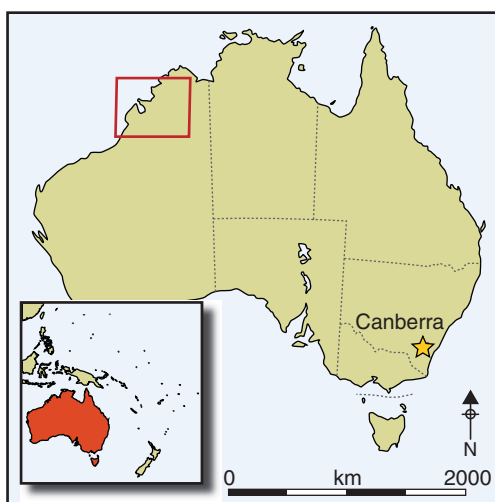


Marking resistance? Change and continuity in the recent rock art of the southern Kimberley, Australia

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Enhanced by recent survey, the authors define new kinds of rock art along the Lennard and Fitzroy rivers in Western Australia—black pigment and scratch-work images featuring anthropomorphic figures with elaborate head-dresses. These are shown to belong to the Contact period and represent the response of Indigenous artists to European land-taking by recalling and restating traditional themes from earlier times.

Keywords: Australia, Kimberley, Contact period, rock art

Introduction

The classic painted images known as Wanjinās first appear in the last 2000 years and were actively repainted in many parts of the Kimberley into the late twentieth century (Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005; Morwood *et al.* 2010). Blundell (1974) describes repainting as traditionally taking place within the context of landscape renewal. When large numbers of men met to burn the grass and to undertake communal hunting, the sacred Wanjinās were retouched to ensure the coming of the monsoon and the regeneration of all life. The visual impact of Wanjinās with their full frontal pose, prominent eyes and lack of mouth,

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and the highly decorative quality of Wanjina-associated imagery, has led to the impression of stylistic unity in the recent art tradition of the Kimberley region of northern Australia (Rosenfeld 1997).

This impression is, however, somewhat misleading and has resulted in other styles being overlooked. This paper presents a preliminary description of two other forms of art from the south-central Kimberley that have not been previously recorded: black dry pigment and fine scratch-work images and markings. Both styles were recorded in the traditional lands of the Bunuba and Gooniyandi, some of whom are co-authors of this paper and have provided local knowledge about the art. While not directly dated, many of the drawn charcoal and scratched graphics appear, on the basis of superimposition and oral tradition, to be synchronous with, or to post-date, Wanjina imagery.

Although the drawn charcoal and scratched graphics we describe here do not occur in all shelters or caves with art, both styles are sufficiently common across a region spanning more than 20 000km² to suggest that they can be viewed as regionally important. The drawn black pigment art has strong parallels with the dry pigment Contact art described by Smith & Rosenfeld (1992: 12) and Frederick (1999) for the Watarrka National Park region of central Australia. Similar scratch-work has been recorded in the West Baines region of the Victoria River District of the Northern Territory, where McNickle (1991) suggests (on the basis of the motifs including horses, people on horse-back and a helicopter) that they relate to the period after European contact. In the Keep River region, also to the north-east, Taçon *et al.* (2003) have recorded scratch-work art as the most recent art. Scratch-work and charcoal motifs have also recently been identified on the Canning Stock Route survey (Veth *pers. comm.*).

In the Kimberley region these two rock art styles may well have gone unrecorded because they do not have the stylistic unity commanded by the Wanjinas and do not depict Europeans—so are not instantly recognisable as Contact-themed art. We suggest that they nevertheless belong to the Contact period and that the concentration on themes of ceremony and continuity in traditional motifs may have been influenced by the particularly violent history of this region.

Rock art research in the Kimberley Devonian Reef region

The Devonian Reef complex discussed in this paper is represented by a number of ranges including the Oscar and Napier Ranges in the west and the Mueller and Sparke Ranges in the east (Figure 1). The boundary between Bunuba lands to the west and Gooniyandi lands to the east is close to the Fitzroy River. The rock art of the Kimberley region is best known for the diminutive and beautifully crafted Gwion Gwion figures (previously known as Bradshaw figures) (see McNiven 2011 for an overview of the history of Gwion Gwion research), and the visually powerful Wanjinas (Crawford 1968). The Gwion Gwions are spatially restricted to the northern Kimberley (Crawford 1968: 82; Layton 1992: 235–36; Welch 1993; Morwood *et al.* 2010). None has been reported from the southern Kimberley region between Derby and Fitzroy Crossing where Wanjinas and associated graphics are the dominant rock art tradition (Crawford 1968).

