

New South Wales
 The remoteness of their location,
is under-represented
 limited access to training and
in the nation's
 development opportunities,
Indigenous visual arts
 constrained local marketplaces and
sector ... but artists in
 an absence of a clear or coordinated
the west are perhaps
 'gateway' into the larger buying
the worst off of all.
 markets in the metropolitan centres
 by ANGELA SIDOTI
 present severe difficulties for



Indigenous artists in the Far West.

long distance vision

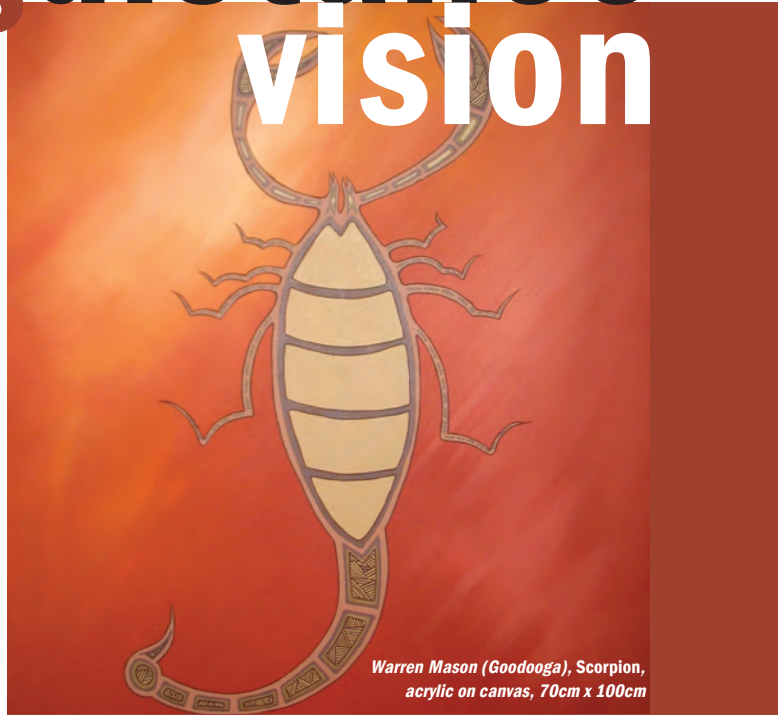
IT IS NOT UNCOMMON TO HEAR OF ARTISTS RECEIVING APPALLINGLY small sums of money for their work in this region. Meanwhile a lack of understanding — confusion even — over the dynamics of the fickle art market sees many artists frustrated that they cannot attract the prices they see being charged for 'similar' but sophisticatedly marketed works in tourist outlets in Sydney or Brisbane.

These are all issues raised in a current parliamentary enquiry into the Indigenous visual arts sector, an initiative seeking to examine and make recommendations on strategies and mechanisms to strengthen this long neglected sector. Submissions and witnesses to the Inquiry have already clearly emphasised the vital role Indigenous community art centres play in supporting Australia's Indigenous visual arts industry. The government's Indigenous Art Centre Strategy & Action Plan and its objectives relating to a broad spectrum of developmental needs formed a strong start point for development activities in NSW's far west.

And the need is desperate. The Far West is a region rich with Indigenous artists, but with no visual art centre — mainly a variety of largely inconsistent or informal outlets for the sale of Indigenous art. The region's art and artists suffer from an absence of any coordinated marketing or selling opportunities and there is a strong need for skills development in marketing and the 'business' side of art as well as support for both emerging and more established artists.

The long term goal of an Indigenous Visual Art Centre for the region would be to provide a resource centre, a training hub and a selling point for Indigenous artists, but also an access point for buyers which promises quality control, authentic product, and ethical practice. Gone would be the days of an egg carver selling his work directly to Sydney outlets for a lousy sixty dollars only to see it tagged with a \$300 sell price. Or the tourist seeking Indigenous artworks only to be told that they will need to contact an artist directly or come back next week.

