

# *Abstract*

This is an ethnoarchaeological study of style in the visual arts of Aboriginal people living in the Barunga region of the Northern Territory, Australia. My main concern is the development of a practical framework for the analysis of style in indigenous visual arts. This framework integrates the notions of style, semiotics and social strategy in an attempt to deal with the dynamics of image creation and perception.

The principal result is that the morphological characteristics of style are influenced systematically by the historically situated positions of both producer and interpreter and by the differing strengths, possibilities and constraints of different raw materials. Moreover, each raw material has inherent qualities that make it particularly suitable for specific social uses. Since different media within an artistic system are likely to exhibit a unique combination of stylistic characteristics, including differing degrees of diversity, it is incorrect to assume that a single art form will be indicative of an artistic system as a whole.

My conclusions are that research needs to be focussed clearly on the contexts in which archaeological art occurs and comparative studies need to compare like with like. Single explanations are unlikely to be sufficient since it is most likely that they tell only part of the story. In addition, seemingly anomalous evidence should not be discounted, but should be used as a basis for inquiry into the likelihood of alternative scenarios that co-exist with the main explanation.