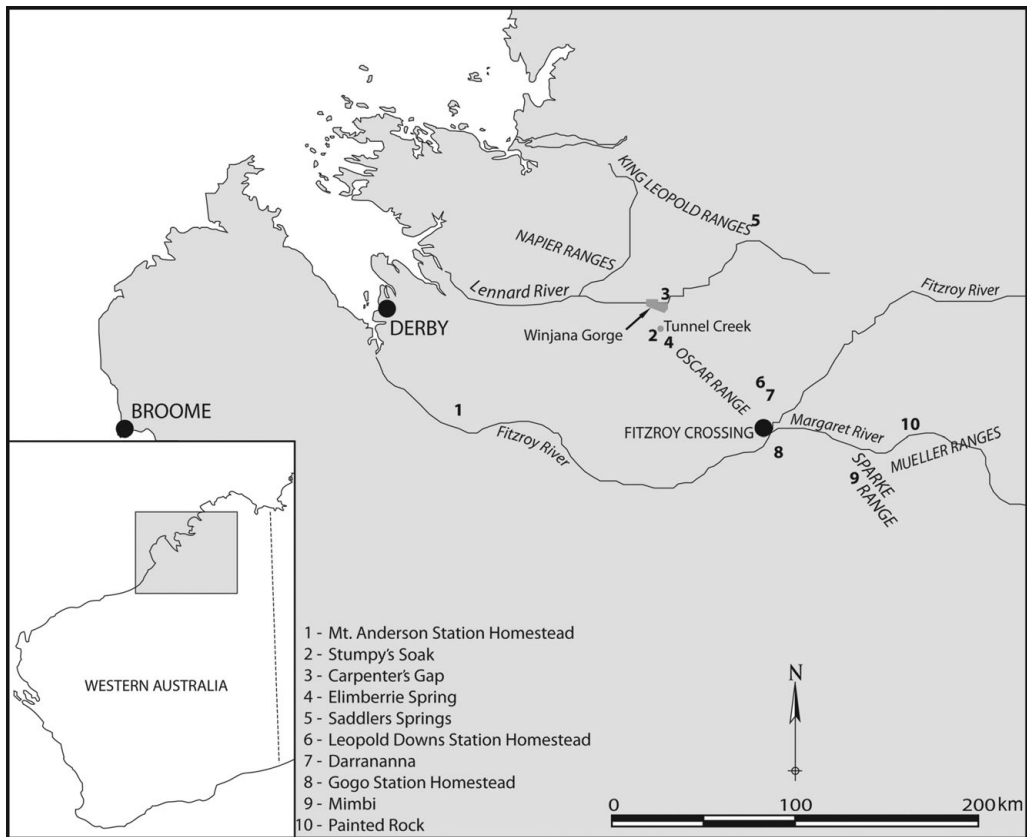


Figure 1. The south-central Kimberley, covering Bunuba and Gooniyandi country.

Wanjinas occur in shelters and caves in the Oscar and Napier Ranges throughout the lands associated with Unggumi and Bunuba (who refer to them as Waliarri), but do not extend east into Gooniyandi country according to current Gooniyandi Traditional Owners. Like the Wanjinas recorded elsewhere in the Kimberley (Crawford 1968; Ryan & Akerman 1993; Frederick & O'Connor 2009), those in Bunuba country are visually powerful and distinctive figures, having haloed heads (Figure 2a), often with radiating line infill, and faces that include eyes and a nose but which lack a mouth. They occur as both large full-bodied individuals, such as the Waliarri at Carpenter's Gap 1 (Tangalma) (Playford 2007: 141), and as simple head or head and shoulders, such as those recorded by Akerman at Saddlers Springs, Iminji (Figure 2b). According to oral tradition, Wanjina paintings are not believed to have been created by humans but rather to have put themselves on the rock (Capell 1939: 390; Schulz 1956: 8–9; Crawford 1972: 304 and Mowaljarlai in Mowaljarlai *et al.* 1988 for an Indigenous perspective). There are also records of people acknowledging that they were regularly retouched or even painted by people (Layton 1992: 21, 33, 37–38, 471; Watchman 1992: 29). Crawford (1968: 49), for example, records that Aboriginal people told him that one man or a very limited number of men were chosen to paint each site. In reference to Wanjina paintings, Woolagoodja (2007: 29) said “our ancestors made this art”.



Figure 2. (a) Wanjina with black cockatoo feathers painted in Otiliyalyanggarri Cave, Mount Barnett (photo by Kim Akerman, 13 April 1985); (b) detail of small Wanjina faces at Saddlers Springs, Iminji (photo by Kim Akerman, November 1973).

Other motifs associated with Wanjinas include a variety of animals and plants, particularly yams (see images in Crawford 1968). Although little has been recorded about the tradition in Bunuba country, in other regions the animals and plants that occur alongside a Wanjina are known to feature in the particular mythic creation events and exploits associated with the individual Wanjina in the shelter (Crawford 1968; Akerman 2009). In Bunuba country, animals that commonly occur in Wanjina caves include crocodiles, lizards including monitors, long neck turtles, dogs, birds, fish and eels. Several sites with Wanjina art include

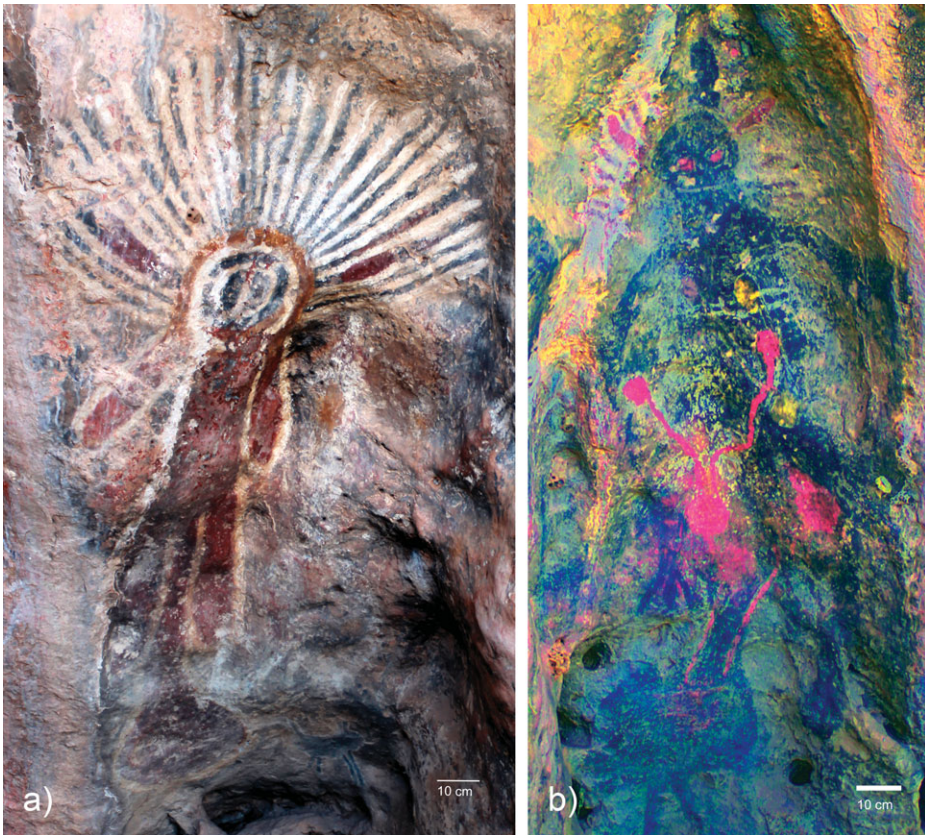


Figure 3. (a) Waliarri dancing figure and (b) Djuari figure at Painted Rock in Gooniyandi country. Images enhanced using Image J/DStretch.

snakes or rainbow serpents (usually referred to as Ungud) (Crawford 1968: 103). Akerman (2009) discusses the fluidity of the concept of Wanjina and Ungud, both of which are associated with the monsoon.

