

Johanna Koons

Art Exploration: Discovering Aboriginal Songlines

Palo Alto, California

Drawing, Painting, Printmaking & Sustainable Studies

Mileta Roe

“By singing the world into existence, he said, the Ancestors had been poets in the original sense of poesis, meaning ‘creation’. No Aboriginal could conceive that the created world was in any way imperfect. His religious life had a single aim: to keep the land the way it was and should be. The man who went ‘Walkabout’ was making a ritual journey. He trod in the footprints of his Ancestor. He sang the Ancestor’s stanzas without changing a word or note –and so recreated the Creation.” – Bruce Chatwin, *The Songlines*.

Throughout Australia, “The Songlines,” also known as the “Dreaming Tracks” or “Trails of Ancestors,” are sacred trails belonging to the Aborigines. The Aboriginal people sing their way across these trails, living the stories or “Dreamings” of their creation. Their songs, in turn, acknowledge and reflect upon each sacred landmark they encounter and the space in between. Their land is holy, and they celebrate and care for it. For my senior thesis, I would like to put together a multimedia art exhibit inspired by the Aboriginal Australian “Songlines” and their connection to the earth and sacred knowledge.

For my thesis I will research more about Aboriginal Dreamings and try to find connections between their Dreamings and my own travels and experiences in different landscapes. My fascination with this topic began in the first semester of my junior year while studying sustainability in Australia. During this time I visited many different kinds of farms and experienced how spiritual farming can be, specifically in small organic and permaculture farming. As part of my program, I also spent time with Aboriginal elders (wise and respected people within

the Aboriginal community) and learned about the fundamental role of the earth in their spiritual beliefs, and also how this is reflected in their art practices. The elders told me a few of their Dreamings (similar to creation myths) and taught me how to make their art (similar to “maps” that connect the landscape to different Dreamings).

Within my art exhibit, there will be three main components: a set of three felted dolls, a series of mobiles and two paintings. Religious rituals related to the Aboriginal Dreamings inspire the felted dolls. The ceiling mobiles are inspired by traditional Aboriginal art. Since all Aboriginal art tells a Dreaming of the individual and the tribe, there will be five main mobiles that will represent different aspects of my own life journey--my own personal Dreaming. In my two paintings, I would like to pay homage to Aboriginal woman and to the general idea of a woman’s sacred role in nature. Separately, my pieces should be able to stand alone and be thought provoking by themselves, but together they should complement and feed off each other in a way that creates sacred space or even a Songline.

