

# Indigenous Australian Corporation Accused of Censoring Aboriginal Artists

by Crystal Wu



Artists JACK GREEN, STEWART HOOSAN and NANCY MCDINNY. Photo by Miriam Charlie. Courtesy Cross Art Projects, Sydney.

An Australian corporation has been accused of censoring three indigenous artists whose paintings depict the impact of mining and settlements on local aboriginal communities.

The three artists—Garawa-identifying Jack Green and Nancy McDinny, along with her husband Stewart Hoosan, whose maternal heritage is also Garawa—were asked to remove their art from storage in Waralungku Arts, an enterprise under Borroloola’s Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Association Incorporated. Waralungku is a community art center which supports artists through commissions from the sales of artwork, providing them with access to studio space and material, and supporting their travel to interstate exhibitions.

Green, McDinny and Hoosan were not given any notice or alternate relocation space when the art center was undergoing refurbishment in November 2016, according to Cross Art Projects director Jo Holder. During that period, Mabunji chief executive officer Greg Crofts changed all the locks of the art center and sacked its co-ordinator and assistant co-ordinator. Up until the incident, the three artists were represented by Waralungku Arts.

Green has accused Mabunji of silencing their voices, as the removal of their artworks and lockout of the artists would mean that they would have no access to art supplies. The artists have also lost a source of income as their artworks are no longer sold via the art center.

Green’s paintings, such as *One Two, Three, Jacky Green* (2016) and *Spirit Country* (2016), have dealt with the destruction that miners cause to land inhabited by indigenous Australians. “Because I can’t read or write, the only way I’m going to get my voice across is with painting, that’s the only way I can tell my story,” Green said to ABC News.



JACK GREEN, Heart of Country, acrylic on linen, 66 cm x 84 cm. Part of the collection of the Australian National University. Courtesy Cross Art Projects, Sydney.

Crofts denied Green's accusation, saying that they "haven't returned artwork to anybody." He also explained to ABC News that the reason why the three artists' works were not exhibited in the gallery was because they would like to "give opportunities to other artists".

McDinny and her husband Hoosan were at their exhibition in Sydney with the Cross Art Projects when the lockout happened.

The majority of McDinny and Hoosan's works have been damaged due to wet season conditions as their only storage option was a shed at their outstation home that was not weatherproof.

Although Crofts had shown one of Green's paintings in the storage room to ABC News when the media outlet visited the art center in May, canvases by the three artists, who were finalists in the National Indigenous Arts Awards, were not on display in the art gallery.

Holder said that the Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKA) had an agreement with Crofts in that he had to work with the advocacy agency to advertise the position of art center co-ordinator, and that an ANKA board member must be present for the job interview. However, that did not happen and an associate of Crofts with little background in the visual arts was hired.

Holder said that situations like this are “unusual,” stating that while most indigenous art centers have an elected board of indigenous artists, Waralungku Arts does not have its own board, which “made it vulnerable to such unilateral action.”

“It is disturbing to have the lives of artists [and] art center workers subjected to punitive and opaque regimes operating outside decent professional codes and apparently with little corporate oversight,” Holder told ArtAsiaPacific in an email. She also urges the Australian and Northern Territory Governments to meet with ANKA to ensure that a similar situation would not happen again.

Waralungku Arts and ANKA have not responded to ArtAsiaPacific’s request for comment at the time of publication.

Crystal Wu is an editorial intern at ArtAsiaPacific.

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<http://artasiapacific.com/News/IndigenousAustralianCorporationAccusedOfCensoringAboriginalArtists>