In Gooniyandi country large anthropomorphs with rayed head-dresses also occur (Figure 3a). Although they share fewer similarities with western Kimberley Wanjina figures than those in Bunuba country, this type was described by Playford as a “typical old-style Wandjina” (Playford 2007: 147–148, fig. 8.35), and our Gooniyandi authors identify it as a Waliarri dancing figure. As well as a prominent head-dress with radiating lines, this Waliarri has two head adornments that look very similar to the red and black cockatoo feathers commonly shown in the Wanjina head-dress, and associated with lightning (Elkin 1948: 14; figs. 10 & 11, Akerman 2009: 15) (see Figure 2a). Such figures may be regarded as at one end of the continuum in a west to east stylistic cline depicting large anthropomorphic forms.

The Waliarri figure occurs alongside other large anthropomorphs identified by Traditional Owners as Djuari (Figure 3b). Djuari are described by the Traditional Owners as ‘cheeky spirits’ who are recent arrivals from Gidja country in the north. In the course of their



Figure 4. Painted art showing European motifs and introduced animals at Mimbi in Gooniyandi country.

travels the Djuari created a wide 'pathway like an orchard' as they walked. These malicious looking beings are characterised by having two long ears/horns/head-dress/feathers on their heads. The relationship between these and the depictions of dangerous ghosts in the western Kimberley that Crawford (1968: 93) was told were also called Djuari is unclear.

Contact art featuring European subjects, such as people wearing clothing or introduced animals and objects, does occur in the region but is rare compared to Arnhem Land in the north (May *et al.* 2010) and parts of the Pilbara to the south (Paterson & Wilson 2009). Playford (2007:

150, fig. 8.40) records one of the few examples in Gooniyandi country near Mimbi Caves. It includes images of a camel, a horse, a carriage, car or tram, a man wearing a hat, the initials CPLE and a ship, which may be a screw steamer as it has what appears to be a trail of steam or smoke emerging from a central funnel (Figure 4). The hat in question could be a top hat but it is also very like a tall, probably felt, hat similar to that worn by an Aboriginal man in a photograph taken between 1920 and 1936 and labelled 'southern Kimberley' in the Charles Edward Flinders collection of Kimberley photographs held in the Battye Library (Album BA1459). Together the steamer, the hat and carriage/car types suggest a late nineteenth to early twentieth century date for the art.

Black dry pigment art

We recorded possible images of Europeans in Contact art executed in dry black pigment at Darrananna, a cave site in Bunuba country. Amongst drawings in dry black pigment is an image of a person wearing what appears to be a brimmed hat but may be a head decoration. The drawings are mostly diminutive, contrasting markedly with the large, bold Wanjinastyle graphics that are executed in wet pigment and applied onto a matte white background. In many cases the drawn black pigment motifs are indistinct and where multiple motifs occur on a single panel they often seem to lack overall compositional structure. Black drawn motifs include scored lines and meanders (Figure 5a), amorphous shapes and anthropomorphs, some with head-dresses (Figure 5b). Hand stencils are common in the painted art but in the black drawn pigment art they are replaced with hand outlines (Figure 5c).

Another feature of this art is that it often appears to have been used in re-marking existing motifs by outlining the painted figures or highlighting or refreshing certain features of painted figures. Some Wanjinastyle, such as the one at Carpenter's Gap 1, have been outlined or re-marked in charcoal (Figures 6a & b). Other painted motifs have been augmented with the later addition of new features in black pigment. Figures 6c & d show varying degrees of

