

PATRICIA ANSELL DODDS

INTERVIEW

1- Hello Patricia. Will you please tell us your name, or your names? Do you have a skin name? (The notion of skin name is completely unknown in Europe, can you tell us more about it?)

My name is Patricia Ansell Dodds. My skin name is Perrule. Our skin names are given when we're born, depending on our fathers or mothers skin names. The name gives me my connection to everybody within my cultural region, it's a complex system, but at its basic level defines how I connect to others and my role, responsibility or obligation in relation to everyone and everything. Not every Aboriginal group has skin kinship systems, but a lot of the groups in Central Australia do.

2- You belong to the Arrernte nation - by your father -, and Anmatyerre nation, by your mother. What do you want to say to us about your people, and your land?

My people and my land are in Central Australia, that's me and my experiences that I talk from. I believe it's important that we don't forget where we come from like our grandparents and our mother and father. The land today is important to us, to be the first people of this country. It's our identity, it's our life, it's who we are, we are not just Australians we are Indigenous and we still want to uphold our culture and our knowledge of our country, the oldest living culture in the world. Everything is connected our past, our present and our future, our land, our culture, our language, our family, our health and wellbeing. Colonialisation took our land away making it harder to look after it and our own health and wellbeing is suffering, we see that link. We need to look after our land or it won't be able to look after us and then what are we left with.

3- Your paintings are beautiful. How did you come to the art?

I wasn't an artist when I was younger, my younger brother was, he painted our land adding our culture way and I felt it was important that I should continue with it when he passed away. And being one of the eldest in my family I feel we have to keep going with the knowledge and share it, I do in my artwork as well as keeping my culture.

4- How would you explain the notion of "Stories" to the Europeans? It is very important in your culture.

Other cultures have written words, books, but not ours and these stories have been passed through every generation unchanging. Our altyerre, creation story of our country, show our people had great knowledge of how the land was created and what we needed to survive. Our stories are the most important, they are our survival, how we have become the oldest living culture in the world. We want to keep passing that on to our younger generation today so they can survive another 120,000 yrs.

5- When I travelled around Australia to meet the tribes, all over the country I encountered a lot of terrible misery. A great deal of racism, too. As a very well known artist now, how do you deal with that? Do you think that your work can be useful to the cause of social justice in the island?

I think the racist attitude of the people who came to Australia since the arrival of Captain Cook, has gone on through the generations and nothing is better, our people are still fighting for our rights to our land for a treaty, sovereignty, etc and its still hasn't happened. Australia is the only Commonwealth country without a treaty with its First People, but then are the other treaties truly upheld. Some of that is deep rooted racism and some is ignorance, and some is just the self centred individualism of their white culture.

I've been a very strong person since I was a little girl and I have not changed I grew up with very strong old people that didn't have any rights in this country until 1967 when we became citizens, I was 19. Even then things haven't changed that much for them, but I will never stop, even today I still protest about our rights in Australia. I teach in Cultural awareness programs to share understanding about my culture. I work on a number of committees and initiatives to raise awareness and make change, self determining a better future for us.

I hope my artwork helps, I think what it does is tell people that we still know our culture and we want to tell our stories through our artwork, that we are still here and we are not gonna change, and if it helps us to make the younger generation wake up and say the older generation was not right in what they did. That they can make a difference to the next generations of Aboriginal people. They didn't want to give us anything in Australia and most don't know the history of what happened. Funny how there are 2 histories when you research, Australian History and Aboriginal History, but Aboriginal History happened in Australia, it is Australian history and it should be taught as that,

not something separate like it happened somewhere else. Australians tend to demean the USA with their slavery, shame Germany with their genocide attempts, discredit South Africa with their years of apartheid and I'm sure there are many other examples, Australia is not above this, we have this history. But we are still here, we still practice culture in our country and speak some of our languages.

This is a way to celebrate our culture, shows it is worth keeping and valuing its differences.

6- Some aboriginal people, in Alice Springs, told me that this town is one of the most racist in Australia. And when I stayed there, I felt a lot of tension between black and white fellows. What is your opinion?

There is definitely racism in the town. And this is also happening all over Australia, not just Alice Springs. There are many people who are trying to change that, more needs to be done to change it. Like I said about the 2 histories. When they learn about the history properly, and put themselves in that position, they have more understanding, it makes a difference. It doesn't stop us from having things like Parrtjima Festival of light, to show our culture to visitors, they probably don't like it but we have our supporters.

That's why we do the cultural awareness and other initiatives to share knowledge and to put them on that path to say that respect works both ways and to learn about the history properly. They think about all the wars that Australia's been in but they never worry about the massacres that Australia did to our people in Australia. If you don't learn from your past you can't move forward in your future.

7- You come in Paris, France, very soon, to show your art. Where can it be seen? And what are the dates? It is quite unusual to have such a great aboriginal artist here in France, and I encourage french people to come and see your marvelous paintings.

I am going to an International Environmental conference in Scotland as an Indigenous representative from Australia first. Discussing environmental concerns, climate change and our legacy for our Earth and sharing my culture. I wanted to see some of the galleries in London and Paris before coming back to Australia. I'm coming to Paris France in early May, only for 6 days this trip, and I might have samples of my art, but at this stage I am not having an exhibition. I do hope that one day I can have an exhibition in Europe somewhere, so if anyone has some suggestions or interest in hosting an exhibition I would be happy to come back and show my art and culture properly.

