



FONDATION OPALE

≡ Cultural foundation
≡ Exhibition

PRESS RELEASE

Opening in June 2019, the exhibition *Before Time Began* will initiate the artistic project of Fondation Opale. The exhibition will feature works from the origins of contemporary Aboriginal art to the present day.

From 9 June 2019 to 29 March 2020, Fondation Opale will be presenting *Before Time Began*, its first major exhibition of contemporary Aboriginal art. A selection of nearly 80 major works – paintings on canvas and bark, installations and sculptures – will offer visitors insights into the evolution of contemporary Aboriginal art from its emergence in 1971 to the present day. *Before Time Began* honours the artistic creation of the most representative Aboriginal artists of our generation. The exhibition explores the notion of Dreaming in Aboriginal culture and highlights its relevance today.

Established in 2018, Fondation Opale, based in Lens, Canton of Valais (Switzerland), is the only contemporary art centre dedicated to the promotion of Aboriginal art in Europe. It strives to facilitate dialogue between peoples and cultures through art. The foundation is based on the Collection Bérengère Primat, one of the main collections of Australian Indigenous art in Europe characterized by its commitment, diversity (nearly 250 artists) and richness (800 works).

Before Time Began, a quotation from Aboriginal artists often heard in Central Australia, offers two levels of interpretation:

- in reference to the concept of Dreaming, the phrase is used to describe the process of Creation. The reference to “time” helps to understand this very complex and innate concept for Aboriginal people, in whose course the Earth was shaped by the actions and journeys of the ancestral beings of the Dreaming. Dreaming is widespread across Australia and does not compare to the Western system of time measurement. It captures so-called “time out of time,” which is described as “Everywhen” or “Eternal Present”;
- from the point of view of art history, *Before Time Began* evokes the genesis of contemporary Aboriginal art in remote areas of Australia; in particular through ancient works from Arnhem Land and paintings from Papunya in the early 1970s. Recent works from the APY Lands region complete this brief history of Aboriginal art.

Before Time Began traverses different regions:

- Arnhem Land and its works painted on bark, which are close to rock art. They can be identified, among other aspects, by artistic representations known as “X-rays,” where skeletons and organs are visible, a style that dates back several millennia. These works invite viewers to discover the animals of the Dreaming, the creative ancestors and the spirits;
- the central desert represented by some of the first works painted in the community of Papunya between 1971 and 1975;
- Kimberley, where contemporary painting began to develop from the 1980s, sometimes inspired by very old cave paintings such as depictions of the Wanjina, the creative spirits of the region;
- the APY Lands, which represent the current situation of contemporary Aboriginal painting: here contemporary art and traditional art, ancestral knowledge and new developments intersect.



FONDATION OPALE

Also noteworthy, both for their historical significance and for their dimensions, are two monumental collaborative paintings, created specially for the exhibition, as well as Kulata Tjuta (“many spears”): Kupa Kupa, an installation of 1,200 spears, is the cornerstone of this exhibition.

Before Time Began has been curated by art historian and curator Georges Petitjean and by collector Bérengère Primat. The exhibition catalogue serves as a reference work on the history and development of Aboriginal art. It includes contributions by several Australian Aboriginal art specialists: Luke Scholes – curator at the Department of Aboriginal Art, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory; Lisa Slade – Deputy Director of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; Nici Cumpston – Artistic Director of the Tarnanthi Festival and herself a practising artist; Jessica De Larcy Healy – anthropologist at the Laboratoire d’Ethnologie et de Sociologie comparative (CNRS – Université Paris Nanterre).

Art as a vehicle for dialogue between cultures and peoples: Fondation Opale embodies this vision, which origins lie in the oldest continuous culture in the world, that of the Indigenous peoples of Australia.

In Before Time Began, this vocation is represented by *Berg Elle*, a work by Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist, and a metaphor for the equality of peoples and genders.

Indeed, Fondation Opale explores contemporary art along the lines of universal themes: the messages conveyed by these Aboriginal artists, men and women great Initiates, are addressed to each of us. They convey values that are essential and universal to humanity.

Lens / Crans-Montana, 20 March 2019

Opening times

Before Time Began

Exhibition: 9 June 2019 – 29 March 2020, Wednesday to Sunday, 10am – 6pm.

Restaurant L’Opale: Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday, 9:30am – 7 pm;

Friday and Saturday, 9:30am – 11pm.

Open Wednesday and Thursday evenings by appointment.

Media inquiries

International

Claudine Colin Communications
Christine Cuny | christine@claudinecolin.com

+33 1 42 72 60 01

Switzerland

Gautier Chiarini | gc@fondationopale.ch
+41 27 483 46 15

Isabelle Revaz | ir@fondationopale.ch
+41 27 483 46 16