216	422.2	0.5	7.0
Total		618	1,305.9		

Bom: boomerangs, Car: carvings, Coo: coolamans, Nec: necklaces, Wom: woomeras.

Table 9. Selling record of two Alice Springs painters.

Date	Item	Quantity	Income (\$A)	Min. Price of Items	Max. Price of Items
81 May 5	Pnt	1	17.5	17.5	—
81 Oct 15	Pnt	1	25.0	25.0	—
81 Oct 27	Pnt	2	32.0	16.0	—
81 Nov 1	Pnt	2	24.5	8.5	16.0
81 Nov 2	Pnt	1	16.0	16.0	—
82 Jan 22	Pnt	2	42.5	17.5	25.0
82 Feb 3	Pnt	1	17.5	17.5	—
82 Feb 5	Pnt	1	17.5	17.5	—
82 Feb 20	Pnt	1	16.0	16.0	—
82 Feb 26	Pnt	2	32.0	16.0	—
82 Mar 19	Pnt, Nec	3	26.5	3.0	16.0
Total		17	267.0		

Date	Item	Quantity	Income (\$A)	Min. price of Items	Max. price of Items
81 May 25	Pnt	1	17.5	17.5	—
81 Jul 24	Pnt	1	17.5	17.5	—
81 Aug 5	Pnt	2	35.0	17.5	—
81 Aug 10	Pnt	1	17.5	17.5	—
81 Aug 18	Pnt	1	17.5	17.5	—
81 Aug 20	Pnt	1	17.5	17.5	—
81 Nov 3	Pnt	1	17.5	17.5	—
81 Oct 21	Pnt	1	16.0	16.0	—
82 Jan 7	Pnt	2	32.0	16.0	—
82 Mar 22	Pnt	1	16.0	16.0	—
82 Mar 29	Pnt	2	16.0	8.0	—
82 Mar 31	Pnt	1	16.0	16.0	—
82 Apr 2	Pnt	2	33.5	16.0	17.5
82 Apr 15	Pnt	2	33.5	16.0	17.5
Total		19	303.0		

Pnt: paintings, Nec: necklaces.

So today it is the old men using mostly neglected techniques that produce weapons. From the data it is seen that one old Ernabella man often brought in boomerangs and though low in number received relatively high payment per item (Table 8). The small quantity of boomerangs suggests they were probably self made, and that the money was kept by him. Such a pattern was predominant among the old men from the desert communities (Table 9). Sometimes this man brought in a large quantity of items of various kinds including women's works and received more money. Such a pattern was even more explicit in the records of a second man (Table 8).

Table 10. Selling records of a man from Papunya and a man from Yuendumu to the CAAC centre.

Date	Item	Quantity	Income (\$A)	Min. Price of Items	Max. Price of Items
81 Apr 27	Bom	1	7	7	—
81 Apr 29	Pnt	2	24	12	—
81 May 1	Pnt	1	20	20	—
81 Jul 16	Shd	1	6	6	—
81 Aug 5	Bom	7	48	6	7
81 Aug 11	Bom, Pnt	3	30	5	10
81 Sep 15	Pnt	3	45	15	—
81 Sep 25	Bom	1	5	5	—
81 Oct 2	Pnt	1	25	25	—
81 Oct 6	Pnt	1	22	22	—
81 Oct 13	Pnt	2	38	16	22
81 Oct 15	Pnt	2	14	7	—
81 Nov 11	Car	1	6	6	—
82 Jan 5	Bom, Pnt	5	37	7	15
82 Feb 5	Car	3	9	3	—
82 Feb 8	Pnt	1	12	12	—
Total		35	348		

Date	Item	Quantity	Income (\$A)	Min. Price of Items	Max. Price of Items
81 Jun 25	Bom	2	30	10	20
81 Jun 26	Pnt	2	28	14	—
81 Jul 10	Bom	2	50	10	40
81 Oct 6	Pnt	1	60	60	—
81 Oct 9	Pnt	1	30	30	—
81 Oct 15	Pnt	1	25	25	—
81 Oct 18	Pnt	1	30	30	—
Total		10	253		

Bom: boomerangs, Car: carvings, Pnt: paintings, Shd: shields.

