

FROM
SOUTHWOLD TO
ALICE SPRINGS

*Selected Works
from the Collection
of Robert Cripps*

Robert
Cripps
Gallery



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The Robert Cripps Gallery
The New Library
Magdalene College, Cambridge
Summer - Autumn 2022



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Duncan Robinson

ROBERT WINSTON HUMPHREY CRIPPS was born in Northampton on St. George's Day, 23rd April, 1946. The oldest son of the business man and philanthropist Sir Humphrey Cripps, he grew up alongside his siblings in the family home at Bull's Head Farm in North Buckinghamshire, but recalls with particular pleasure the summer holidays they spent in the seaside town of Southwold on the Suffolk coast. Southwold was where his great-grandmother was born and where a number of her descendants live today. Those memories were to play an important part in the formation of Robert's art collection.

Robert attended Bilton Grange Preparatory School and Oundle School before enrolling as an undergraduate at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. Afterwards he went with his father's blessing to train at a branch of the family business in Australia. There, as he puts it, he 'met a girl and stayed.' Robert and Jan were married in November 1974 in Romsey, Victoria. They were joined for the wedding by Robert's best man, Jeremy Raffe, a friend from Southwold whom he had known along with his cousin Graham Denny since the three of them were teenagers. It was Raffe who suggested that Robert should collect works of art which would remind him of his ties to the countryside and coastlines of East Anglia. What may have begun as an exercise in nostalgia for an expatriate has resulted, over the years, in an impressive collection of more than five hundred paintings, drawings and prints, the vast majority of them featuring the distinctive topography of Norfolk and Suffolk and the changes which have taken place in its social geography over the past two hundred years.

◀ **Peter Mennim**
Portrait of Robert Cripps c. 2014

FROM SOUTHWOLD...



John Berney Crome (1794–1842)
The river near St. Martin's Gate, Norwich

ROBERT RECALLS THAT his first purchase was a view of 'Cottages at Waxham Corner' by the prolific landscapist Edward Seago (1910–1974), followed shortly afterwards by a marine painting by Alfred Stannard (1806–1889), a prominent member of the Norwich School of painters which originated at the beginning of the nineteenth century when John Crome (1768–1821) and Robert Ladbrooke (1768–1842) established the Norwich Society of Artists. It flourished in part because the artists who belonged to it also taught, beginning with the members of their own families. John Crome became 'Old Crome' to differentiate between him and his sons John Berney Crome and William Henry Crome.

Alfred Stannard was the younger brother of Joseph Stannard (1797–1830) who was a pupil of Robert Ladbrooke. He in turn taught his daughter, Eloise Harriet Stannard (1829–1915).

The animal painter Edwin Cooper (1785–1833) was the son of a miniature painter in Bury St. Edmunds. He became an honorary member of the Norwich School, specializing in portraits of horses for which there was a high demand among the racing fraternity centered around Newmarket. Like his contemporary Ben Marshall (1768–1835), he found that 'many a man will give me 50 guineas for painting his horse, who thinks 10 guineas too much for painting his wife.'

› **Eloise Harriet Stannard (1829–1915)**
Cottage fruits

Edwin Cooper (1795–1833)
A chestnut horse in a landscape



Harry Becker (1865–1928) was born in Colchester, a town which has had close ties to Belgium and Holland since the 16th Century when weavers and cloth makers from Flanders settled there. It is not surprising then that Becker began his training as an artist at the Antwerp Academy, one of the leading art schools in Europe. By the 1880s, when van Gogh was enrolled there, it had developed a reputation for social realism based on rigorous draughtsmanship. Becker, who settled in the Suffolk villages of Wenhaston and Darsham, recorded life in the countryside before it was transformed by mechanization, emphasizing the importance, and dignity, of manual labour. *The Joyful Noise of Rest* may well have been a preliminary drawing for a mural; there was a vogue for such works, often inspired by the Mexican muralists, in the inter-war years of the 1920s and 1930s.

No-one traveling through the East of England can fail to be impressed by its rich architectural heritage, ranging from medieval ruins recorded in meticulous detail by the artists of the Norwich School, to the impressive ‘wool churches’ which despite the stripping of their altars, survived the depredations of the Reformation. The church of the Holy Trinity in the village of Blythburgh, often referred to as the Cathedral of the Marshes, stands as testimony to the prosperity which the wool trade conferred on the area. Its size bears no relation to that of the local population which worshipped there, even when it was associated with the nearby priory.

