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ANCIENT MEETS MODERN

AN ABORIGINAL ART EXHIBIT
FEATURES AN EMERGING
CONTEMPORARY VOICE
FROM AN ANCIENT CULTURE

By Derek Ostensen



Photo: Andria Huber



Enveloped in a striking glass + steel design and spanning nearly an entire city block, the Studio Pali Fekete Architecture (SPFA) offices and its Museum of Design Art and Architecture (MODAA) gallery space have become a cultural fixture on the Culver City scene. With a client list including such landmark structures as the LACMA West, Pantages and Greek theaters, and numerous international movers and shakers, SPFA has become a widely acclaimed architecture firm known for its dramatically artistic design style.

It thus seems appropriate that nearly half their offices would comprise an evocative art gallery—a union that brings the inspirations of the art world deeply into the firm's environment and workspace.

"Our architecture has always had a close relationship with fine art," says Dafna Zilafro, who helps arrange exhibitions and manage the MODAA gallery for SPFA. "Compelling artwork has long been important to our founders, Zoltan Pali and Judit Meda Fekete, and it has been a focus for them that our entire firm stay continually connected to the inspirations and new directions offered by exceptional art" ▶



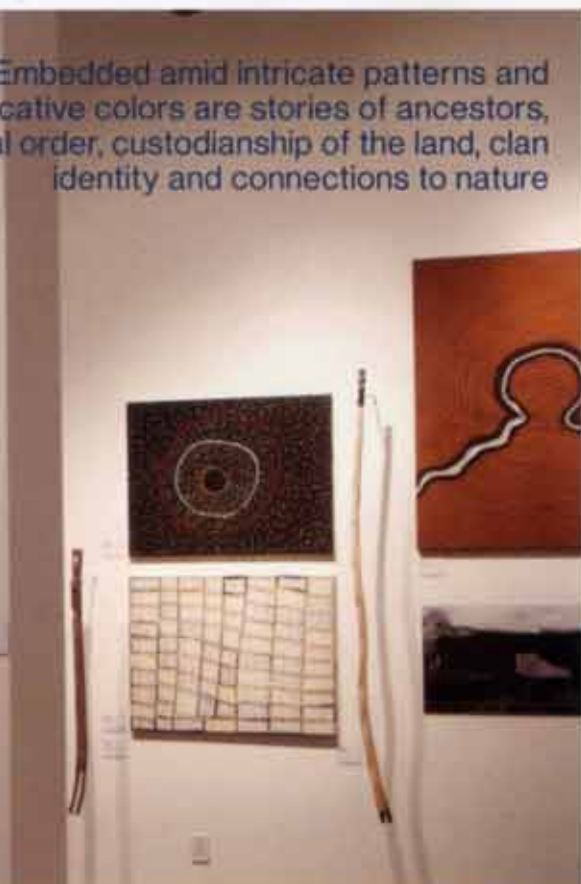
Nira Puruntatamari, Kulama, 2007 | Photo courtesy of Wolfgang Schliak, Tribal Earth Gallery



Photo: Andrea Huber



Embedded amid intricate patterns and evocative colors are stories of ancestors, moral order, custodianship of the land, clan identity and connections to nature



Indeed, walking through the dynamic, airy offices, there is the inspiring sense that stimulating fine art is often closer in reach than a pencil sharpener.

It is a refreshing departure from conventional office cubical farms and one that offers SPFA employees a wellspring of consistent inspiration.

Since its inception, MODAA Gallery has become a popular destination for Los Angeles art lovers, and openings often attract more than 600 people. Situated in lively and pedestrian-friendly downtown Culver City, the gallery is an anchor for a fertile art scene, and its exhibitions are frequently groundbreaking.

In January, the exhibition, Australia Contemporary—Aboriginal Art + Modern Architecture vibrantly explored the emerging contemporary artwork of a culture that goes

back more than 40,000 years. With western art materials such as acrylic paint and canvas having only been introduced to aboriginal culture in the 1970s, the culture is undergoing a transformative exploration of the new possibilities afforded by these tools.

The resulting artwork has been heralded by the art world as a compelling union of ancient culture and contemporary representation. Indeed, though the aesthetics of the work would be described as modern by many, the themes of each piece are distinctly ancient. Embedded amid intricate patterns and evocative colors are stories of ancestors, moral order, custodianship of the land, clan identity and connections to nature.

Curator Wolfgang Schlink notes, "Each piece tells a story within the abstract and these stories, such as the creation legend, are foundations to their cultural identity.



Accordingly, you often have multiple artists expressing the same cultural history, but in different ways and the result is quite vivid and extraordinary."

Complementing the aboriginal art is a selection of photographs detailing bold, award-winning Australian architecture.

"Both artists and architects share deep roots," notes Schlink. "They both embrace the unique bond to place and landscape." Indeed, that mutual bond is evident throughout the juxtaposition. The broad sweeping modernity of the structures echoes the abstract lines of the paintings as the buildings open themselves up to the surrounding meadows, eucalyptus trees and dynamism of an ancient landscape.

It is a unique meeting of contemporary and ancient culture thousands of years in the making and one that promises to alter both western and aboriginal culture for many years to come. □

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