



ROVER THOMAS. I want to paint.

Art Gallery of South Australia. 24 September – 28 November 2004.

...these selected works speak for themselves as great paintings by an artist who simply loved to paint.

Janet Holmes à Court.

ROVER THOMAS. I want to paint is a national travelling exhibition featuring 20 seminal works by one of Australia's most celebrated Aboriginal artists, Rover Thomas (c.1926-1998).

Rover Thomas was a pioneer in many ways. He was one of the first Indigenous artists to represent Australia at the Venice Biennale (1990); was the subject of a major retrospective exhibition at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (1994) and holds the highest sale price for an Indigenous work of art (2002). By the time of his death in 1998, 'Rover Thomas' was a household name.

A Kukatja/ Wangkatjunga man, Rover Thomas was born around 1926 at a place where the Great Sandy Desert meets the Gibson Desert in far north Western Australia. Like many other Aboriginal artists of the period he lived most of his life as a stockman and station hand but his life changed forever in the early 1980s when he met Aboriginal Arts & Crafts field officer, Mary Mächa and announced: "I want to paint". He soon rose to prominence not only as an influential figure in the emerging East Kimberley painting community but as a major force in Australia's Aboriginal art movement.

Rover Thomas became known for his direct and powerful images of his country and its stories. His works are not literal representations of the landscape but conceptual abstractions of ancestral and modern events, ceremonies and Dreamings. While many of his contemporaries chose to work with synthetic paints, Rover Thomas used locally sourced natural pigments and gums so his paintings are imbued with the very essence of the land they depict.

Says Janet Holmes à Court: "his painting is distinctive, and the deceptively simple use of form and pigments are at once stark representations of the country he painted and stunning examples of contemporary art".

Tracey Lock-Weir, Curator of Australian Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia says "I believe people will be drawn by the sheer beauty of his work and touched by the gestural immediacy of his brushwork, which comes from his intimate knowledge of the land and its history".

ROVER THOMAS. *I want to paint* is organised by The Holmes à Court Collection, the largest private collection of Rover Thomas' works and is also supported by International Art Services. The exhibition includes key paintings drawn from public and private collections around Australia including that of the Art Gallery of South Australia.

MEDIA LAUNCH & EXHIBITION PREVIEW THURSDAY 23 SEPTEMBER AT 11am

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