› **Harry Becker (1865–1928)**
Detail from *The Joyful Noise of Rest*

William Bowyer (1926–2015)
Blythburgh Church from the Quarry





All Saints' Dunwich is a landmark of a different kind. Classified as a 'rotten borough' in 1832, because most of the village had by then fallen into the sea, it exemplifies the treacherously shifting coastline of the Suffolk Sandlings. Most of the church, and its graveyard, was lost to the sea in 1919.

The small fishing village of Southwold was the direct beneficiary of Dunwich's misfortunes in the 15th Century when the river Blyth changed course to form a shallow estuary between Southwold and the neighbouring village of Walberswick. The rebuilding of the church of St Edmund from the 1430s onwards attests to the new-found importance and wealth of the town which received its royal charter in 1489. Like Magdalene College, Cambridge, St Edmund's has been in recent years a beneficiary of the Cripps Foundation's generosity. For Robert the church is more than another fine example of ecclesiastical architecture; it recalls his family's history. Generations of his great-grandmother's descendants are buried in the churchyard and, poignantly, the ashes of his younger brother Edward are interred there. Magdalene also has an association with the church which goes back to the seventeenth century. In 1637 the Revd. Peter Hobart, a Magdalene graduate who became the assistant vicar of St Edmund's, joined a group of puritans who emigrated to Hingham, Massachusetts, three years before his fellow graduate Henry Dunster sailed to the Bay Colony to become the first President of Harvard College.

^ James Barclay Grahame (active 1877-82)
All Saints' Church, Dunwich

› John Piper (1903-1992)
Southwold II (The Interior of St Edmund's Church) 1965





Southwold's prosperity was short-lived thanks to the gravel bar which closed off the harbour mouth. On the other hand, it did not suffer in the same way as the much larger port of Lowestoft, eleven miles to the north, from the decline of the fishing industry in the 20th Century. Instead it provides shelter for an assortment of inshore fishing boats and, with its commanding views of the sea from Gun Hill, it has for the past century or so shared with Walberswick a steady stream of part-time residents and tourists.

Reg Carter (1886–1949), the son of a prominent local builder, produced the first of his comic postcards at the age of eighteen when he realized that there was a ready market for them among holiday-makers. The first of his popular series of Railway cards, 'The Sorrows of Southwold', appeared in 1910, followed by a second set in 1921.

In recent years it is clear that Southwold has lost none of its appeal to artists. Ian Houston (1934–2021) abandoned a promising career as a concert pianist after attending a part-time painting course at St Martin's School of Art. In 1957 he met Edward Seago who recognized his talent and encouraged him to persevere. *Evening on Cromer Beach* is a good example of his evocative treatment of the wide open spaces of the Suffolk coastline under a cloud-strewn sky from which the light is gently fading.

Peter Brown (b.1967) remains true to the principle of *plein air* painting which has defined the New English Art Club, of which he is the current President, since its foundation in 1885. Nick-named 'Pete the Street' because of his insistence on painting out-of-doors in all weathers, his views of Southwold capture with breezy naturalism (and Southwold is breezy) the bustling life of a seaside town.

◀ Margaret Green (1925–2003)
Amongst the windbreaks

Ian Houston (1934–2021)
Evening on Cromer Beach

Peter Brown (b. 1967)
Southwold, summer 2018

...TO ALICE SPRINGS

NOT LONG AFTER Robert began to collect he came across a group of woodcuts and etchings by the Australian artist Lionel Lindsay (1874-1961). In his hey-day Lindsay enjoyed an international reputation, exhibiting in London and Sydney from the 1920s onwards. When the Australian Painter-Etchers' Society was formed, he became its first President and he was knighted for services to Australian art in 1941. Yet by the time of his death his reputation was in decline to the point at which, by the late 20th Century, his work was completely overlooked. But Robert recognized the quality of his engravings and, as he explained, 'bought half a dozen of them.' He continued to buy Lindsay's works when they came up for sale at auction, along with works by his contemporaries Hans Heysen (1877-1968) and Elioth Gruner (1882-1939). Convinced that all of these artists deserved wider recognition, Robert became something of a champion for them. 'What do you know about Lionel Lindsay?' he asked me at one of our first meetings. Fortunately I had received a tip-off in time to look Lindsay up in a Dictionary of Australian Art and was able to say with some conviction that I thought he was underestimated. It was shortly after that that Robert made his first gift of works of art to the College, all of them by Lindsay and his fellow Euro-Australian painters and engravers.