Work is needed in addressing some of the complex issues associated with the inconsistency of artists' income and the current limitations on forward planning for Indigenous artists. Right now, many artists will often undersell art for cash in the hand rather than work on a commission basis which, while ensuring a better price, delays payment. Established artists meanwhile struggle for recognition despite marketing activities, business plans, and



Warren Mason (Gooodooga), Scorpion, acrylic on canvas, 70cm x 100cm

incredible talent. Indigenous art works are sold through post offices, tourism centres and motel front desks; through CDEP outlets selling work created by workers paid in weekly wages; by word of mouth and even, in some cases, on e-Bay. A few communities are lucky enough to have (continued on p. 30)

April — May

Until 29 April

👁 *Less is More* An exhibition of small works by local and regional artists.

TAMWORTH Regional Gallery
 Tel 02 6767 5459 Website
www.tamworth.nsw.gov.au/gallery

3 May — 17 June

👁 *CPM National Print Awards Works* from the Community Printmakers of Murwillumbah, Tweed River Art Gallery, **MURWILLUMBAH** Tel 02 6670 2790 Website www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/artgallery

3 May — 17 June

👁 *Multiplicity* Prints and multiples from the collections of the MCA and University of Wollongong. Tweed River Art Gallery, **MURWILLUMBAH** Tel 02 6670 2790 Website www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/artgallery

4 — 5 May

🎭 *The Wiz* Musical theatre performed by local high school students. **BATHURST** Memorial Entertainment Centre Tel 02 6333 6161

An Indigenous Visual Arts Centre for the Far West *(cont'd from p.12)*

small local galleries. Stories are told of brilliant paintings sent to families from artists serving time in correctional facilities who 'dry out' or 'go clean' while inside but on release find a lack of infrastructure and support to continue their art practice.

These issues are not easily solved. At their root are deep issues around loss of culture and knowledge of cultural practice, compounded by a mostly frustrated opportunity to capitalise on the growing interest in Indigenous arts both nationally and internationally.

This year Outback Arts has successfully secured support through the Indigenous Visual Arts Special Initiative managed by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA), a program which resulted from a 2004 election commitment to provide funding to support the production, distribution and promotion of Indigenous art. A grant of \$42,124 will enable us to offer a curatorial mentorship in partnership with the Western Plains Cultural Centre to a local artist — building capacity and skills locally. We will also deliver a series of two day workshops on visual arts technique and the 'business' of art in Walgett, Coonamble, Bourke, Warren, Brewarrina, the Yetta Correctional Facility, Weilmoringle, Collarenebri, Cobar, Lightning Ridge, and Goodooga. The program will culminate in an exhibition at the Opal Festival in Lightning Ridge in July — an event which attracts national and international visitors but which also provides an opportunity to exhibit locally, and to capitalise on locally oriented market-places without necessarily relying on sending art away to a distant major city to sell in a consolidated 'art fair'.

The rationale for the program comes from many artists' clearly articulated desire to respect and build on the 'local', providing the solid base required for any regionally based marketing and development for the arts. Tourism and enterprise opportunities have been identified by Community Working Parties — groups like the Biamie Dreaming Co-operative (see story p. 14), Elders groups, tourism and information centres, interested local governments, a variety of other agencies working in the region, and of course the artists themselves. The energy is there and the time is well, long overdue.

Outback Arts' Indigenous Visual Arts Development project will support the work and goals of existing regional groups, the development of networks, and much needed knowledge on access to the commercial art market for emerging Indigenous artists. Together with the ongoing development of strategies to identify and capitalise on the region's existing infrastructure and economic and training opportunities for artists, my belief is that we will take a giant step along the way towards our vision for a Far West Indigenous Arts Centre. But I'm long-sighted. ■

Angela Sidoti is the Regional Arts Development Officer at Outback Arts, the Regional Arts Board in the Far West region.

**CONTACT Angela Sidoti Tel 02 6822 2484
Email rado@outbackarts.com.au**