

# Juniper draws support for Burrup rock art

PAUL MURRAY

Few people understand the Australian landscape better than Darlington artist Bob Juniper. His images of outback WA have interpreted a harsh interior to an eager urban audience. And WA's most celebrated artist is furious about what's happening to the Aboriginal rock art on the Burrup Peninsula.

"Some years ago, I made a pilgrimage to Taliesin West in Phoenix, Arizona," he said. "This is the masterpiece of the great American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, a man whose work I had revered for decades.

"I was mildly shocked and displeased to see that boulders from the surrounding desert had been used in the building and landscaping. These boulders are works of art, showing ancient native American motifs — petroglyphs.

"At this time, Lloyd Wright fell from grace in my eyes as I perceived these actions to display disrespect and vandalism. I then rationalised that when Taliesin West was built in 1936, names such as Sitting Bull and Geronimo would still have been resonant with the American people (courtesy of Hollywood).

"Now, on reflection, I have come to think that as Taliesin West will most certainly be a national heritage site, the artefacts will be preserved for all time, as in a museum.

"The petroglyphs on Burrup, which are much older and stem from the same techniques as the American ones, are also historical artefacts far too precious to be dismissed as mere rubble and a nuisance to an industrial venture."

Juniper says that as a European artist who has had the privilege of gaining admission to Aboriginal heritage, he is dismayed at the obliteration of "irreplaceable prehistoric rock art" on the Burrup.

"I have no opposition to the development of WA's natural resources to benefit the people of this wonderful country," Juniper said.

"However, I believe that if a tiny proportion of the enormous sums which will be generated from these ventures were diverted to relocating the endangered petroglyphs to a new national park, irreplaceable icons of our indigenous

heritage would be preserved for future generations to enjoy and admire."

Juniper raises a hugely contentious issue here. The State Government plans to build an interpretation centre for tourists in the virtually inaccessible northern half of the Burrup Peninsula.

It has been suggested that the centre may become the home for all or part of the 1800 petroglyphs that have been moved since work began on the first LNG plant in 1980 — and those still to be dislocated by development.

At the moment, a physical feature known as the jump-up just north of the LNG plant restricts access to all but the very well-equipped and that has afforded the northern Burrup rock art some protection.

Under the Burrup and Maitland Industrial Estates agreement, signed with the local Aboriginals in 2003, the Government agreed to make the northern area a conservation reserve to be managed jointly with the indigenous interests. But it has promised \$8 million for the tourism project, which would include a road that opens up the north to all comers.

It would be the final nail in the coffin of the arguments put by archaeologists that the whole Burrup represents a single site complex worthy of total protection. "The heritage of the Dampier Archipelago should be considered as a continuous cultural landscape," archaeologists Caroline Bird and Sylvia Hallam wrote in a report for the National Trust last year.

The National Trust has rejected all former plans to open up the northern Burrup. Trust chief executive Tom Perrigo says the recent national heritage listing by the Federal Government will ensure that previous "ad hoc" planning approach by the WA Government will now cease.

"Before the State Government even contemplates an interpretation centre, there must be an overall management plan for the area — and they don't have one yet," Mr Perrigo said. "We are against opening up the northern Burrup other than under the careful supervision of trained indigenous people."

Deputy Premier Eric Ripper says no site has been chosen for the interpretation

centre. "This will be considered as part of the overall plan for the management of the Burrup non-industrial land, by the Department of Environment and Conservation and the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation," he said.

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**Robert Juniper: The WA artist wants better protection for the rock art on the Burrup Peninsula**