8- Does your work inspire itself from other artists, and pieces of art? Do you have a master?

I have Aunties of both nations of people where I come from that have inspired me to do my story from my family culture. My land and their stories also inspire me. I have started teaching members of my family to paint as well.

9- This summer (the south hemisphere one) has seen a lot of aboriginal children suicides, all over Australia. I was there when it happened, and I was very afraid by the numbers. It seems that it comes from a sort of despair. And it goes hand in hand with the petrol sniffing, the "ice" epidemic, the over consumption of alcohol. I have met around Australia many marvelous natives, with a touching kindness and a fabulous culture, but aboriginal people suffer a great deal, and many times I felt heartbroken of the situations, from Broome to Perth, around Alice Springs, Coober Pedy, etc. In the whole country, in fact.

How do you think french people could help? Maybe is it necessary to speak alot about that? Because the horror prospers, often, in silence...

There are many problems that plague our communities and people. These problems dont necessarily discriminate between white and black but they are definately affecting us at a much higher rate, it is becoming an emergency to deal with it. I think maybe because our young people have to live in two cultures, Australia and Aboriginal, and one is not valued as much as the other, its sometimes very difficult for them and they get caught in between. Its also the drugs the things they take and young people from my own family have died with taking drugs and things, so I do understand what that means to families but they get caught in a condition they cant handle and its very sad. We have a very strong group of ladies in Alice Springs and around Australia a Grandmothers group who are fighting for many years for our rights in Australia, for our young people and we are still doing it for our young people today that the laws should be changed not keep putting our young people in jail and taking them away, cause they have been doing that for over 200 years and it hasnt stopped, my family was in jail that many times its not funny as well. The NT juvenile centre is filled with 100% Aboriginal kids, does that mean that no non-Aboriginal kid gets in trouble with the law ? That they never make a mistake ? We have whats known as the Stolen Generations from 1900-1970, the government apologised to us in 2008, because of the effects of that time to these people. The words spoken by our Prime Minister were 'The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's

history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future.' Further on stating 'A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.' Today more of our children are in out of home care than ever before, even when the Stolen Generation policies were at their peak, how is this never, never happening again ?

We are not gonna stop protesting and marching for our rights. One of the problems is the Government wont take responsibility for any of this, letting the propaganda of media distract the country and then think they can just have a one fix for all, the issues are way too complicated for that. And there are way too many nations with these complex problems to have one solution. People from other places can help if they get an understanding of us first and whats happening from us, thats why I do so much talking and sharing in our programs and my art. Seek us out when you visit Australia, tell other people about us, tell our Government they can't be the great leaders in the world without listening to us and our needs, coming to terms with their own history. Help celebrate our Culture with us, stand with us not for us.

10- When I spoke with natives in the Red Center (Yulara, Alice Springs, and communities around), they told me that the roots of aboriginal culture remain stronger in the center, because it's the last part of Australia to have been really colonised. As a woman Anmatyerre and Arrernte, do you think it's true?

Yes I believe we are very lucky to be able to know our culture and where we come from and to still speak our languages and this is really important for our young people today I would say that it would be because our first contact with white people was alot more recent in time, but also because of the remoteness and the aridness of our country. Life is much harder in Central Australia, lots of people have come and gone, not able to make it work for them, cause you have to know the country and we've had 60,000 plus years to work that out.

11- The aboriginal cosmogony and the vision of life of the natives in Australia are the strangest, most poetic, and incredible ones, for Europeans. It takes a very long time for us to begin to understand this world. What would you want us to know about your way of thinking?

We realise that we have to live in this modern society today, but still in our heads we also feel very strong for our land, culture, language and where we come from. This way of thinking should be valuable to the rest of the world, how else could we have become the oldest living culture in the world, we still feel that strong connection to our country. It is really hard to explain to non-

Indigenous, the connections we have, the sense of community, the value of all things and our place in it. It shouldn't be dismissed just cause its not understood.

12- How long will you stay in France? What other countries do you want to visit to show your paintings?

As I said earlier on this trip I will be in France for 6 days. As our culture has intriguing stories and places, I like to hear and see others, sharing my culture along the way. I just want to share it with anybody, it doesn't matter which country or how many countries I put. I think its important that people understand that Aboriginal people are still able to tell their stories for the land like our old people did to share it with anybody dosent matter where they come from in Europe.

Be free to say someting more, about any subject, if you feel it.

And if anyone is considering visiting Australia in April, be sure to put Central Australia in your itinerary between 5 - 14 APRIL 2019. Each year my home comes alive with new artworks, light shows and a range of performances, workshops and talks carefully developed for the Parrtjima Festival. This is the only authentic First Nations festival of its kind, celebrating our culture through the newest technology – all on a 300-million-year-old natural canvas in the Red Centre. Parrtjima celebrates the way our artists can evolve and experiment with different styles and materials, while staying true to our ancient philosophy of connection and Country.

<https://www.parrtjimaaustralia.com.au/>

A way for us to celebrate our culture and share in its importance.