



# Mulion-go (Like an eagle)

REGINALD KNOX RETROSPECTIVE



Doug Spowart,

**Reginald Roy Knox,**

1998, silver gelatin photograph. Logan Art Collection

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Reginald Knox retrospective

Logan Art Gallery

11 December 2015 to 16 January 2016

Logan Art Gallery is pleased and honoured to present *Mulion-go (Like an eagle)*, a retrospective of the work of Reginald (Uncle Reg) Knox. Uncle Reg has supported the Logan Art Gallery since it opened in 1995 and in the first year he officiated at the opening of *Jukurrpa Wankaru Juku: Keeping the Dreaming Alive*, a touring exhibition from the collection of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. A year later the Gallery organised a major survey of his art from 1988-1996 and commissioned him to paint *Scrubby Creek* in 1997 for the Logan Art Collection.

Uncle Reg has had a long and distinguished career both as an artist and as an educator and has received many awards for his art and for his service to the community. However, perhaps his greatest achievement has been his singular approach to providing a greater understanding of our country's ancient culture and fostering a sense of pride in his people. In 2009, in recognition of his lifelong community work he was honoured with the NAIDOC award, Aboriginal Elder of the Year.

**Michael Wardell**, Logan Art Gallery Coordinator

## Acknowledgements:

This exhibition would not have been possible without the help and support of Uncle Reg's family. I would particularly like to thank his daughter Missy, whose personal and professional insights into her father's work have greatly informed this exhibition. I would also like to thank Uncle Reg's wife Beverley, for her catalogue essay and for lending so many works from her own collection. Thank you also to Logan Hospital, Mabel Park State High School and all the private collectors who have lent works from their collections.

Cover Image: Reg Knox,

***Spirit of the land***,

1999-2000, oil on canvas. Collection of Missy Knox

# Mulion-go (Like an eagle)

by Beverley Knox

Uncle Reg Knox was the sixth child of nine, born in 1934, to John and Carrie Knox of the Kamilaroi tribe of South Queensland and New South Wales area. His was the last tribe to be moved onto a mission under the government of the day and he grew up under the Protection Act. 'The Act', as it was known, allowed the removal of children, the cessation of natural language and cultural practices, and the restriction of education beyond grade four. It was believed by the white folk that Aborigines were nothing more than animals and it would be impossible to educate them any further.

It was in this atmosphere that the young Reg grew up. Though the government supplied some food it was an inadequate amount to feed the whole tribe therefore necessitating hunting and fishing by the men and boys to feed everybody. Young Reg and his cousin Togeys would hunt for food in the traditional way, they had many adventures, some frightening and some hilariously funny. On one occasion they spied a bird sitting high up in a tree. With a stick and pat of mud attached to one end both boys took aim and were able to cleanly sever its head and the bird fell to the ground.

Excitedly they rushed to gather up their prize when they discovered that they had killed a 'Grave digger', a bird that was feared by the tribe because it was believed that to do it any harm would bring a curse on the whole tribe. They were terrified, Togeys dropped to his knees immediately and with his hands closed in prayer he began to recite the Lord's Prayer to God for forgiveness. The young Reg who was fluent in his natural language raised his hands to the heavens and called on the 'old people' to protect them and stop any harm coming to their people. Looking back Reg says it must have looked hilariously funny but it shows the difference in the cultures they were living under.

Reg Knox,  
**Self portrait (To my darling Bevie),**  
1970s, charcoal on paper. Collection of  
Missy Knox



Image of Reg Knox with his artwork commissioned by the Catholic Church to present to Pope John Paul II during his visit to Australia in 1986



At about this time Reg was attending the mission school when his teachers noticed he had a natural talent for art. So impressed, they sent his drawings around to various other schools to display for other children. These drawings still hang in the old school today. On leaving school Reg took work ring barking and fencing, jobs which took him to many parts of Western Queensland and New South Wales.

It was at Burnt Bridge mission, Kempsey, many years later that he discovered some of his childhood drawings that had been sent all around Australia as examples of excellence in education. Reg realised his natural talent and with a new sense of self-worth he continued his nomadic life gaining inspiration from the land he travelled.

In 1968, a now confident Reg entered the Toowoomba art exhibition and successfully won first and second prize ahead of some of the renowned artists of the day. In the 1970s he enrolled at Queensland University of Technology to broaden and develop his artistic style and approach. In 1983 he received a fellowship grant through the Australian Arts Board which provided even greater incentive to focus on his artistic endeavours. In 1986 Reg was commissioned by the Catholic Church to create a sculptural carving for the visiting Pope John Paul II. This comprised of the Lord's Prayer in the language of the Stradbroke Island tribal people and a frame hand-carved with the animal totems of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. After carving the totems Reg spent many weeks polishing the frame to a beautiful lustre using only a pig's tusk.