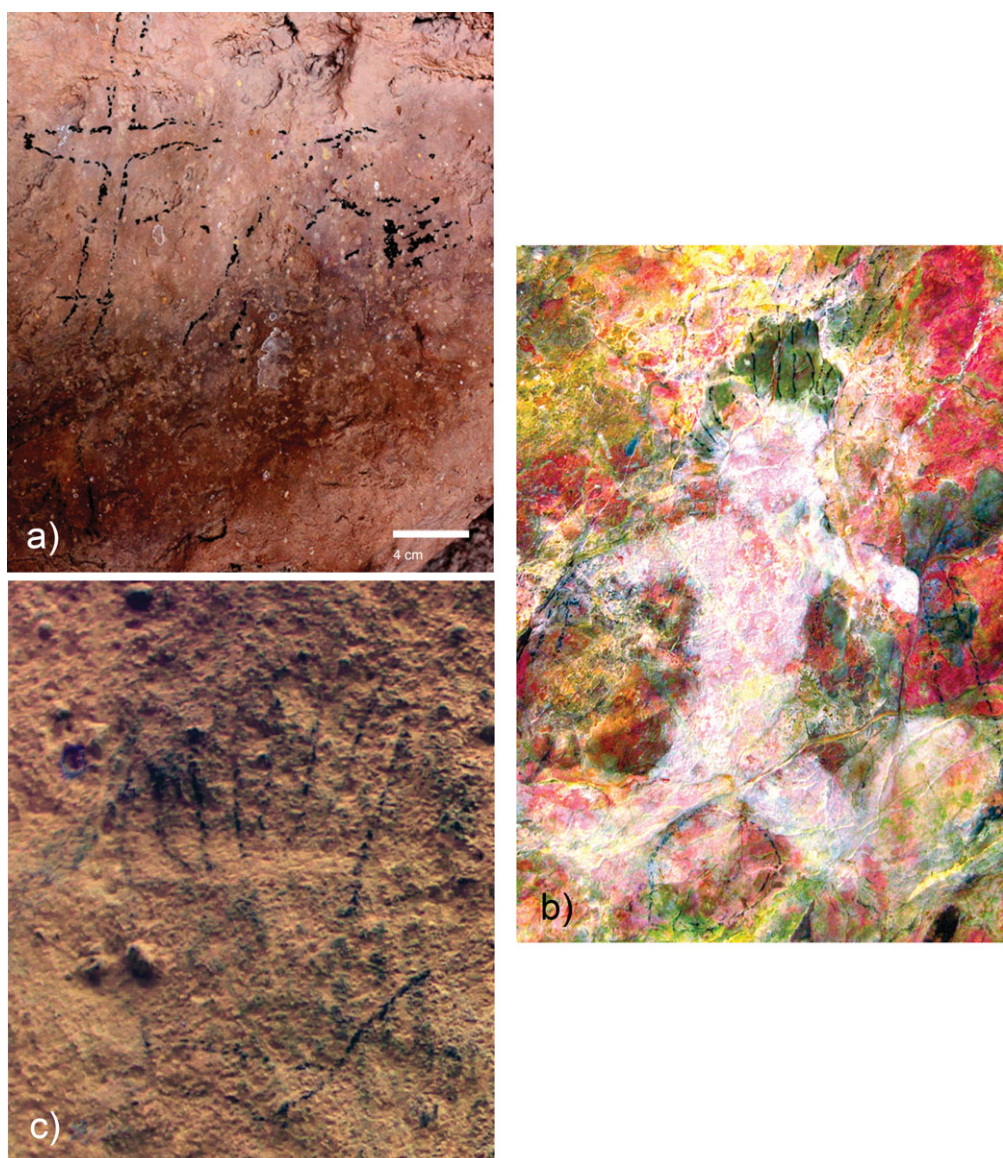


Figure 5. Dry black pigment art: (a) amorphous shapes; (b) anthropomorph; (c) hand stencil. Images (a) and (c) enhanced using Adobe Photoshop tools, and (b) using Image J/DStretch.

addition to either create a new image or refresh an existing one with drawn lines and shapes at the shelter known as Elimberrie Spring.

The addition of head-dresses in black pigment to older paintings is common. Figure 7a shows one such example at Elimberrie Spring. At another site in Bunuba country, an anthropomorph in orange pigment has drawn black pigment applied on top of existing painted pigment to highlight or refresh the facial features and to outline parts of the body (Figure 7b). A series of lines extending vertically from the top of the head does not appear

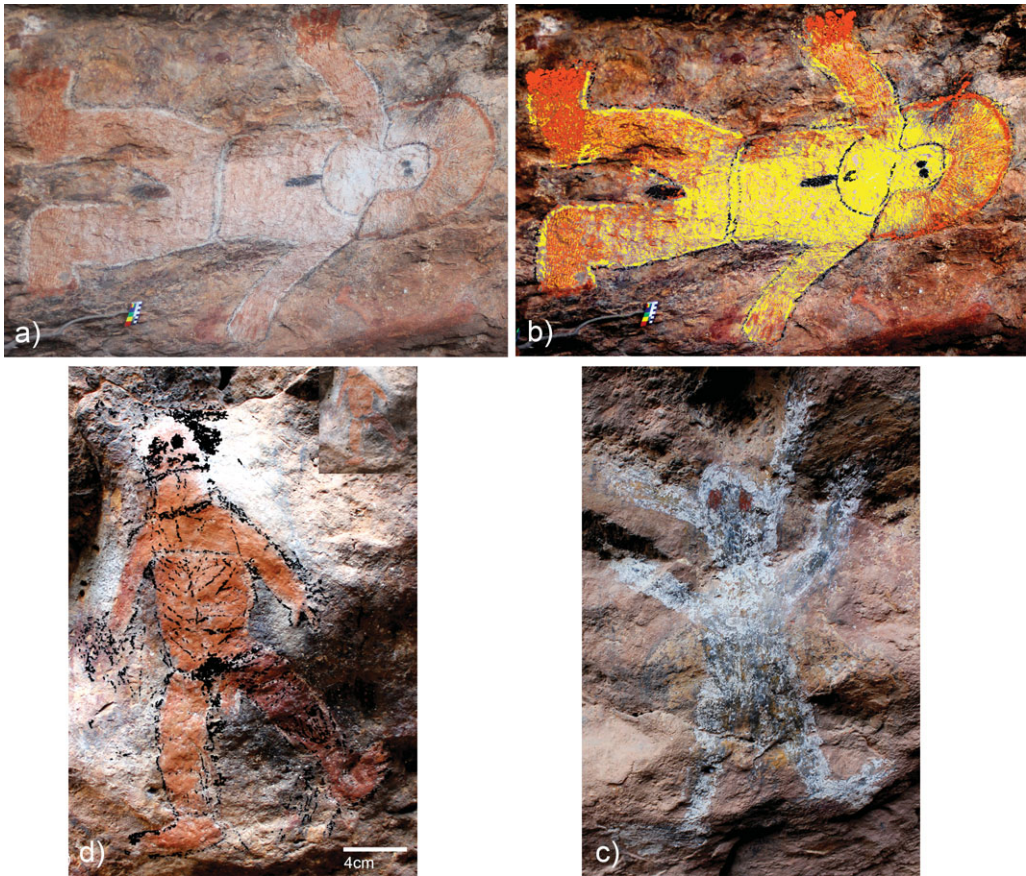


Figure 6. Dry black pigment art added to older art: (a & b) Wanjina from Carpenter's Gap 1 remarked and outlined; (c) anthropomorph with additions and highlights in black pigment; and (d) with internal features on the body added, outline and rayed head-dress drawn in narrow lines of black pigment on figures at Elimberrie Spring. Images b, c & d are enhanced, and drawn black lines highlighted, using Adobe Photoshop layers and tools.

to superimpose any previous such lines and suggest the later addition of a head-dress similar to the rayed head-dresses of Wanjinas. The arrangement of the facial features of this figure also suggests similarity to the Wanjina-style figures found in Bunuba country, with two large solid-fill circle variants joined by an upward opening arc.

