

## *The Small Figure Rock Paintings in the Bradshaw Style*

*by Andreas Lommel*

In the Kimberley region one also encounters small rock paintings of human figures. Their location varies: sometimes they are to be found in the immediate vicinity of the larger Wandjina paintings, but sometimes they stand entirely on their own, as if they had been dropped at random into the landscape. Invariably painted in monochrome dark red, the figures are often shown walking or running, generally carrying a barbed spear or a boomerang. Elaborately coiffured and ornamented, they sometimes appear to be clothed instead of going naked. The figures are known as Bradshaws, after their discoverer, J.P. Bradshaw, who published an illustrated account of his findings in 1892 (*Notes on a Recent Trip to Prince Regent River*, *Royal Geographical Society of Australia. Victorian Branch. Transactions. 9(5), pp. 90-103.*

The origins of this style of painting are relatively obscure. A measure of outside influence must be assumed, as the depletion of movement is wholly uncharacteristic of indigenous Australian art, although the weapons — the multibarbed spear and boomerang — remain typical. Possibly the external influence was only short-lived.



A small Bradshaw style rock paintings at the Sundron copied by Katharina Lommel

86 x 41 cm

*A typical Bradshaw painting. Usually the figures of these paintings are represented in movement. Here we have a later version of the Bradshaw Style. As usual our Aborigines did not know the picture and they were not interested in it. Katharina copied it and probably the little dog figure between the two figures on the left side is a later addition.*

These elegant little figures have been studied in detail by Grahame Walsh, whose recent book on the subject contains a wide selection of examples. (*See Grahame L. Walsh, Bradshaws. Ancient Rock Paintings of North-West Australia. Bradshaw Foundation Geneva 1994*).

Instead of being tied to a religious context, Bradshaws are possibly an instance of creative activity inspired by purely playful motives. The pictures are painted directly on the rock, using any flat surface available and paying no heed to the question of protection from the elements. Seldom over 60 cm high, the small figures are often found in groups.

In his survey of the subject, Grahame Walsh examines the question of stylistic derivation and priority, pointing out that both types of painting, the Bradshaw and the Wandjina, are often found at the same site. In such cases, the central picture is always the Wandjina, with the Bradshaws distributed round about in small niches and alcoves. Sometimes there is an element of continuity between the two styles: this is the case, for example, in Wonalirri, where the motif of the tree is repeated and varied.

In 2000 Grahame L. Walsh wrote a third book on the Bradshaw paintings. *Bradshaws: Art of the Kimberleys, Takkarakka Mowan Kas Publications*.