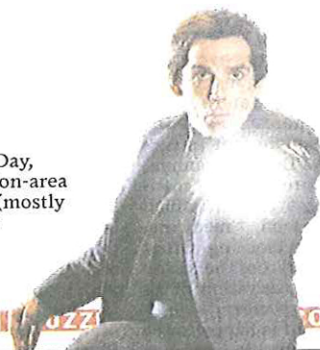




TMI

■ In a salute to Memorial Day, we'd like to rename Houston-area landmarks to honor local (mostly living) celebrities. **PAGE E5**



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Art from the 'dreamings' of aboriginal women

■ Gallery exhibition is rich in imagery related to oral culture

By DOUGLAS BRITT
ARTS WRITER

Abstract painter and teacher Hans Hofmann delivered one of the art world's more dubious compliments in the 1930s, when he told Lee Krasner, one of his students, that a piece was "so good you would not know it was painted by a woman." But an exhibition at Booker-Lowe Gallery, Houston's only art space

devoted to Australian aboriginal work, is chock full of apparently abstract paintings that an aficionado *would* know were made by women — for reasons pertaining to subject matter, not quality.

Featuring work by artists from northeastern Queensland, the Northern Territory and northern Western Australia, *Women's Business: Paintings by Leading and Emerging Australian Artists* is a must-see. Please see **ART**, Page E2



COURTESY THE ARTISTS AND BOOKER-LOWE GALLERY

KURTAL JILA (WATERHOLE): Maryann Downs and Dolly Snell created a piece about Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley Mountain region of Western Australia.

WOMEN'S BUSINESS: PAINTINGS BY LEADING AND EMERGING AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL WOMEN ARTISTS

■ **When:** Through June 4

■ **Where:** Booker-Lowe Gallery, 4623 Feagan

■ **Information:** bookerlowegallery.com or 713-880-1541

ART: Symbols tell stories of rituals

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tralian Aboriginal Women Artists is rich in imagery related to oral traditions.

"Generally speaking, the works appear abstract, but the markings may have geographic significance, may tell a traditional story related to women or may incorporate techniques handed down for centuries," said Nana Booker, the gallery's co-owner and Texas' honorary consul for Australia.

"In aboriginal culture, each child has custody of certain 'dreamings,' or myths, which help preserve the ancient traditions and survival lore necessary in an oral culture," she said, adding that factors such as family structure or what is believed to be the time of a child's conception determine which parent passes down the dreamings, which are typically gender-specific.

The term "business" relates to aboriginal law, which Booker said "is often very rigid, with clear delineation of acceptable marriage linkages, family relationships and behavior. Mourning rituals are called 'sorry business,' gathering food is 'women's business,' and hunting kangaroos is usually 'men's business.'"

A painting's symbols may tell a story related to "women's business" that provide clues about foods that can be eaten only at certain times of the year, or where to find medicinal bush seeds or fresh potable water, she said.

For example, a seemingly abstract painting by Judy Napangardi Watson, based on a dreaming story about women who traveled east gathering food, contains "forms that depict women, traveling lines, water holes and other elements related to the myth

and to traditional women's roles," Booker said.

Rosella Namok, 30, uses finger-painting techniques taught by her grandmother for body-painting rituals while a collaborative painting between Maryann Downs and Dolly Snells is a reminder that women traditionally painted each other's bodies for such ceremonies, Booker said.

Paintings about "women's business" have become big business in recent years, dominating the aboriginal art market, eclipsing auction records once held by men and overcoming old prejudices, the Sydney Morning Herald reported in 2007.

"People used to say if it wasn't a man's painting, it wasn't real," Roslyn Premont, director of Australia's Gallery Gondwana, told the paper. "They wouldn't acknowledge women had their own stories and their own dreamings."

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