- › **Lionel Lindsay (1874-1961)**
Morning Glory 1932





In the First World War, Rex Battarbee (1893-1973) joined the Australian Imperial Force and was posted to France where he was seriously injured. Unable to return to farm work, he decided in 1921 to study commercial art in Melbourne, where he met his fellow student John Gardner. In 1928 they set out in a model T Ford motor car which they converted into a caravan on a fifteen month trip through Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. Their objective was to discover for themselves the distinctive landscapes of the interior, so unlike the ones they were used to and so alien from the conventions of Eurocentric art in which they had been trained. A second expedition in 1932 took them through South Australia to the Northern Territory where they showed their work at the Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission on the Finke River, west of Alice Springs.

They returned two years later, which was when Battarbee met Albert Namatjira (1902-1959), recording in his diary that 'Albert who does the poker work would like to paint and Mr Albrecht (the Pastor in charge of the Mission) is prepared to buy him some paints and wants me to tell him what to get.' It is important to remember that at that time the native peoples of Australia, or aborigines as they were called, were treated as wards of the state by the British settlers who had colonized their country. It is all the more remarkable that Battarbee and Namatjira were able to travel together and to work side by side; 'Albert and I lived continuously on our own,' Battarbee wrote, 'Albert painted continuously... a very clever man, a marvellous pair of hands and marvellous eyes (who) has no mistakes to unlearn.' The experience was transformative for both men. Some three or four years later Battarbee moved permanently to Central Australia where he gave art classes to indigenous Australians and played a prominent part in the activities of the Aranda Arts Council which he chaired, 1951-1956. Meanwhile Albert Namatjira rose to prominence as a celebrated artist. In 1954 he was presented to Queen Elizabeth II during her first state visit to Australia, and in 1957 he and his wife were granted citizenship which allowed them to vote, to build a house and to consume alcohol. However those privileges were not transferable, and did not protect Albert from going to prison in 1958 for serving alcohol to members of his family. Assimilation did not absolve him from his tribal responsibility to the Aranda people who expected a share of his good fortune. Such was the 'burden of fame' he bore.

On the other hand that same culture of familial responsibility helps to explain the artistic dynasty he founded. Five of his sons, including Oscar Namatjira (1922-1991), and at least eight of his grandsons, including Gabriel Namatjira (1942-1969), followed in his footsteps.