A few of the dry pigment anthropomorphs have heads haloed with rayed head-dresses which also seem to reference those depicted on the wet pigment Wanjinas in this region. Figure 7c, for example, shows a small full-frontal black drawn anthropomorph with head-dress. In Figure 7d, a Wanjina-style figure has been drawn in charcoal over an existing red pigment lizard/crocodile.

While the scratched and black pigment art seems to be the most recent art of the area, in some places it is evident that painting using ochres is either contemporary with, or more recent than, the black drawn figures. For example at Elimberrie Spring, a 22cm high anthropomorph has been drawn with a small hat, or head-dress, to the left of two arced lines and indeterminate black drawn shapes that may at one time have formed another

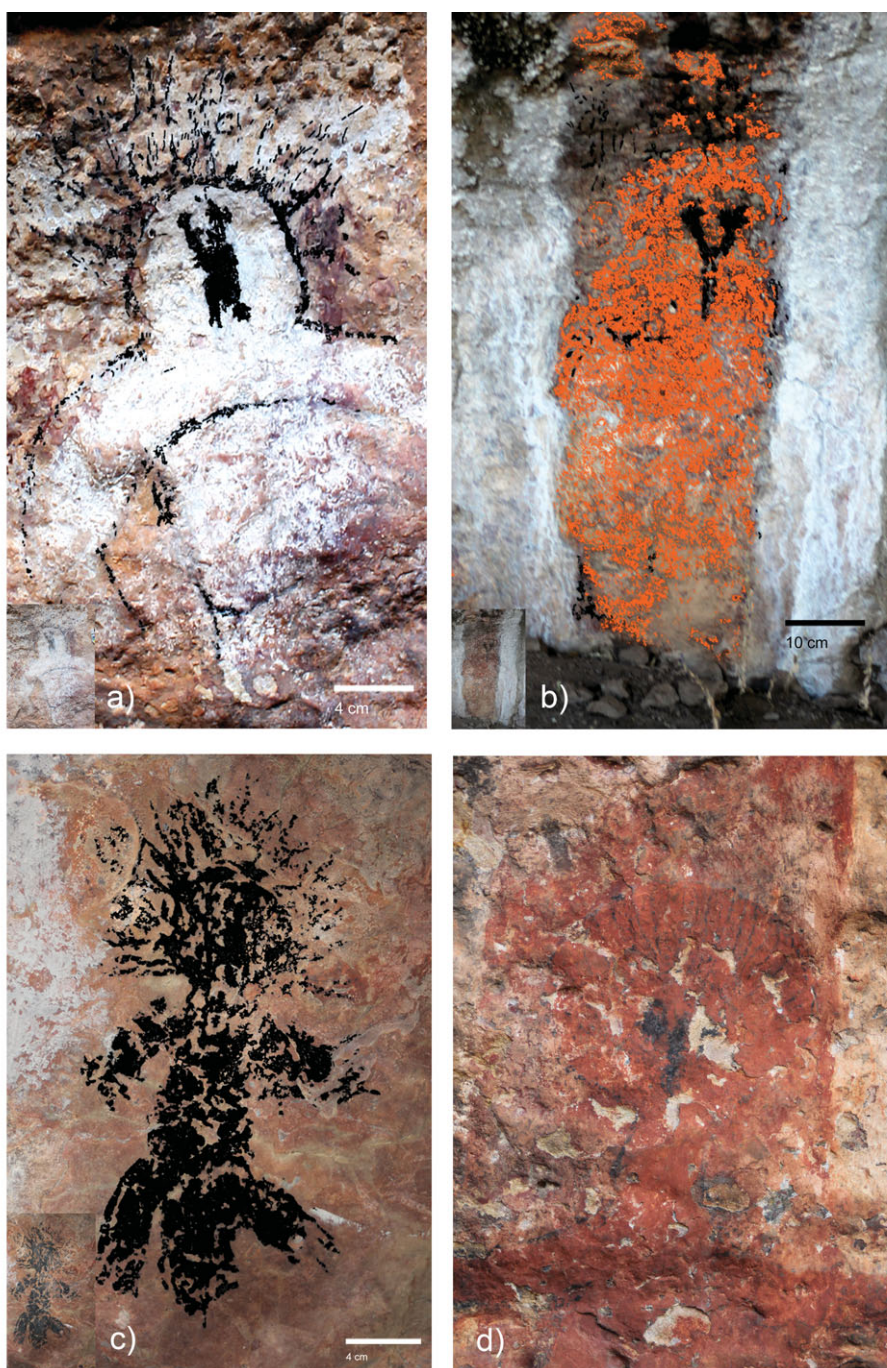


Figure 7. Dry black pigment art used to add head-dresses to older art: (a) anthropomorph at Elimberrie Spring; (b) anthropomorph at an unnamed site in Bunuba country; (c) anthropomorph at a rockshelter close to Tunnel Creek; (d) detail of drawn Wanjina superimposed on large red ochre crocodile south-west of Tunnel Creek. All images enhanced using layers and tools in Adobe Photoshop.