Reg Knox,  
***Old spirit man,***  
pencil on paper. Collection of Missy  
Knox

Meanwhile Reg's art attracted the attention of the public and he began to paint commissioned subjects. The interest was welcomed and he spent hours producing his art, however, in order to support his family, he would often sell them for a price that enabled him to pay a bill. It was at this time he decided to paint his own people. Aboriginal people were usually photographed standing high on a hill or rock with a spear in one hand gazing out over the landscape. Reg painted them going about their everyday life: fishing, hunting, dancing or just gathered together around the fire as the children played close by. In other scenes he painted a mother holding a newborn infant with the father lovingly looking on. He wanted to create a new awakening in people to see Aboriginal people as the same as themselves. These paintings, depicting simple peace and happiness in the love of family and mateship, were in great demand. He illustrated the pride Aboriginal people have in themselves and their children's faces were depicted with awe and wonderment at a new spirituality, the unseen thread that unifies his people. I recall watching Reg paint, without his knowledge, as his demeanour changed as every brushstroke was lovingly applied, telling a story. The brush flowing across the canvas with love and pride, guided by this quiet, genteel man who is Reg Knox. These paintings were his masterpieces.

During the 1980s Reg began work with the Queensland Education Department. It was a time when attitudes were changing and schools needed people who were conversant in Aboriginal culture to teach children. Reg offered his services and the doors opened to a whole new life working with children. Reg taught the value of having respect for ourselves, parents, teachers and classmates. Through his art he drew stories, he encouraged the children to stay in school as long as they could and to use everything they had

learned to become whatever they wished to be. Reg then began to paint murals in the schools. With each mural he would put the hand print of every child and teacher on the wall. As he was spraying the child's handprint he would tell them how special and unique each little person was. Reg's reputation grew and soon he was travelling throughout South East Queensland and Northern New South Wales teaching in many schools.

When a lady named Pauline Hanson came into parliament, Reg was inundated with calls to come and speak at schools as dissention erupted between children of different nationalities. Children would fight in the playground and Asian and Aboriginal children were especially vilified. Reg was able to 'calm the waters' and without denigrating Pauline Hanson he preached his credo of unity, love and respect. The children never forgot the lovely Aboriginal man who came to their school or what he talked about. In recognition of his work, in the 1990s, Reg was awarded 'The quiet achiever award' by the Combined Housing Organisation Limited, Woodridge.

In 1990 Reg presented an exhibition at the University of Queensland Anthropology Museum entitled *Mianjin* which he related to the Brisbane Turrbal Aborigines who once occupied that area. His artistic talents continued to develop at the many places he worked, in particular, the Queensland Art Gallery, the Queensland Performing Arts Complex, the University of Queensland Anthropology Museum and Boystown. His art has been exhibited in many places, such as the John Paul College Art Show, Gold Coast City Council chambers, Ramada Hotel, Somerset College, Nerang Art Gallery, Brisbane City Hall and the Brisbane Entertainment Centre. Among his proudest moments were invitations to

Reg Knox,  
**Untitled**,  
pencil on paper. Collection of Missy  
Knox



teach at the Brisbane Police Academy and Logan Hospital where he spent two years teaching cultural awareness. He was also invited to address parliament during the Joh Bjelke-Petersen era.

His daughter Missy, then aged eighteen, often went to schools with Reg and discovered she also had a talent for painting Aboriginal traditional art and in 1996 she began teaching full time with Reg. They started a business under the title of Murra Murals. It was a great success and they travelled far and wide teaching culture and painting murals whilst establishing a wonderful rapport everywhere they went.

Reg Knox,  
**Australiana**,  
pencil on paper. Collection of Missy  
Knox



Reg was acclaimed for his work and many art awards began to flow in. Reg still didn't realise the good he was doing in the community and would comment he was only doing what had to be done. Among the many awards he received was the 2001 Centenary Award Medal from the Queen, presented by the Governor General 'for service to school students teaching Aboriginal art'. In 2000 he was awarded the Logan Citizen of the Year and in 2004, he was one of five inductees to the Logan City Council Wall of Acclaim.

Reg suffered a heart attack and a stroke in 2006 from which he was lucky to survive. He has been left with cardiac dementia, otherwise he is in good health. He occasionally accompanies his daughter Missy who carries on his legacy in schools. Missy is a great source of pride to both Reg and myself being an accomplished traditional Aboriginal artist. She teaches the same philosophy of unity and harmony among people just as her father has done for so many years.



