

الحنس



FONDATION OPALE

# SERPENT

MUSÉE YVES SAINT LAURENT MARRAKECH

21.07.2023 — 28.01.2024

MUSÉE  
YVES SAINT LAURENT  
MARRAKECH



FONDATION  
JARDIN MAJORELLE

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# SERPENT

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Aboriginal  
Art from  
Australia

Snakes undergo physical changes throughout their lives, which, on a meta-physical level, can symbolize fertility, rebirth, transformation, immortality and healing among other things. These fundamental traits and attributes, whether actual or symbolic, explain man's fascination with the sinuous animal throughout history and across the globe, and the snake's endless manifestation in varied cultures and means of artistic expression. For many First Nation people, the United Nations estimates over 475 million indigenous people across ninety countries in the world today, among the most remarkable and fascinating are the Aboriginal tribes of the Australian continent. It is a profound honor to present to the Moroccan people and those visiting the Kingdom this extraordinary exhibition of major works by the indigenous peoples of Australia and to pay tribute to the creators of these objects, each of which is imbued with powerful energy.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Bérengère Primat, co-curator of this exhibition and founder of the Fondation Opale, a Swiss-based nonprofit foundation dedicated to the preservation and better understanding of indigenous peoples and to forging a better understanding and greater dialogue between global communities, for allowing the Fondation Jardin Majorelle to present, for the first time on the African continent, a group show of modern and contemporary First Nation artists from Australia.

The theme of our exhibition, *Serpent*, as envisioned by Bérengère Primat and her co-curator Georges Petitjean, a renowned Belgian art historian, curator of collections at the Fondation Opale and one of the leading authorities on Aboriginal art, is a universal one and commonly found throughout Morocco itself. From the famous snake charmers of the Jemaa el-Fnaa square of Marrakech to symbolic representation of the snake in Berber jewelry, or even Yves Saint Laurent's fascination with the serpent motif, which he repeatedly used throughout his career in his creations, the serpent seemed an outstanding subject to consider for an exhibition.

I am deeply grateful to the three contributors to this important catalogue: of course Mr. Petitjean, but also Wouter Welling and Donatien Grau, who offer us equally brilliant texts. It is an honor for us not only to bring this groundbreaking body of work to Morocco for the first time, but to also have the exhibition associated with such distinguished authors.

Words cannot express my gratitude to both the entire organization at the Jardin Majorelle, led by Peter Blunschi and Siham Kraifa, and to the team at the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech, headed by director Alexis Sornin. Everyone has surpassed themselves in terms of logistics, organization and collective efforts. I thank you all.

In 1987, a monumental Yves Saint Laurent exhibition was held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, which brought the couturier's creations to the Australian continent and Oceania. It is fitting that today we return this gesture by introducing powerful works by the Aboriginal peoples of Australia to Morocco.

Madison Cox

## Marrakech, 2018

At the end of my visit to the newly built Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech, I stopped at the museum's book shop to browse through several beautiful volumes and buy several postcards that showed the couturier's iconic "Love" motif intertwined with snakes. The cover of a particular book caught my attention: It reproduced a snake drawn by the hand of Yves Saint Laurent at the first house that he and Pierre Bergé had acquired in the heart of the medina of Marrakech, Dar El Hanch, literally the House of the Serpent. This snake intrigued me because it represented a rainbow-colored snake, a totem animal frequently encountered in Aboriginal art. This ancestral being appears and reappears in the stories passed down from generation to generation through paintings and sung poems for over 60,000 years. I began to dream of an exhibition of contemporary Aboriginal art within these very walls...

## Marrakech, 2023

Five years later, *The Serpent / El Hanch*, the first exhibition of Aboriginal art to be mounted in Morocco, presents thirty works by several of the most renowned Aboriginal artists on the Australian continent.

These paintings, sculptures and photographs have been selected from my collection and that of the Fondation Opale, located in Lens/Crans-Montana in Switzerland. Established in 2018, the Fondation Opale is dedicated to building awareness of contemporary Aboriginal art through exhibitions, conferences, workshops and meetings with artists. The Foundation often partners with museums, either through the loan of works including to the Palais de Tokyo, Center Pompidou, Fondation Cartier in Paris, Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Gwangju Biennale in South Korea, National Gallery of Australia, etc. and through the organization of exhibitions "beyond its walls" such as at the Menil Collection in Houston, the Art & History Museum in Brussels or here, at the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech.