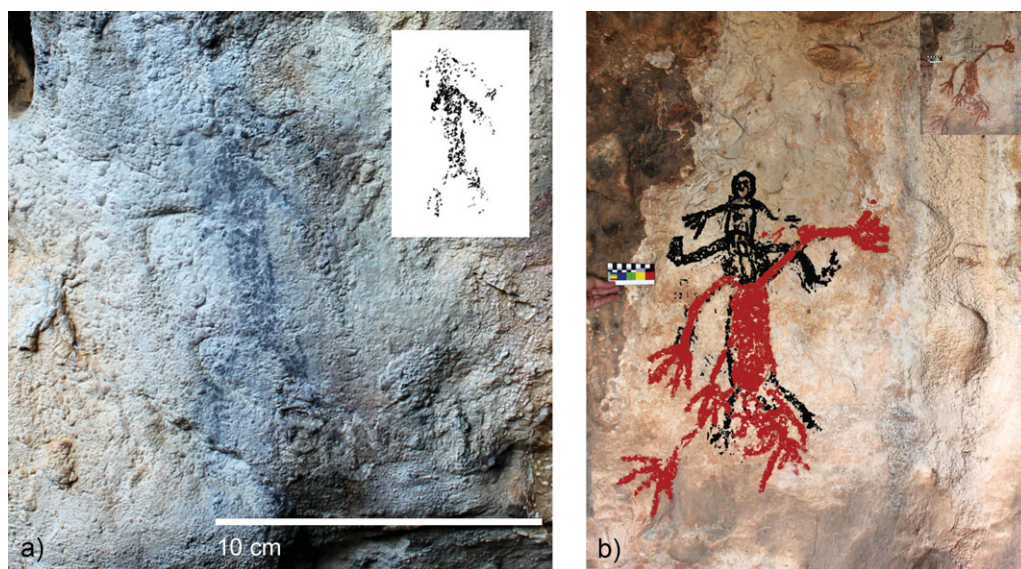


Figure 8. Painted art superimposed on black pigment drawn art at (a) Elimberrie Spring and (b) Tunnel Creek. Both images enhanced using layers and tools in Adobe Photoshop.

figure (Figure 8a). The indeterminate markings are drawn over remnants of a red pigment motif that shows through the gaps in the drawing. These markings are representative of a number of drawings at this site where red, white and orange figures are interspersed with and superimposed on one another and on black drawn figures. Figure 8b shows a black drawn anthropomorph superimposed by a red figure.

Fine scratch-work art

Scratch-work art has been created by incising the limestone surfaces, but the incisions are fine and the depth minimal, suggesting that they were created by scratching the surface with a hard sharp object. Although the incisions are shallow, by removing the dark grey weathered surface of the limestone to expose the underlying white stone, the artists have managed to create contrast without depth. Because many of the scratches are narrow with sharp acute angles at their edges with the parent rock, it is likely that they were made with metal tools such as screwdrivers, fencing wire or knife blades. As discussed below, this is consistent with information given to one of the authors (S.O.) in 1993 by senior Traditional Owners (now deceased) of this country, who had been employed as stockmen.

Examples of scratch-work art identified during the 2011 survey include the small cave designated as Stumpy's Soak 1. This site contains many scratched motifs including three anthropomorphs (Figures 9a & b) with conical head-dresses (or dressed hair arrangements) shown holding implements or weapons, birds that resemble emus, and other motifs that may be plants or ceremonial regalia. About 0.2m to the right of these are some scratch-work figures that superimpose an ochre painting of an anthropomorph. Close examination suggests that they resemble grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea*) or a stylised boab (*Adansonia gregorii*);

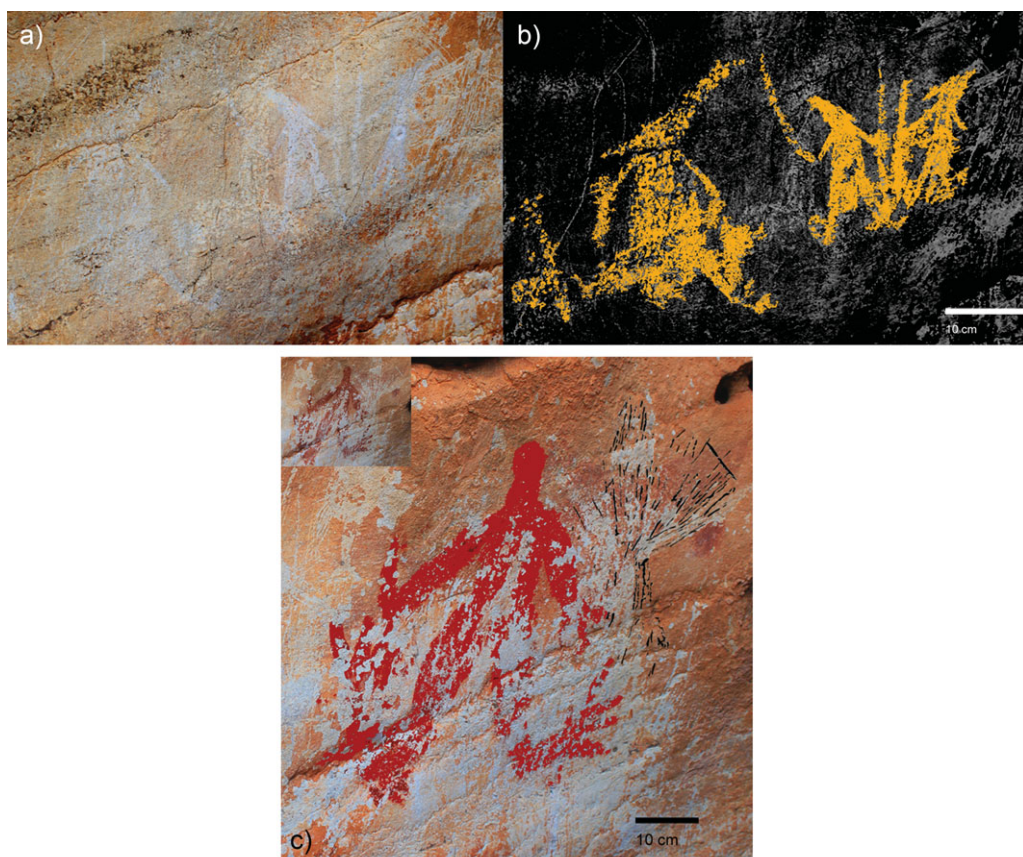


Figure 9. Scratch-work art from Stumpy's Soak 1, Bunuba country: (a & b) anthropomorphs with conical head-dresses or dressed hair arrangements; (c) rays and infilled shapes that superimpose an ochre painting of an anthropomorph. Images b & c enhanced using layers and tools in Adobe Photoshop.

