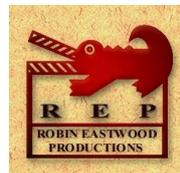


PRESS KIT

PAINTING COUNTRY



Painting Country is a 1 x 52 minute HDTV documentary about some of Australia's most famous Aboriginal artists, and their journey through the Australian outback, tracing the origins of the Dreamtime stories which inspire their work.



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SYNOPSIS

ONE LINE

Venture on a journey painting the kingfisher songline, from the Western Desert to Uluru, with a group of internationally acclaimed artists and custodians from Balgo Hills.



ONE PARAGRAPH

Painting Country follows a journey back to the traditional country of ten indigenous artists from the outback community of Balgo in North West Australia. Their art is famous for its hot bright colours, bold composition and creative brush techniques. Its origins lie in the traditional designs done in sand and body paintings. And in less than 20 years it has evolved into one of the most innovative movements of modern art in Australia. This film, whilst it intimately portrays the life and humour of the artists, also reveals how white settlement forced them to leave their country, and why their relationship to the land is still fundamental to their existence.

ONE PAGE SYNOPSIS

Balgo Hills or Wirrimanu is located on the edge of the Tanami and Great Sandy Deserts in far North Western Australia. Despite its isolation this is home to some of Australia's most famous indigenous artists whose paintings hang in galleries and private collections around the world.

Balgo art is famous for its hot bright colours, bold composition and creative brush techniques. Its origins lie in the traditional designs done in sand and body paintings. And in less than 20 years it has evolved into one of the most innovative movements of modern art in Australia.

The Balgo artists draw their inspiration from their deep spiritual connection with the land. But none of these artists live in the land they paint. Most were born

deep in the desert where they lived a nomadic life until the impact of white settlement forced them to seek sanctuary in missions such as Balgo.

It's been decades since these artists have seen their country. And as many are getting old, it's time to go back.

Painting Country follows a journey back to the traditional country of ten of Balgo's most celebrated artists – including Tjumpo Tjapanangka, Lucy Yukenbarri, Helicopter Tjungurrayi and Sam Tjampitjin. Along with two art coordinators from Warlayirti Artists, the Aboriginal artists travel through some of Australia's most remote desert landscapes on tracks that have not been used for many years.

Their journey takes them as far as spectacular Lake Mackay and onto Jupiter Well deep in the Gibson Desert. The film intimately portrays the life and humour of the indigenous artists. It reveals why they had to leave their country and why their relationship to the land is still fundamental to their existence

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In September 1999 the NHK Satellite & Hi-Vision Broadcasting Department and Media Development & Co-Productions Department contacted several production companies in Australia asking for proposals to be put forward for one hour HDTV documentaries with Australian Arts, Culture or Human Interest content for delivery and broadcast on NHK before the Sydney 2000 Olympics.

Painting Country was one of three documentaries selected for co-production with NHK. The program was broadcast in a prime time slot on the prestigious Hi-Vision (HDTV) channel just prior to the Sydney Olympics. NHK has also broadcast *Painting Country* on one of their two Satellite Channels and one of it's Terrestrial Channels, offering the program to a further mass audience nationally. The estimated viewing audience was approximately 11 million and the breakdown of viewers as follows:

HDTV	= 1 million
Satellite	= 5 million
Terrestrial	= 5 million

In Australia, the program was pre-purchased by SBS and broadcast during a prime time evening documentary slot.

PRODUCTION

The HD Camera Kit was supplied by NHK and the program was filmed over a six week period. The film crew and support staff employed were all Australian.

EDIT

The off-line 'Creative' Edit and sound mix was completed in Perth. The final 'full resolution' on-line edit and colour grading was done in Japan at NHK's state of the art Hi Definition facilities.

PRODUCER'S NOTES

Painting Country presents a positive 'good news' story from a remote community which too often only attracts media attention when there's a problem.