Sellers whose domicile was a remote community tended to get a high or medium amount of money. They generally provided a large range of products at one time (Table 9). These people had separate types of production and selling strategies. They are distinguished by the degree of access to Alice Springs (i.e. distance, road-condition etc.) as well as the historical and contemporary situation in each community (Table 10).

On one occasion in 1982 Aug., I came across a large old American car stopped on a dirt road in the desert with 7 or 8 people, men and women, standing around it. I asked if they needed help but they said it was all right. An old man walked up to me pulling out a large coolamon from his sack and asked if I wanted it as a

souvenir for \$A 30. A large number of boomerangs, and carvings were in the sack. Each man and woman had their own bag or sack full of the same kinds of items. Craft seems to act as a sought of bank account during their stay in Alice Springs: items are cashed as the need arises which is an effective way of controlling expenditure.

MID-INCOME SELLERS

A large proportion of sellers gained between \$A 15–20 (18.8%) and \$A 20–25 (12.8%) per sale. Two distinct groups living in Alice Springs were observed.

Male painters, Alice Springs dwellers

There is a group of people who produce watercolour landscape paintings. They usually brought in one item and got approximately \$A 16–20. Two artists visited the shop regularly. One 14 times and the other 11 times during this period (Table 9). They usually sold a painting a month but occasionally produced more than 5 pieces a month. Others appeared less consistently.

This pattern of concentration of effort followed by a non-productive period was a characteristic of these painters. This may mean that they were not dependent on their income from painting but worked only when an extra amount of money was needed.

In 1982 we had an occasion to observe how the painters work. On July 22, we met two artists on the bank of the Todd River in Alice Springs and asked them to produce paintings for us. We said we would provide materials, canvas, pencil, paint, and indicated we would buy the work for \$A 20; in return they agreed to show us the process of work.

At 11 : 22 am the next day at their homes the two artists started work. They used the provided materials, modified soft drink cans for pallets and a wine bottle to contain water. Using pencils they drew a frame and sketched in before painting. They kept working with an occasional smoking rest for two hours until 1 : 25 pm when both paintings were completed almost simultaneously.

While they were painting they often gazed at scenery outside but the scenes painted were completely different. They said they were painting scenery from inside their own heads.

We offered a dozen cans of beer and a \$A 10 lunch fee which was accepted. We asked the men to repeat their performance the next day but they were uninterested saying they had worked and now had enough money for the time being. An example of this philosophy of “enough and no more” is evident in the case of a Papanya painter (Table 10). This old man visited the shop 16 times during the year. Except for the occasions when he brought in boomerangs and shields most of his products were Papanya sand paintings. The price of his paintings ranged from \$A 7 to \$A 25. He would have been able to earn more money if he had produced larger paintings but seemed to prefer cheap or moderate priced items that



Photo. 3. Watercolour painters in Alice Springs.

would have no trouble being sold.

Such reluctance we also observed elsewhere. The owner of the gallery where we purchased the painting materials told the artist that he would buy whatever amount he produced but the artist did not show any interest. The artist told us later that there were many men who could paint well but did not want to work. Such behaviour can be seen in the data. There are more than ten individual painters mentioned in the CAAC records.

If the painters received \$A 16 for two hours work it was a high hourly rate. According to Tamura [1985] the highest hourly rate in the Ernabella Community in 1983 was \$A 6.50/hour. This means that even if they produced 5 works a week, which is probably the maximum amount likely, they would earn \$A 80 a fortnight: this was only equivalent to the age or widow's pension. Further if many people produced similar paintings of the same standard as souvenir goods it could cause overproduction and a consequent fall in prices. The general reluctance of landscape painters to produce more may partly be an economically motivated response to this situation. They restricted their activity to the level of gaining petty cash and depended upon welfare for subsistence.

