

Explore Aboriginal Art with Kluge-Ruhe's Tours

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Finding art in Charlottesville is an easy task: it is on buildings, inside museums, and beside the roads. Finding an easily accessible tour of one of Charlottesville's many collections is less straightforward. Hidden behind a rolling, scenic hillside, the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of UVA may not seem like an obvious first choice for a museum outing, but the gallery's weekly tours are the perfect primer in Aboriginal culture and art forms.

"What can you do in Cville that you can't do anywhere else in the United States? Visit the only museum dedicated to Indigenous Australian art and culture!" said Kluge-Ruhe's website, adding



The exterior of Kluge-Ruhe. Photo courtesy of Wren Bolick

that they have a fixed collection of over 1,900 works.

Nicole Wade, the museum's collection manager and registrar, put that number at 2,089 on Feb. 1, 2020, when she gave a tour of the museum's storage. In the short, 30-minute introduction to Aboriginal art, Wade explained Aboriginal methods and customs, as well as what Kluge-Ruhe does to preserve their works.

Starting with humidity and ending with a directory of every bug ever spotted in the building, Wade detailed the efforts of the museum to preserve the fragile, eucalyptus bark paintings, which can start to expand within a few minutes of an atmospheric change. The paintings, which range from small, tablet-sized pieces to huge, 10-foot slabs of bark, are decorated with dots and crisscrossing patterns.

In addition to Kluge-Ruhe's current works, Wade said 32 more have been commissioned by the museum and are on their way from Australia. She also mentioned the other exhibitions of Aboriginal art in the United States, such as UVA's Fralin Museum of Art and an upcoming tour.

Kluge-Ruhe is located at 400 Worrell Drive, a short way from Shadwell's. The museum offers weekly tours every Saturday, starting at 10:30 a.m. and usually lasting about 45 minutes. It opens at 10 a.m. most days except Sunday (1 p.m.) and Monday (closed).



Made of eucalyptus bark, these were used to hold the remains of the dead.
Photo courtesy of Wren Bolick