The Art Gang

Contemporary Aboriginal Painting

"Spirits Floating" by Fiona Omeonyo

Lockhart River

Columbus State University
“The Nunny Hole”
Rosella Namok
acrylic on canvas
Permanent Collection
Silas Hobson, an artist from the Lockhart River Aboriginal Community Arts and Culture Centre in Queensland, Australia, gives his interpretation Tuesday night of what some of his paintings symbolize in The Gallery at Columbus State University's Fine Arts Hall.

Spiritual art

"Spiritual art has been in Australia since the beginning of dream time," says Silas Hobson. "They watch over us." Hobson is a member of "The Art Gang," a handful of young Aboriginal Australian artists who are promoting the spirit of their vanishing culture through their own creations.

They come from Lockhart River, an isolated part of Queensland, Australia, about a 4-hour trek in a four-wheel-drive from the nearest small town. All of them are under 30. Growing up, they say, they had no restaurants or coffee shops for entertainment, only the stories and ceremonies of their aging elders.

Rosella Namok's father was an elder who used to body-paint the community's boys to prepare them for religious ceremonies. Namok decided to tell the story of her culture on canvas.

"It's a good way to show people where you're from," said Namok. "It's a good way to paint abstract landscapes of summer rain, fishing holes and the like. It's good for our people, to show other people that there are people living on the other side of the world."

The works of "The Art Gang" — Hobson, Namok, Samantha,

"Knowing About Spirit People" by Silas Hobson

Hobson, Adrian King, Fiona Omonseyo, Leroy Platt, Terry Platt and Evelyn Sandy — are on display through Thursday in The Gallery at Columbus State University's Fine Arts Hall. It is the group's first-ever exhibition in the United States.

"They are from an old culture, one that is dying," said Sue Ryan, director of the Lockhart River Center in Australia. "They have listened to the old stories and are portraying them in a very modern way."

Silas Hobson explained that his art deals with perpetuating the aboriginal stories involving "dream time," a complex landscape of creation myth, populated by the spirits of ancestors.

"No one was there to keep the generation going," he said of the passing elder generation. "There was no one to teach the young ones what happened in dream time."

“Nummy Hole” by Rosella Namok.

STORY BY S. THORNE HARPER / PHOTOS BY G. MARC BENAVIDEZ