the latter are prolific in the area (Figure 9c). In all cases where painted motifs and scratch-work overlap, the scratch-work images are executed over the painted art. The fact that the scratch-work anthropomorphs are clearly superimposed over red painted figures but appear to reproduce the subject and posture of the painted anthropomorphs indicates they were created after the painted art but reference the same stylistic and symbolic system. Information from the Traditional Owners present when this cave was visited suggested that it was not a habitation site but a place where people came to cool down in the heat of the day while engaged in 'cattle work' on the pastoral station from the late nineteenth century.

Elimberrie shelter also has a large body of light scratch-work art. Figure 10a shows many light and narrow scratched lines that combine to form a figure, possibly a Wanjina-style figure. The enhanced image in Figure 10b shows what appears to be a cockatoo feather emerging from the head-dress, referencing those shown in Figure 2a. The base of the figure forms the body of the anthropomorph with vertical lines forming a rounded wide torso, and one deeper discontinuous line creating a chest-like division similar to those seen on the torso of painted Wanjinas. The figure is partially superimposed by a white ochre anthropomorph,

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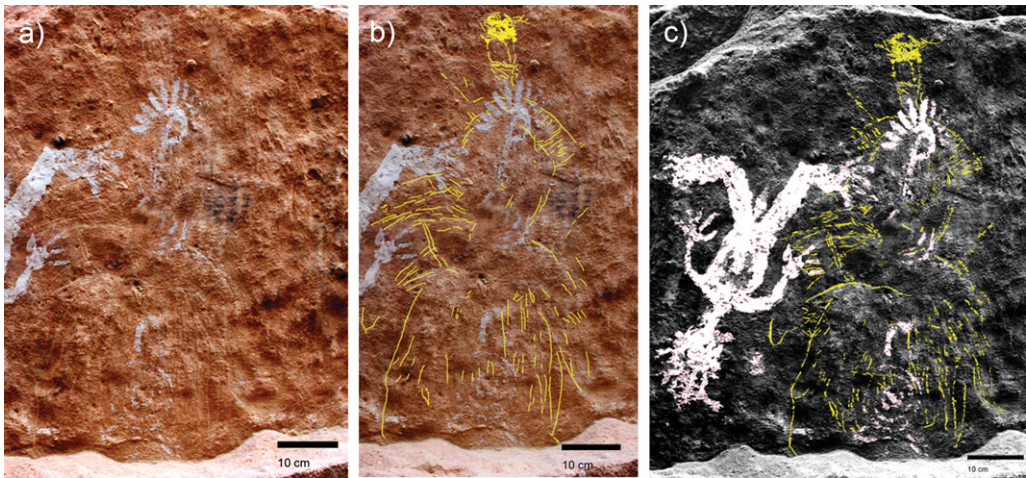


Figure 10. Scratch-work art from Elimberrie Spring: (a) Wanjina-style anthropomorph; (b) scratch-work in 10a highlighted using magic wand and infill tools in Adobe Photoshop; (c) white painted anthropomorph partially superimposed over scratch-work anthropomorph with head-dress.

with vertical extensions that may be interpreted as a head-dress (Figure 10c). The ochre anthropomorph is inverted, which may indicate a deceased person or spirit according to Bunuba Traditional Owners.

Context

The superimposition of the black pigment and scratch-work art indicates that it is some of the most recent art of the region, and contemporary information suggests that at least some, if not all, may relate to the Contact period. The Contact period in the Kimberley, especially the southern Kimberley, was particularly violent. The first British expedition into the Kimberley was led by George Grey and began in 1837, some 10 years after the first British settlement in Western Australia at King George Sound. He describes poor relations with the Aboriginal people, and on February 11 reported a skirmish in which he was wounded and an Aboriginal man killed (Grey 1841)—violence that was to mark early European expansion into the Kimberley. European expansion into the south-central part of the Kimberley began after Alexander Forrest's favourable reports following his 1879 expedition south of the Leopold Range and adjacent to the Fitzroy River. Large tracts of land were taken up very quickly after land was released for settlement in 1881. Durack and Emanuel claimed a holding of a million acres on the Fitzroy River in 1882 (Taylor 1984: 160). In Bunuba country, William Forrester established Lillimooloora, a one million acre property stocked with 60 000 sheep, in 1884. In the space of a few short years the Aboriginal people of this area lost control of their land and resources.

The period of European contact from first settlement to about 1920 is often referred to by Kimberley Aboriginal people as the “killing times” (Kimberley Language Resource Centre 1996), and the first recorded casualty of the south-central region occurred in 1882, almost immediately after settlement (Pedersen & Woorunmurra 1995). Despite the difficulty of

keeping records of killings, many have been recorded and the stories remain in oral traditions today (Ross 1989; Pedersen & Woorunmurra 1995; Kimberley Language Resource Centre 1996; Blundell & Woolagoodja 2005). Most of these killings were as reprisals for killing Europeans or stock, or for killing European men who were involved with Aboriginal women. Oral traditions are often substantiated by government records. For example, the murder of people in Gooniyandi country in the Margaret River region is a well-known story told by Gooniyandi people today (Rosemary Nuggett *pers. comm.*). It is supported by the State Records of the Police Department for 1895, which record the shootings of nine individuals (SROWA, AN5/1, Police Department Acc 430, 1808/1895, cited in Clement 2010: 13).