The problem of over production was detected in a case from Yuendumu. A man from this community sold 4 paintings in less than two weeks in October 1981 (Table 10). The buying price of the paintings quickly decreased during that time. There may be two reasons for this: the shop may have bargained harder because of over stocking and the hurried work may have resulted in a decline in the quality of his painting.

Female craft, Alice Springs dwellers

Some Alice Springs craft women showed the same tendencies as male painters

Table 11. Selling records of two Alice Springs women.

Date	Item	Quantity	Income (\$A)	Min. Price of Items	Max. Price of Items
81 Jul 10	Car	19	28.5	1.5	—
81 Sep 21	Nec	14	21.0	1.5	—
81 Dec 30	Nec	15	28.0	0.5	2.5
81 Dec 31	Car, Nec	15	40.0	1.0	3.5
82 Jan 25	Nec	12	28.0	2.0	3.0
82 Feb 5	Nec	12	25.5	2.0	2.5
82 Feb 11	Nec	12	24.0	2.0	—
82 Feb 16	Nec	12	21.5	1.5	2.5
82 Mar 4	Nec	11	19.3	1.75	—
82 Mar 18	Nec	21	42.2	1.75	2.5
Total		143	278.0		

Date	Item	Quantity	Income (\$A)	Min. Price of Items	Max. Price of Items
81 May 29	Car	13	19.5	1.5	—
81 Jun 26	Car	14	28.0	2.0	—
81 Sep 14	Car	11	17.5	1.0	2.0
81 Oct 15	Car	20	37.5	0.75	3.0
82 Jan 29	Nec	16	32.0	2.0	—
82 Jan 31	Nec	8	17.5	1.5	2.5
82 Feb 5	Nec	5	9.0	1.0	2.0
82 Feb 16	Nec	7	11.0	1.0	4.0
82 Mar 17	Nec	9	18.0	2.0	—
82 Mar 19	Nec	23	45.6	1.75	2.5
82 Apr 2	Car, Nec	64	132.6	1.5	3.0
Total		190	368.2		

Car: carvings, Nec: necklaces.

earning about \$A 25 on each selling occasion. Typical examples were: a woman visiting 10 times and earning an average of \$A 26.40 and another one 11 times receiving an average of \$A 24 (except for one sale of \$A 132) (Table 11). They usually brought in a collection of necklaces and animal carvings they seldom sold for more than \$A 2 per item.

The collection of suitable materials is more difficult and less varied for the urbanised Alice Springs women than for their counterparts in remote communities. They use available materials like eucalyptus or acacia nuts for necklaces which can be collected in the vicinity and pieces of wood gathered for carving without digging or cutting down trees. There is an easier access to the seed materials compared to the raw materials for carving, which seems to be the reason for the popularity of the necklace among city-dwelling women. When seeds are unavailable during the cold months, necklaces are not made.

As a consequence Alice Springs women, for the most part, can only produce cheap tourist items of bad quality however some Alice Springs women brought in carvings. Two such women usually took in 10–20 items each month (Table 11). Taking into consideration the size of the carvings and the length of time needed to produce one, it is considered they were produced by individual effort for personal benefit which again contrasts with the work of remote area women.

SMALL INCOME SELLERS

Eighteen percent of the sellers received less than \$A 10 and people who received less than \$A 5 made up 7.7% of total sales. Names of sellers recorded in the ledger are usually rather anonymous such as old lady, a kid, Jane (without surnames) and their domiciles are not recorded.