The snake symbol, one of the oldest in the world, is found in many cultures and often embodies wisdom, death, resurrection or even fertility.

In Berber culture, great importance is given to representations of the snake in art, crafts and jewelry.

A powerful spiritual figure in Aboriginal art, appearing as feminine or masculine, the snake is often linked to the creation of the world and to natural landscapes, to the acquisition of knowledge, to water in all its forms (rain, rivers, points of water) and the life cycle.

In some of his iconic creations, Yves Saint Laurent managed to capture the mysterious essence of the serpent.

Depending on the context, the snake can take on different meanings, undulating between wisdom and healing, seduction and aestheticism, but undeniably transcending cultural and artistic boundaries.

I would like to personally thank Madison Cox and Peter Blunschi for their trust, for their enthusiastic support of this exhibition and for their valued friendship.

Bérengère Primat



Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri

## Cheeky Snake

1973  
acrylic on wood  
© Fondation Opale



Tiger Palpatja

*Wanampi Tjukurpa*  
Tiger's creation story  
Wanampi Water Snakes Dreaming

2005  
acrylic on linen  
© Fondation Opale



## PRESENTATION

‘Serpent’ is the first exhibition ever of Australian Aboriginal art in Morocco (North Africa). It draws on the collection of Bérengère Primat / Fondation Opale. As its title suggests, the exhibition focusses on artworks in which the serpent plays a primordial role.

The serpent can be found in many cultures throughout the world and often assumes an important role in local mythology. In Australian Aboriginal culture the serpent, and more precisely the Rainbow Serpent, is one the most important ancestral beings.

This mythical snake can be found all over the Australian continent. Many stories in Aboriginal culture are about the Rainbow Serpent. This being is associated and sometimes even identified with the rainbow, but it is also connected with water in the form of rain, rivers, and pools of water. As a symbol of fertility, this being is both father and mother to all life, and as such forms a link in the connection between man and nature. Besides creative being, the Rainbow Serpent can also manifest itself destructively. This is especially the case when people trample on the laws of the land of which the snake is often seen as a custodian.

It comes as no surprise that this being features prominently in Aboriginal art. In this exhibition several artworks, by some of the most prominent Australian Aboriginal artists including John Mawurndjul, Rover Thomas and Emily Kam Kngwararray, that have the serpent as a subject, are presented. At the same time ‘Serpent’ displays a rich and diverse overview of Aboriginal art.

Bardayal “Lofty” Nadjamerrek

Rainbow Serpent with buffalo horns

date unknown  
natural ochres on paper  
© Fondation Opale







### BÉRENGÈRE PRIMAT CO-CURATOR

Bérengère Primat, the founder of the Opale Foundation, is passionate about Aboriginal art and culture. Based in Valais, Switzerland, she traveled throughout Australia for more than twenty years, during which time she met Aboriginal people and learned about their millennia-old values and culture. Over time, Bérengère Primat has built one of the world's leading collections of contemporary Australian Aboriginal art while remaining in close contact with artists and their families. She established the Opale Foundation in 2018, naming it after a stone that occupies an important place in Aboriginal culture; its mission is to provide this art with a platform in Europe and the visibility it deserves. Bérengère Primat has been awarded the grade of Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture and is president of the Schlumberger Museum Foundation, devoted to her family's rich history. She is vice president of the Régent International School in Crans-Montana and of the Didier and Martine Primat Foundation, which works in the fields of education and the environment. Since 2020, she has served on the board of directors of the Fondation Pierre Bergé –Yves Saint Laurent.

### GEORGES PETITJEAN CO-CURATOR



The art historian Georges Petitjean has been curator of the Bérengère Primat Collection / Opale Foundation (Switzerland) since 2018. His main area of interest is the conveyance of Australian Aboriginal art—in particular the painting of desert communities—from their sites of origin to the contemporary art world. Georges Petitjean began his training in Brussels at the LUCA School of Arts before obtaining a master's degree in Art History at the VUB (Vrije Universiteit Brussel). He completed his doctorate in Art History, Anthropology and Sociology at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia; his thesis was on the art of Australia's Western Desert. Georges Petitjean lived and worked for much of his life in Australia. Since 1992, he has closely followed the work of artists across Australia, with many of whom he has formed close personal relationships. From 2005 to 2017, he was curator of the Museum of Contemporary Aboriginal Art (AAMU) in Utrecht, The Netherlands. He has co-curated several exhibitions, including *Before Time Began* at the Opale Foundation and the Royal Museums of Art and History of Belgium. He lives in Brussels and works between Brussels, Lens (Switzerland) and Australia.