Deep in the desert landscape of Australia where ancestral heroes are still alive; mythical beings capable of magical acts roam the country, explaining the land and its law to the people. The people listen to the land and celebrate its power through song, story and painting.

Painting Country follows a journey back to the traditional country of ten indigenous artists from the outback community of Balgo in North West Australia. Their art is famous for its hot bright colours, bold composition and creative brush techniques. Its origins lie in the traditional designs done in sand and body paintings. But in less than 20 years it has evolved into one of the most innovative movements of modern art in Australia. And every brushstroke or 'mark' is about the artists' relationship to their country.

Yet none of these artists live in the land they paint. Most were born hundreds of kilometres away in the desert, and lived a nomadic life until they were driven off their land by the impact of white settlement. It has been decades since they've seen the land they paint, and for many of the older indigenous artists, this journey may be the last chance to see the country where they were born.

Painting Country takes the audience on a journey into the heart of some of Australia's most remote and desolate landscape. The group travels through the Great Sandy Desert, towards Lake Mackay, a major constellation of dreaming sites for desert people. All along the way the artists paint and tell stories about their life before the white man arrived. For Tjumpo Tjapanangka, returning to the land he paints releases powerful recollections: "I still remember it. I am from this place. I went through the law here. This is still my place. I grew up and became a man here...we were all naked. We belonged to this country. No white man here. No one else - just us. This was our place."

Despite decades of absence we witness how the land is still familiar to these artists. They know exactly where one person's land begins, and another ends. This relationship to the land is determined by family and language groups: "That road...I can talk for it", and, "That's the country from my granny's side." Their spirit lives in the land they paint, and the act of painting is an act of remembering, of keeping it alive. Every mark or line is deliberate, as the artists recreate a track they used to walk to a particular watering hole, or a place where certain bush foods grew. With flawless navigation, they know each and every turn of the desert country, where the road is rough, and where it disappears. When these details are recorded on canvas, the painting becomes a celebration, a prayer, and a reflection of their deep relationship with the land.

But the journey is not without its problems. Unseasonal heavy rains have made many of the roads impassable - turning the Great Sandy Desert into the Great Sandy Swamp. With humour and good spirits the artists dig their way out of the mud until they reach the tiny community of Kiwirrkurra. Here they are forced to sit out the rain until the roads dry out and they can continue west to their final destination of the Gibson Desert. As we travel further and further back into the artists' country, their stories intimately unfold as to why they were forced to leave their land and go to what was once a Mission at Balgo.

Painting Country provides an evocative and intimate connection with the Aboriginal artists, the laws of their land, and an insight into part of their history. Their paintings keep this history alive. As Balgo community art coordinator Tim Acker, says: "The best of the work out here is as contemporary as anywhere you'd find on the planet. The fact that it's painted by people whose background, whose perception, whose storytelling, whose priorities, whose whole life is so different gives it a quality that other paintings don't have.

Andrew Ogilvie, Producer, Electric Pictures

CREDITS

Production Title: PAINTING COUNTRY

Production Companies: Electric Pictures Pty Ltd & Robin Eastwood Productions Pty Ltd

Executive Producers: Andrew Ogilvie and Robin Eastwood

Writer/Director: Sally Ingleton

Principal Crew: DOP Simon Smith
Sound Recordist Laurie Chlanda
Production Manager Robin Eastwood

Principal Participants: Warlayirti Artists
The Communities of BALGO and
KIWIRRKURRA

Post Production: Editors Peter Pritchard
Lawrie Silvestrin
Composer Chris Norman
Narrator Robert Menzies
Sound Editors Glenn Martin
Laurie Sinagra
Sound Mix Ric Curtin
On- Line Editors Masaharu Iizuka
Yoshihito Hatanaka
Technical Advisor Kai Teramoto
On-Line Facilities NHK HI VISION –
TOKYO

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Commissioning Editor John Hughes

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