

ABORIGINAL ART TAKES OFF IN EUROPE'S SALONS

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A GERMAN collector has purchased a huge collaborative dot painting by Western Desert artists from an exhibition of Aboriginal art which opened in Dusseldorf on Friday.

The purchase, from an exhibition which is not even commercial, continues a run of valuable sales of contemporary Aboriginal art on the relatively undeveloped Continental market this year.

The buyer was an established collector of Aboriginal art, the Berlin artist Horst Antes. But Bernhard Luthi, the chief organiser of the exhibition, is seeking to persuade Mr Antes to put the work on permanent loan at the exhibition venue, the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen.

At 300cm by 700cm the acrylic on canvas, completed in 1992, would be rather large even for a big studio space, Mr Luthi said. The Kunstsammlung, moreover, is one of the few German museums contemplating expansion.

If so loaned, the work would be the second contemporary Aboriginal work to find its way into a museum on the Continent within a matter of weeks.

The Continent, particularly Germany, is the focus of a strong sales pitch by the Australian Aboriginal arts industry.

As a result of other recent sales in Europe, a work by Lin Onus, an urban artist, has been placed in an arts museum in Helsinki.

Campfire Consultancy, a Brisbane art advisory service, jointly ventured by Michael Eather and Marshall Bell, sold 20 works from an exhibition held by them at public galleries in Finland.

Many of the sales were admittedly prints, but the exhibition is being freshened up for a continuing tour and the total so far has been a respectable \$25,000.

Of this, the work by Onus accounts for \$10,000.

The exhibition arose as a result of visits by a group of Finns to the exhibition Views, Visions, Places held at the Queensland Art Gallery in 1990.

The Onus, Gotjan Jing-Jirra Swamp, of 1980, has been acquired by the Art Museum at Rouaniemi.

"I had given up the work as dead," said Mr Onus, who is in Dusseldorf for the opening of Aratjara - Art of the First Australians. "But evidently it was the right work for the right place." Melbourne dealer Gabrielle Pizzi also sold work by Onus to private buyers at the Madrid Art Fair in February.

Several commercial exhibitions of Australian contemporary art will be held at venues in the rich Dusseldorf-Cologne art industrial belt as a result of the Aratjara exhibition over the next few months.

Bookstores have loaded up with Aboriginal art titles and dealers have descended in the region hawking their wares.

Dot paintings are being used as display accessories in expensive clothing shops on Dusseldorf's fashionable Konigsweg.

This may not be what the Aboriginal arts community quite had in mind when it jointly ventured the Kunstsammlung show, but it does suggest that Aboriginal art is still unappreciated. Prices of the works, even of some of the better-known names, are less than the fashionable jackets and sweaters in the window.