A film series exploring the Aboriginal tribes of Australia  
Organized by the Fondation Opale

Free admission; limited seats available

No reservation required

Saturday at 7:00 pm

Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech

14.10.23 *Ten Canoes*  
Rolf de Heer et Peter Djigir, 2006, 91 min., English/Yolngu

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21.10.23 *Another country*  
Molly Reynolds, 2015, 75 min., English/Yolngu

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28.10.23 *Charlie's Country*  
Rolf de Heer, 2013, 109 min., English/Yolngu

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04.11.23 *My name is Gulpilil*  
Molly Reynolds, 2021, 75 min., English/Mandhalpingu

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11.11.23 *Walkabout*  
Nicolas Roeg, 1971, 100 min., English

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09.12.23 *Yolngu Boy*  
Stephen Maxwell Johnson, 2001, 85 min., English

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16.12.23 *Where the Green Ants Dream*  
Werner Herzog, 1984, 100 min., English

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30.12.23 *Satellite Boy*  
Catriona McKenzie, 2012, 95 min., English

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13.01.24 *Sweet Country*  
Warwick Thornton, 2017, 113 min., English/Arrernte

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20.01.24 *Rabbit-Proof Fence*  
Phillip Noyce, 2002, 94 min., English/Walmajarri

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27.01.24 *Beneath Clouds*  
Ivan Sen, 2002, 90 min., English



*Serpent. Aboriginal Art from Australia*

Fondation Opale - Éditions Jardin Majorelle, 2023

(French/English version)

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*Yves Klein: Dreaming in the Dream of Others*

Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2022

(French/English version)

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*Breath of Life*

Milan: 5 Continents, 2021

(French/English version)

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*Resonances*

Milan: 5 Continents, 2020

(French/English version)

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*Before Time Began*

Milan: 5 Continents, 2019

(French/English version)

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*Art aborigène contemporain*

Paris: Arteos, 2017

(French/English version)


## MUSÉE YVES SAINT LAURENT MARRAKECH

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[www.museeyslmarakech.com](http://www.museeyslmarakech.com)  
[www.tickets.jardinmajorelle.com](http://www.tickets.jardinmajorelle.com)  
Open everyday except Wednesdays  
from 10 am to 6 pm  
Last entrance at 5:30 pm  
[presse@jardinmajorelle.com](mailto:presse@jardinmajorelle.com)  
  [myslmarrakech](https://www.instagram.com/myslmarrakech)

## FONDATION JARDIN MAJORELLE

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[www.jardinmajorelle.com](http://www.jardinmajorelle.com)  
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Open everyday from 9 am to 6 pm  
Last entrance at 5:30 pm  
[presse@jardinmajorelle.com](mailto:presse@jardinmajorelle.com)  
  [jardinmajorelleamarrakech](https://www.instagram.com/jardinmajorelleamarrakech)

The **Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech**, which opened its doors in the fall of 2017, is a vibrant cultural center built around a central exhibition hall that showcases the work of the renowned couturier on a permanent basis. Much more than a simple retrospective of the iconic dresses YSL designed, one is led on a journey, with its focal point in Marrakech, through the many themes that inspired him. The fifty or so magnificent garments displayed – many rarely seen by the public – offer us an original reading of Yves Saint Laurent's oeuvre and of his importance to the history of fashion. The dresses and other haute couture pieces are rotated every ten months in order to ensure their conservation as well as to offer the visitor a panorama that evolves on a regular basis.

The mYSLm also includes a hall for temporary exhibitions, a photography gallery, an auditorium, a reference library, a bookshop and a café-restaurant.

The basement of the building houses the museum's collection and a state-of-the-art preventive conservation center.

The hall used for temporary exhibitions at the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech was conceived as a cultural and artistic showcase. It is where the museum displays talent from all over the world, with a special emphasis given to modern and contemporary Morocco.

The **Fondation Jardin Majorelle** is a nonprofit Moroccan institution that uses its own resources to ensure the conservation and functioning of the Jardin Majorelle, the Pierre Bergé Museum of Berber Arts and the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech.

The foundation's resources were used to establish the Berber Museum, inaugurated in December 2011, and the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech, which opened in October 2017. The foundation's earnings are entirely reinvested in Morocco to finance cultural, educational and social initiatives.