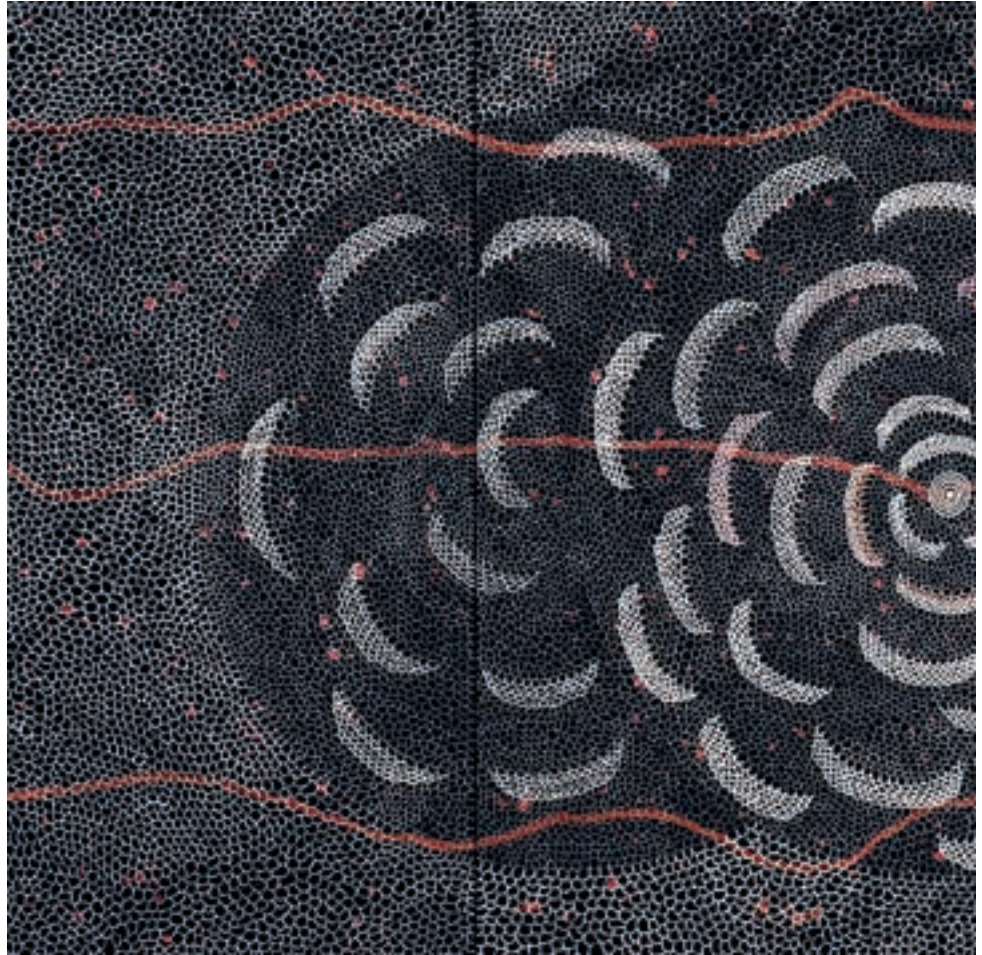
◀ **Rex Battarbee (1893-1973); Albert Namatjira (1902-1959); Oscar Namatjira (1922-1991)**

In spite of the enduring popularity of the Hermannsburg School, its critics point to its 'white mask', or the dependence of indigenous painters upon European models which they compare to the assimilationist policies pursued by Australian governments for much of the twentieth century. Robert has the distinction of appreciating both the art of Albert Namatjira and his followers and that of the indigenous artists who draw exclusively upon their own pictorial traditions. Betty Carrington (skin name Naminyji) (1944–2022) exemplifies this. *Darrajayin* is painted in natural ochre, ground by the artist and her associates to produce the pigments with which she paints. The title refers to the Darrajayin hills south west of Warmun. 'All that country my father's country,' she explained. 'He grew up in this country and used to live out in the bush. He roamed this country until he was old enough to work on the station. This is juwurlinyji [hills] country and darwirrinji [spring water] country. Billimack Spring is a good water place, that's living water. There's one sharp hill called Jawagin standing up right near the spring.' All of which we can see in the painting. Anyone doubting the veracity of the profiles of the hills as shown in the upper section of the canvas has only to visit Western Australia to see how successions of 'sharp hills' dominate the horizon line. Below, the waves of 'living water', so essential to life in the outback, ripple across the canvas.

