

# 002 houston

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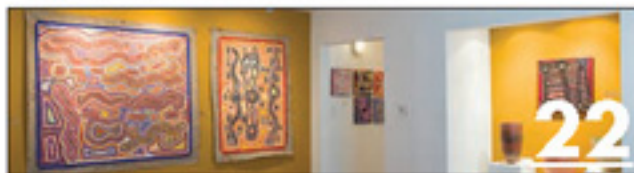
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nana booker



# The

Booker-Lowe Gallery on Feagan, between Memorial and the Heights, is the largest gallery in the country boasting Australian Aboriginal Art. This art is singular in that, although it is over 40,000 years old, it has been drawn on cave walls, on human bodies during ceremonies, and in the sand until relatively recently. Canvases were first introduced to the Aborigines in the 1940s. While some of the artists still mix their paints from ochre and minerals derived from the earth and mixed with an indigenous fixative much like glue, the newer artists have started using acrylic on large medium-toothed linen canvas.

Nana Booker, co-owner of the gallery, has been the honorary consul to Australia for the State of Texas since 1999. She and her husband, co-owner M. David Lowe, have a great passion for the Aboriginal people. They travel to Australia yearly and meet with the directors at various artistic centers—which are organizations set up in the late 1970s to preserve the native cultures in the remotest parts of the continent. Both Booker and Lowe are people who interact regularly with both the elders of the tribe and the young artists who are being schooled in the way of their ancient artistic tradition. In this way, the artistic integrity of the communities is respected and the money earned with the sale of their art is spent on schools, paving roads and building community centers.

Some of the most modern-looking art is being created by the telling of ancient creation myths, or the “Dreamings,” of the oldest living culture. These indigenous people live in remote villages of the desert, plains and even the islands north of the Australian mainland. Major artistic communities spring from the Barrier Reef and the tip of Queensland, to Derby in far western Australia and even to the far tip of the Cape York Peninsula. Their creation tales are called Tjukurrpa, or the “Dream Time.” In this ancient world, only a few god-like characters reigned, with names such as the Rainbow Serpent and the Lightning Men. They roamed the barren earth and created human beings, plants, animals and geographic landmarks.

Only certain individuals are given custody of “Dreamings,” determined by where and when they were born and their ancestral ties. A series of dots and lines make the paintings pleasing to the eye and rhythmic—often songs are sung while the paintings are being made. The Aborigines used to paint their stories on sand and the paint was made of a mixture of natural ochre or charcoal. The mixing of paint and the sand was what presumably made the paint draw itself into dot-like shapes. Some of the origin stories are of a crop, an animal or a season. “Honey Ant Dreaming,” “Water Dreaming” and “Two Kangaroos Dreaming” are all examples of names of “Dreamings” which are important to different communities.

The unique bird’s-eye view of the trails and footprints of animals and geographical areas makes the artwork resonate with a map-like quality. The lack of a horizon and Western perspective makes these works nearly burst with topographical and three-dimensional movement.

Owners Nana and David Lowe travel by plane and four-wheeler to the furthest regions of Australia – some places that aren’t even accessible during the rainy season – to pursue their private collection of the beautiful and vibrant pieces and to continue on their quest to bring Aboriginal art to the forefront of the American art scene. The gallery prides itself on showcasing a plethora of art from a myriad of artistic communities including regions such as the Lockhart River Art Gang and Papunya, Balgo and the Tiwi Islands. Their prices can range anywhere from \$170 to \$35,000. In addition to the shows, the Booker-Lowe Gallery shows at least one non-Aboriginal artist per year and is showcasing world-renowned speakers, such as an upcoming evening with Andrew Wagner, the Editor-in-Chief of *American Craft*.