Representations of Wandjina, originating from cave paintings in Kimberley, Western Australia.

The Wandjina figures are cloud spirits and fertility sources of the Kimberley region. As found in caves, they are:-

Huge man-like being which are sometimes over twenty feet long. These are spectacular paintings, because of their size, and for the colours. All of the Wandjina figures have an elaborate head-dress which may be described simply as the hair of the Wandjina but which is also the cloud. The long protruberances issuing from this hair are both the feathers which the Wandjina wore and the lightning which he controls. This dual interpretation means that the cumulonimbus clouds which herald the arrival of the monsoon are thought to be the Wandjina themselves.

Just as the Wandjinjas may exist in either human form or cloud, so the paintings of Wandjinjas range from human figures to stylized representations of cloud. The following stages: - Wandjina paintings usually show man-like figures complete with body, but in some cases the body is omitted and only the head and shoulders retained, and in the next stage the shoulders are omitted leaving just the halo surrounding the face. This is finally simplified until the 'halo' becomes a mass of concentric lines, with only the eyes peering through. W. Arndt, a senior research officer with C.S.I.R.O., has put forward the theory that the Wandjina paintings have evolved from paintings of cloud. Arndt has watched cloud formations in the Northern Territory, and he makes the following points: - The clouds often take on a human shape, single clouds move across the sky in an unpredictable fashion like a person wandering through the sky. Arndt's hypothesis is consistent with statements by Aborigines to the effect that the Wandjinjas come out of the clouds and now return in that form. There is no doubt that the Wandjinjas are thought of as beings in the clouds.


Artist's Name: WAIGAN
Language Group: Catalogue No.:
Location: KOOLARI

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