› **Betty Carrington (skin name Naminyji) (1944–2022)**

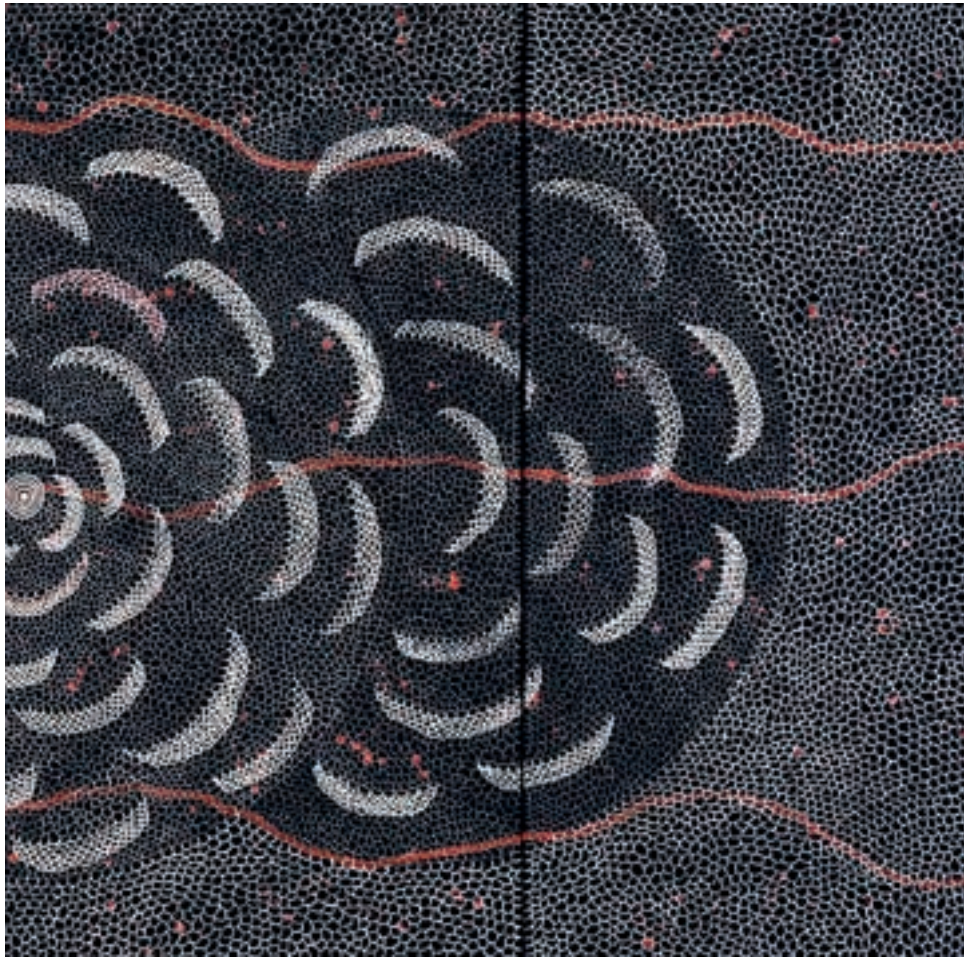
Darrajayin





These features in the painting are not purely descriptive however. They represent the elements of nature which are fundamental to the beliefs of the Gija people who inhabit the region. For them the landscape is the source of life from which their ancestors emerged and Carrington's painting of it is both an act of worship and of reclamation. Robert gifted it to the College in 2014 after inviting me to visit the Warmun Art Centre and to choose for our collection a painting by one of the artists who were active there.

Maureen Nampijinpa was born in 1959 at Mount Barkley cattle station not far from Alice Springs. She studied with her cousin Clifford Possum Tjapaltarri (1932–2002), a leading indigenous artist, before embarking on her own career in 1988. Since then she has exhibited throughout Australia and internationally. In 1997 she participated in an exhibition in London entitled 'Women Dreaming'. Ngarrankarni [dreaming stories] are one of the major themes in her work, no



doubt reinforced when she inherited from her ancestors the sacred dreaming site of Warlukurlongu [Fire Country] to which the untitled triptych given to the College by Robert in 2009 may well refer.

Using the 'dot and circle' technique which Tjapaltarri promoted, Nampijinpa creates on canvas imaginary realms of drifting consciousness from which the conventions of time and space are absent. Like Carrington's, her dreams are not inconsequential; they relate in a very real sense to the culture of Australia's indigenous peoples at a time when it is in danger of being lost to the inexorable pressures of the modern world.

^ Maureen Nampijinpa Hudson (b. 1959)
Untitled [My Country] 2008

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IN SOUTHWOLD

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The Cripps Foundation

IN 1956 SIR HUMPHREY CRIPPS (1915–2000) established the Cripps Foundation. Robert became a Director and took over as Chairman when his father stepped down. He in turn handed over to his son Thomas (Chairman) and daughter Amy (Director) in 2014, although he continues to advise the Foundation as its Director of Philanthropy. Believing that ‘people who have been fortunate enough to amass great wealth should channel it towards the greater good’, some years ago Robert and his family chose to place their business interests under the umbrella of a successor to the original Foundation which operates as a Bermuda company limited by guarantee. In pursuit of their aim to ‘carry out charitable objects throughout the world,’ between 1956 and 2021 the Cripps family had distributed an estimated US\$ 280 million worldwide.

In Cambridge alone, over the years the Foundation has given generously to St. John's College, Queens' College, Selwyn College and, of course, Magdalene. Education at every level remains one of its highest priorities; to quote from the official website, ‘Whether we're using education to help break the poverty cycle or improving the quality of education for those who already have access, from the slums of Cambodia to the splendors of Cambridge, Cripps Foundation changes lives.’



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