Lecture summary:

Throughout the 19th and into the 20th century, Aboriginal art was considered an ethnographic curiosity, or objects for scientific or anthropological study. Tony Tuckson, deputy director of the AGNSW from 1957-1973, was influential in shifting perceptions amongst non-Aboriginal audiences toward an understanding of the great aesthetic value of Indigenous art. During his tenure, Tuckson, himself an accomplished abstract expressionist artist, amassed an exceptional collection of Aboriginal paintings and sculpture from Aboriginal Australia’s northern-most communities. These collections were initiated and built from two expeditions – one in 1958 to Melville Island to commission the Tiwi *Pukamani grave posts* (the first commission of an Aboriginal work for an art gallery) and a subsequent trip in 1959 to north east Arnhem Land that resulted in the Gallery’s acquisition of a spectacular body of bark paintings. On these trips Tuckson was accompanied by Dr Stuart Scougall, an orthopaedic surgeon who financed these commissions and whose earlier expeditions to Arnhem Land and the Tiwi Islands for his medical research had introduced him to the extraordinary artistic traditions of those communities. This lecture gives an overview of the important contribution made by Tuckson and Scougall in shaping the AGNSW’s collection of Aboriginal art and promoting the aesthetic value of Indigenous art that is today recognised at a national and global level.

Slide list of artworks:

Please note that the majority of slides used in the lecture documenting the AGNSW expeditions to Melville Island, 1958 and Yirrkala in 1959 are by Margaret Tuckson.

2. Mawalan Marika *Djan’kawu creation story*, 1959, natural pigments on bark, AGNSW gift of Dr. Stuart Scougall 1959
3. Wandjuk Marika *Sea life (Dreaming of the artist’s mother)* 1959, natural pigments on bark, AGNSW gift of Dr. Stuart Scougall
4. Tony Tuckson *Circular blue and red, female* c1964, synthetic polymer paint on hardboard. Wollongong Art Gallery
5. Tony Tuckson *No 55 Japanese* c1964, synthetic polymer paint on hardboard, private collection
6. Tony Tuckson *Family at table* c1950, oil on canvas, Art Gallery of New South Wales
7. Tony Tuckson *TP 149*, c1955, oil on cardboard, National Gallery of Australia
8. Tony Tuckson *Watery* c1960, oil on composition board, National Gallery of Australia
9. Tony Tuckson *Drawing* c.1962-65, oil and charcoal on hardboard, AGNSW
10. Tony Tuckson (*Pale yellow with charcoal lines*) 1973, synthetic polymer paint and charcoal on hardboard, AGNSW
11. Tony Tuckson *Five white lines (vertical) black ground* 1970-73, synthetic polymer paint on hardboard, AGNSW
12 Tony Tuckson *White lines (vertical) on ultramarine* 1970-73, synthetic polymer paint on hardboard, AGNSW

13. Tony Tuckson *Pink lines (vertical) on red and purple* 1970-73, synthetic polymer paint on hardboard, Queensland Art Gallery

14 Tony Tuckson *Black on white* c1960, oil on hardboard, private collection

15. Artist unknown (Gunbalanya, Western Arnhem Land) *Ancestor figure* c.1900-13, natural pigments on bark. Museums Victoria

11. Artist unknown (Gunbalanya, Western Arnhem Land) *Ancestor figure* c.1913, natural pigments on bark. Museums Victoria

12. Margaret Preston *Aboriginal landscape* 1941, oil on canvas, Art Gallery of South Australia

13. Albert Namatjira *Palm Valley* 1940s, watercolour, AGNSW


15. Unknown artist (Gunbalanya) *Division of fish* 1948, natural pigments on paper. AGNSW

16 Jon Molvig *Dr Stuart Scougall* 1962, oil on canvas, AGNSW

17 Jack Womba (Tiwi, Milikapiti, Melville Island) *seated figure* c.1957 AGNSW, gift of Dr. Stuart Scougall 1957

18. Portaminni Stephen (Tiwi, Milikapiti, Melville Island) *Male figures* c1957 AGNSW, gift of Dr. Stuart Scougall 1957

19. Mawalan Marika, Wandjuk Marika, Mathaman Marika, Woreimo *Djan’kawu Creation story* 1959, natural pigments on bark, AGNSW, gift of Dr. Stuart Scougall 1959

20 following 4 barks are the *Djan’kawu creation story* by Mawalan Marika, natural pigments on bark, 1959, AGNSW, gift of Dr. Stuart Scougall, 1959

21 Munggarrawuy Yunupingu *Lanyjung story (crocodile and bandicoot)* 1959, natural pigments on bark (3 bark panels, out of a series of 4) AGNSW, gift of Dr. Stuart Scougall, 1959

22 Munggarrawuy Yunupingu *Hunting scene* 1959, natural pigments on bark, AGNSW, gift of Dr. Stuart Scougall 1959

23. Wandjuk Marika *Djan’kawu story (the sun rising)* 1959, natural pigments on bark, AGNSW, gift of Dr Stuart Scougall, 1959


Reference:

Geoffrey Legge et al *Tony Tuckson* Craftsman House 2006

Hetti Perkins (ed) *One sun one moon: Aboriginal art in Australia* Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2007


Tony Tuckson archive, AGNSW Research Library and Archive

For access to all past lecture notes visit: