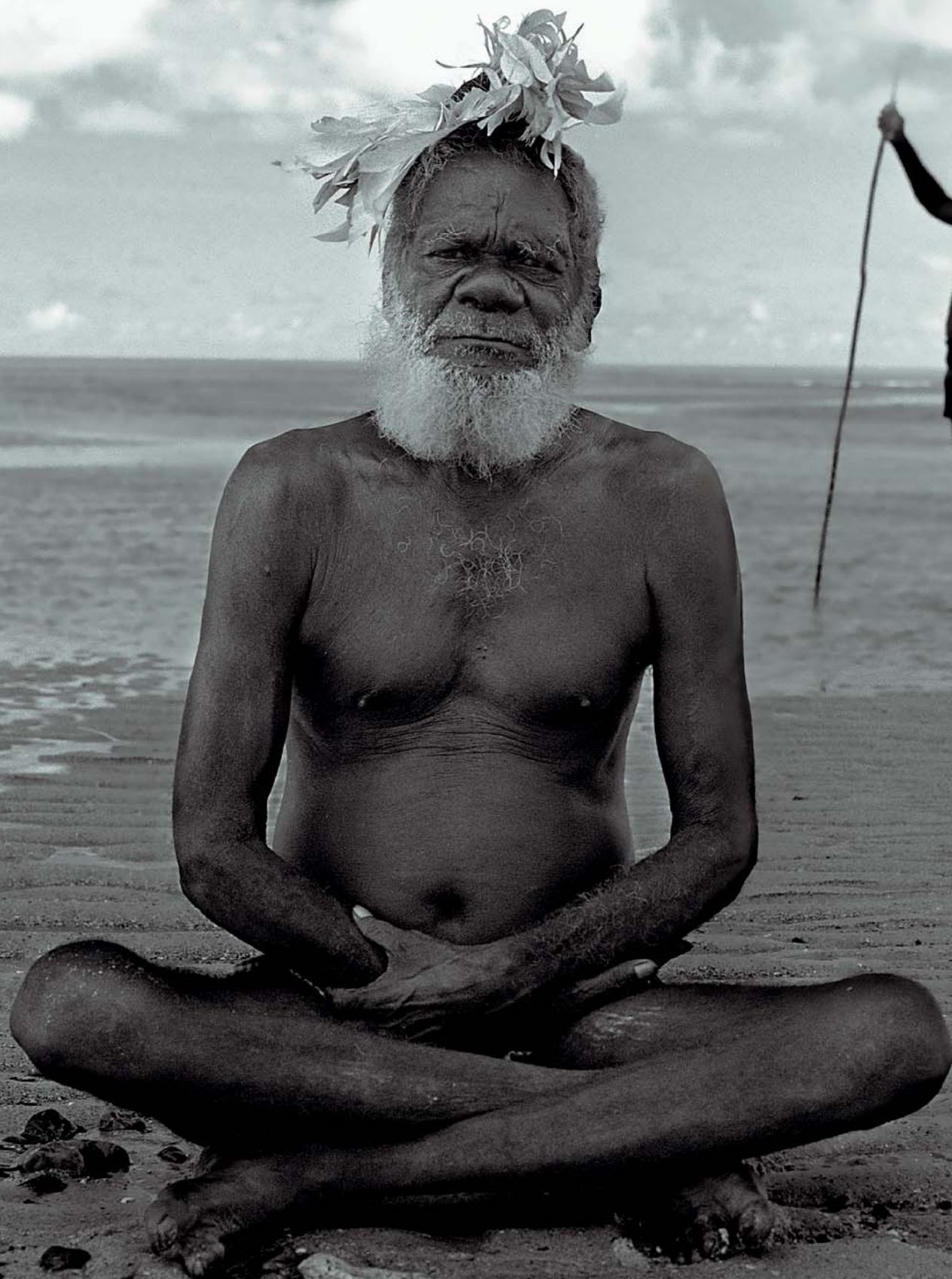


AUSTRALIA

THE VATICAN MUSEUMS INDIGENOUS COLLECTION



ABORIGINAL STUDIES PRESS

EDIZIONI MUSEI VATICANI

The *Australia* catalogue is an example of successful collaboration and interconnections born through cultural contact, setting at the centre of the stage the Indigenous Peoples.

The journey of creating this catalogue included visits to Indigenous communities in Australia to implement our policy of reconnection, which is one of the cornerstones of the Pope's Museums and to which this catalogue provides outstanding testimony. By 'reconnection' we mean our policy of 'culturally' reconnecting the artifacts and works of art that make up the collection with the peoples who created them. My colleagues of the Vatican Museums followed a process of collaboration to trace the objects back to the communities they were originated from, to consult with the cultural custodians today and, through photos of the objects, re-situate them with their heritage. They visited cultural heritage sites with the Gwini and Wunambal Gaambera, Kulari peoples at Kalumburu, in Western Australia. On Melville and Bathurst Islands in the Tiwi Islands, north of Darwin, they met with descendants of the artists who created works that had been sent to the Vatican in the early years of the last century. These descendants eagerly identified the distinct family designs on the cultural objects and spoke of their significance. North of Perth, in Western Australia, the Yued people explained the importance of history, and the Mitakoodi peoples of the Cloncurry River in Queensland showed them heritage sites they were fighting to protect. They witnessed how cultural continuity and intergenerational strengths are passed on through the vibrant contemporary art production that continues at art centres across the country today. The process of valuing and learning about cultural heritage helps to protect and promote it.

All the works in the Vatican Ethnological collection link people to their heritage and history. We are enriched by the synthesis of understandings produced in a two-way dialogue that has developed between two distinct world views. The objects are brought alive again by 'reconnection' with local knowledge and current meaning, they became active in preserving cultural heritage from the past for the future. Through the objects we learn about ancient trade routes and knowledge holders who revitalise and pass on cultural and historic information. Today a special exhibition space dedicated to valuing and learning about the cultural heritage of Australia, is one of the most visited exhibitions among those dedicated to the art of non-Europeans in the Pope's Museums. So many visitors yearn to learn more about Australia.

Initiatives such as the ones being launched in this extraordinary Department of the Pope's Museums are fulfilling Pope Pius XI's desire for openness to the cultures of the whole world. This important volume dedicated to Australia is just one of the many projects involving far-off places and civilizations that, in an era of globalization, are becoming closer and closer.

For that reason, I am most grateful to Fr. Nicola Mapelli, in charge of this Department, now called *Anima Mundi*, for all he has done over the last few years to make this important part of the Vatican Museums accessible to all visitors.

As Director of the Vatican Museums I sincerely hope that this publication will raise awareness of the collection of Indigenous Australian art and cultural heritage, even among those individuals who are unable to visit the Vatican Museums and, above all, that it will foster deeper involvement with Indigenous communities themselves.

Barbara Jatta

Director of the Vatican Museums