



## FONDATION OPALE

- ≡ Visual arts
- ≡ Historical archives

### Press release

## Transfer of the Bernhard Lüthi Archive to Fondation Opale

Swiss artist, activist and curator Bernhard Lüthi (1938) transfers the archives of his lifetime work to Fondation Opale in Lens, Switzerland. A selection of these documents will be exhibited at the Sydney Biennale from March 14<sup>th</sup> to June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

Fondation Opale has been handed over an important resource for the history of contemporary Australian Indigenous art: the Bernhard Lüthi Archive. Made up of thousands of images and documents, these archives are now being inventoried and preserved. They are to be digitalised, with the aim of making them available to researchers and the larger community in the coming years. Fondation Opale's mission is to promote contemporary Aboriginal art through exhibitions and public programs, as well as residencies, conferences and support for academic research.

Bernhard Lüthi is a militant figure for the recognition of Aboriginal art in Europe. His involvement dates back to the mid-1970s. When he first travelled to Australia in 1974, he became interested in and documented rock paintings and befriended Aboriginal artists and activists. Gradually abandoning his own artistic practice – he is a painter, trained as a photo editor – in favour of militant curatorial work, he insisted early on to include Aboriginal representatives in discussions and decisions about exhibitions related to their art. Following a conference he organised in December 1984 at the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Arts, to which he invited Gary Foley, at the time director of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board of the Australia Council (ATSIB)*, he contributed significantly to raise awareness on Aboriginal art in Europe. Major achievements include the 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* in Paris, for which he was appointed co-curator for Aboriginal participation, and *Aratjara, Art of the first Australians*, 1993-94 in Düsseldorf, London and at the Louisiana Museum near Copenhagen, which he curated with Gary Foley and Charles (Chicka) Dixon. At the Tinguely Museum in Basel and in Hanover, he showcased Aboriginal artist John Mawurndjul through the retrospective exhibition *Rarrk* in 2005-06.

In 2020, the Biennale of Sydney, Australia's largest contemporary visual arts event, is led for the first time by an Indigenous artist: Brook Andrew. In his project *Nirin* (meaning "edge" in the Wiradjuri language of west New South Wales), Andrew decided to include a selection of about 70 documents from the Lüthi archives, most related to *Magiciens de la Terre* and *Aratjara*, which will be unveiled for the first time to the public.

We at Fondation Opale wish to express our deep gratitude to Bernhard Lüthi for the trust he places in us with the transfer of his archives; and share the impatient enthusiasm of so many other Indigenous and non-Indigenous art lovers, on the eve of this Biennale under the direction of Brook Andrew.

## Annexes

- Photos of selected archives
- Bernhard Lüthi's short bio

## Contacts

Georges Petitjean, head curator  
[gp@collectionberengereprimat.art](mailto:gp@collectionberengereprimat.art)

Vanessa Pannatier, communication  
[vp@fondationopale.ch](mailto:vp@fondationopale.ch)  
+41 (0)27 483 46 16



Fondation Opale | Route de Crans 1 | CH 1978 Lens/Crans-Montana | [www.fondationopale.ch](http://www.fondationopale.ch)