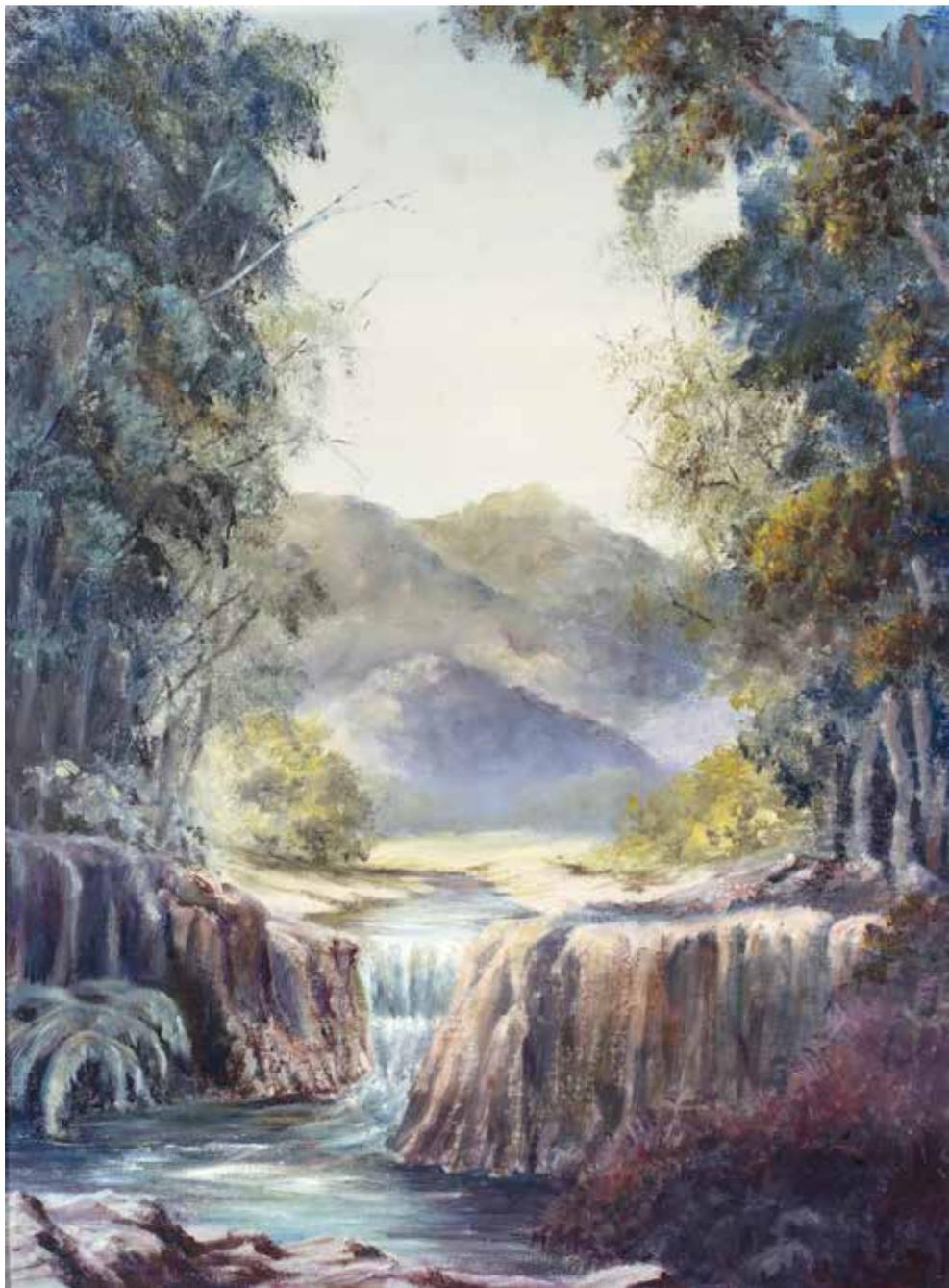
Reg Knox,

***Scrubby Creek,***

1997, oil on canvas. Logan Art Collection, commissioned 1997



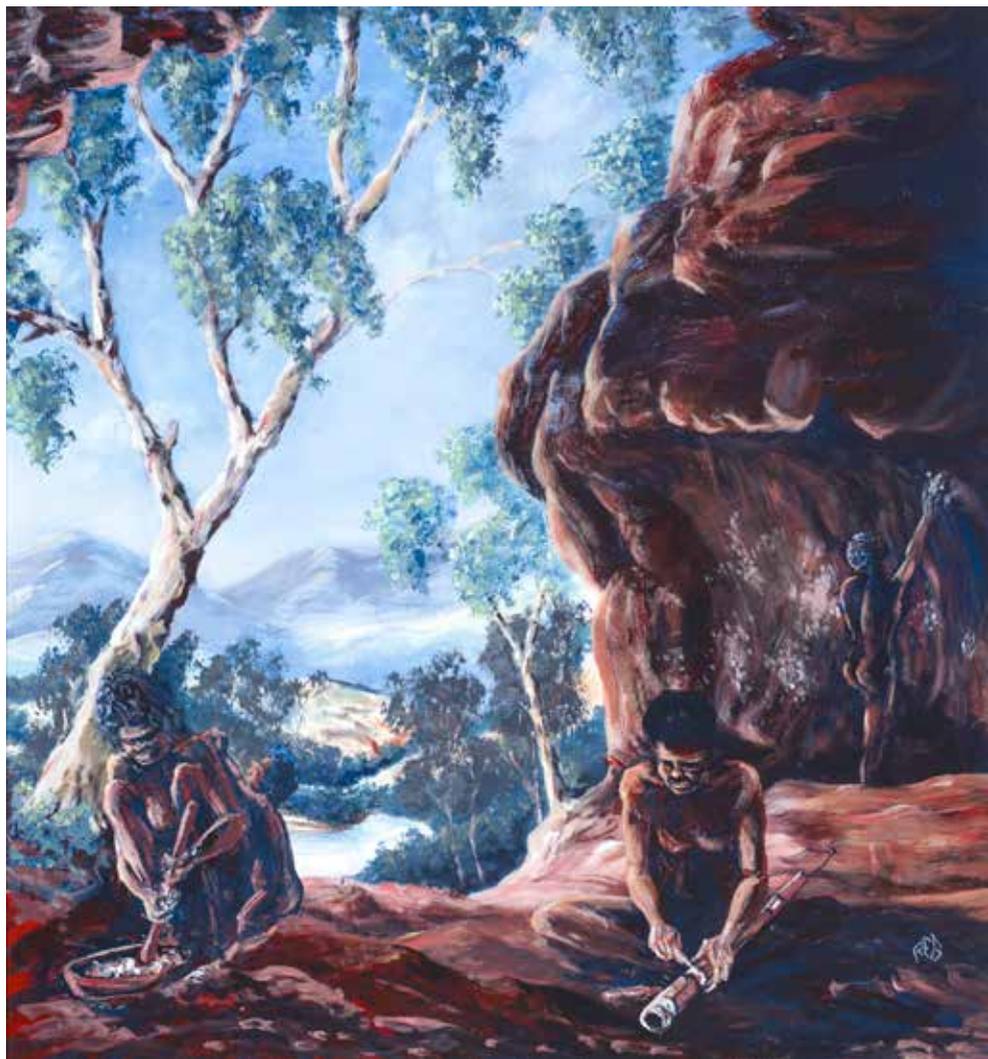
Reg Knox,  
**Blowhole**,  
2000, acrylic on canvas. Collection of Logan Hospital



Reg Knox,  
***Falling waters***,  
c.1988, oil on board. Collection of Mr and Mrs K McCarthy



Reg Knox,  
***The Cutting***,  
c.1988, oil on canvas board. Collection of Mr and Mrs K McCarthy



Reg Knox,

***Legacy***,

1989, acrylic on canvas. Collection of Gwen Lewis



Reg Knox,

***Legend of the first fire,***

1992, acrylic on canvas. Collection of Mr and Mrs J Lewis



Reg Knox,

***Gurri (Uncle), Woman and Boy,***

1988, plaster, Created for Mianjin exhibition at the University of Queensland Museum of Anthropology.  
Collection of Beverley Knox



Reg Knox,  
***On the mountain,***  
1975, oil on canvas. Collection of Beverley Knox



Reg Knox,

***Untitled***,

1994, oil on canvas. Collection of Mr and Mrs K McCarthy



Reg Knox,

***Marine life,***

c.1999, acrylic on canvas. Collection of Logan Hospital

# Story of The Goanna

*The Goanna* was purpose built to take part in the 2003 Super Endeavour rally which travelled from Roma to Hervey Bay via the Simpson Desert. It travelled a total distance of 11,000 km over some of the highest ground in the country. The Dreamtime spirit on the bonnet carries Reg's tribal colours. The silver and white dot trail encircling the car represents a traditional spiritual return journey as undertaken by young tribal males. The lizard on the side holds the spirit of the vehicle, the bust holds the spirit of the owner/driver. The tailgate scene shows our place in the universe – a small rock on the edge of a spiral galaxy. It is now used as a ceremonial show and display vehicle mostly in Aboriginal related events.



Reg Knox,

***The Goanna,***

2003, acrylic on metal. Collection of Syd Hondisides



**11 December 2015 – 16 January 2016**

**Logan Art Gallery**

Cnr Wembley Rd and Jacaranda Ave, Logan Central QLD 4114

Open Tuesday to Saturday, 10am to 5pm. [www.logan.qld.gov.au/artgallery](http://www.logan.qld.gov.au/artgallery)

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