Violent acts against Aboriginal people were sanctioned as “giving them a lesson” (Owen 2003: 109) and at the turn of the century there was a tendency for the police not to report incidents when warning shots accidentally hit people (Gill 1977: 21). When Aboriginal people were not killed in reprisals by pastoralists they were dealt with severely by the law. A Nyikina man who speared the Mt Anderson station manager in 1882 for sexually interfering with his wife was subjected to a public trial in Perth and hanged at Rottnest Island (Pedersen & Woorunmurra 1995: 25).

Despite the violence during the years of conflict, Aboriginal people were also becoming incorporated in the Fitzroy Valley stations (Bolton & Pedersen 1980) where they worked as shepherds to the west and stockmen to the east (Bolton 1954). Payment for this work was largely in rations and the people who worked on the stations camped there with their families while they were working. The Kalgoorlie gold rush of the 1890s made white labour even scarcer and Aboriginal labour more attractive (Rowse 1987: 85). Many Indigenous people resisted the draw of the stations and remained as ‘outsiders’ (Rowse 1987) until as late as the 1950s (Kimberley Language Resource Centre 1996).

Contemporary information indicates a continuing currency for the dry pigment and scratch-work art. During a survey on Leopold Downs Station in 1993 with one of the senior Traditional Owners, Billy Oscar, author S.O. noted a number of black dry pigment and scratched anthropomorphs. While visually dualistic, these images portrayed similar themes, and some small scratched figures seemed to have head-dresses that referenced the rayed halos surrounding the heads of painted Wanjinas. Billy Oscar noted that these images had been created by Bunuba men while they were engaged in cattle droving and were unable to access their traditional ochre sources. He stated that they were undertaken by Traditional Owners who were fulfilling their ritual obligations to the country and their roles as senior law men. In 2011, when visiting the cave Darrananna, Mona Oscar similarly recalled black charcoal drawings having been made by her own family members when they took holidays from station work and visited the site.

Discussion

In her discussion of the black dry pigment art in the Watarrka NP assemblage, Frederick notes a formal shift in “media and technique of art production and corresponding changes in the structuring of graphics and in the frequency of production” (1999: 140). Although the Watarrka black pigment art is not dominated by exotic or introduced objects/subjects,

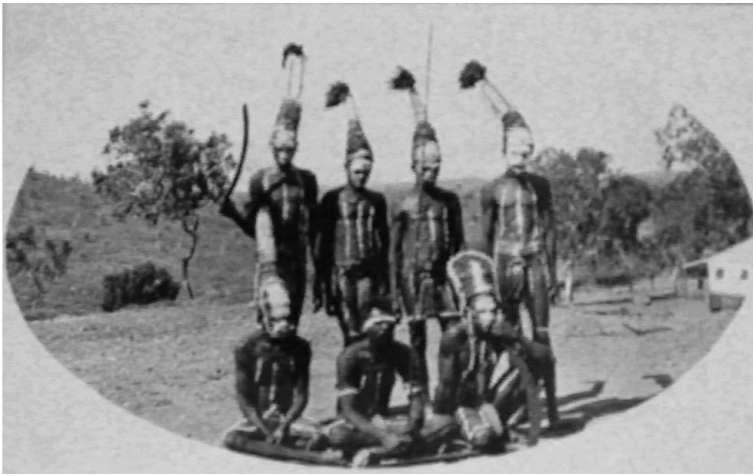


Figure 11. Aboriginal people of the 'southern Kimberley' dressed for ceremony with conical head-dresses. Photograph taken between 1920 and 1936; from the Charles Edward Flinders collection of Kimberley photographs held in the Battye Library (Album BA1459).

Frederick argues that they were produced in the Contact period and therefore record a general process of change associated with the arrival of Europeans. She suggests that the change in graphic systems may have resulted from a number of causes such as change in the use of landscape due to changing access to resources caused by the impingement of colonial forces or other constraints imposed by contact (1999: 141). She notes that this change in the graphic system may not be unique to the Watarrka region but may occur throughout central Australia. Our preliminary survey extends this observation and suggests that these changes may be even more widespread.

In the south-central Kimberley a shift in media and technique associated with the Contact period seems to be towards a greater use of black pigment and scratch-work instead of ochres. However, rather than new motifs representing European objects or people, artists here emphasised traditions of older art, as indicated by animals, a range of plants and anthropomorphs, often with geometric markings and head-dresses. The head-dresses are of the same conical style documented for this area at Contact (Figure 11).

In Arnhem Land, where hundreds of images marking contact between Indigenous people and Southeast Asian boat crews occur (Taçon *et al.* 2010), there is good historical documentation to show that this relationship was one where Indigenous people benefited through the provision of Asian and European goods in exchange for access to trepang and other resources which held no value for them. Additionally, while the settlers of the central Kimberley plains came to stay and usurped the land, the Macassans camped only for a part of the year and brought many of their own staples to exchange.

In contrast, it seems likely that the Bunuba were less attracted by the Europeans and by the objects that were the instruments of their control, perhaps associating these symbols with raids, death, theft of land and the despoilment of their sacred sites. Both those in hiding and those living and working on pastoral stations would have had only limited access

to supplies of ochre and other materials needed for ritual and artistic production, and the ceremonial responsibilities played out in painting would have been curtailed.

Conclusion

Although black drawn art and scratch-work are not found in all sites, they are found throughout a broad region. We believe that these graphic systems have been overlooked due to the visual dominance of Wanjina-style graphics or mistaken for graffiti, and that comprehensive survey will uncover many more dry black pigment and scratch-work motifs. Although further work and dating is needed to be certain, it appears that at least some examples of these graphics are contemporary with, or post-date, Wanjina art.

The particularly violent settlement and rapid land usurpation that affected Aboriginal people's free movement probably reduced access to resources that may have led to the greater use of more abundant and accessible materials—in this case charcoal and techniques that did not require pigment. In this context, people's emphasis on maintenance of pre-European motifs, including ceremonial dress, suggests that social cohesion and identity was important at this time of dramatic and violent change. The newly recorded graphic systems of the southern Kimberley form coherent bodies of art that clearly require further documentation.

Acknowledgements

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