I have observed at the Alice Springs shop poorly dressed women or kids bringing in only one cheap item such as a simple necklace, a badly made small carving or music sticks. A drunken man brought in an unfinished boomerang and argued with the manager who did not want to buy it. Some people tried to sell these types of items to tourists in the street. In 1982 we visited a community in the desert to purchase items for our museum from the craft centre. A rumor of a "rich Japaneese" in the area seems to have spread quickly. Next morning I was surprised to find old men lined up with a strange collection of sticks and stones. This behaviour seems to reflect the pattern of peddling the odd souvenir items to tourists. Such petty income would have been useful to old people prior to the receipt of pensions in cash from 1968 onwards.

CONCLUSION

The material presented above reveals the following characteristics of the Aboriginal arts and crafts industry. There are distinctive differences in production between males and females (Table 12). Females tend to produce low priced crafts in great quantity. They work continuously together for longer hours. In contrast, males produce expensive artefacts (relative to females), but make fewer items. They tend to work individually and intermittently.

The effects of urbanisation are obvious. In town available materials are limited to either market commodities, such as paper and watercolours or natural materials which are easy to collect around the town. The variety of products is thus limited. In remote communities natural as well as market materials are available and the making of traditional artefacts has continued so that products are both rich in variety and number.

The difference between urban and rural dwellers can also be observed in the pattern of selling which reflects the manner of production. Urban sellers representing themselves visited the gallery often, obtaining small amounts of money. People from remote communities often visited it on behalf of groups of

Table 12. Average income and number of items from sales by community and gender to CAAC.

Community	Female					Male				
	N	Price		Number of Item		N	Price		Number of Item	
		\bar{x}	σ	\bar{x}	σ		\bar{x}	σ	\bar{x}	σ
Alice Sp	30	29.3	23.2	15	15	11	23.1	8.1	2	1
Amata	0	—	—	—	—	4	34.1	23.1	7	5
Ayers Rk	6	36.3	35.1	15	15	2	25.0	18.3	3	2
Ernabella	37	70.8	44.8	34	19	15	107.8	150.8	52	68
Fregon	6	78.9	101.2	21	10	2	31.0	19.7	4	1
Papunya	0	—	—	—	—	13	23.8	11.0	3	2
Pipalyatjara	3	32.0	15.6	14	7	3	198.6	47.0	16	4
Yuendumu	3	7.5	3.5	2	2	12	42.6	18.1	4	4
No Rec	66	32.6	53.2	10	9	121	28.3	55.9	3	7
Total	151	41.9	49.7	16	16	183	38.1	69.1	7	24

N: number of recorded sales

 \bar{x} : mean σ : standard deviation

artists, less frequently and usually brought in a large number of artefacts of various types, made by many producers and received greater amounts of money.

A certain contradiction emerges from this data. On the one hand there is clear evidence of a well defined economic interest, most interestingly revealed in the entrepreneurial role of the women from Ernabella who were actively seeking to benefit from the higher prices they could achieve in town. Yet on the other hand the producers generally earn very small amounts of money—at the most \$A 20 per month—which does not reflect the skill and arduous work involved in making these objects. Why do Aboriginal people work so hard to earn so little?

Aboriginal people are in a privileged position as compared with many former hunting and gathering peoples because their survival is guaranteed by state transfer payments and they are not faced with having to be self-supporting. Yet is clear that people have a need for money that is not met by these transfer payments. Craft production is self-planned self-directed activity which can not only be carried out around most other activities at many different locations but is also beyond direct European intervention. It is also one of the very few marketable skills they have that allows such a high degree of autonomy yet produces cash however small the sums. Far from commoditisation dissolving all that it touches, the effect in central Australia is to keep alive skills and knowledge that are no longer essential to day to day survival especially in the remote communities. While there are many ways in which Aboriginal societies are changing, particularly in their ready adoption of consumer goods, much is also being perpetuated.

As a Japanese researcher in remote Australia, I am deeply impressed by certain similarity between Japanese and Aboriginal societies facing western cultures.

Japan may be an economic giant and look completely westernised but the people are still deeply Japanese in their traditions and social organisation: the same I think is true for many Aboriginal people.

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