

# ARTS **YARN UP**



Australian Government





Photo: Stu Spence.

## KEEPING CULTURE STRONG

Indigenous issues have been high on the national agenda in recent months.

While employment, education and health tend to grab the headlines, the arts and culture can play a positive role in helping us tackle some of issues. During the Australia 2020 Summit, held in April 2008, and in many forums since, I've heard the question: how can we use our creative talents to build stronger communities?

In 2008 our executive director Lydia Miller spent time travelling around the country, talking with artists, companies and communities about how to best support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts.

This edition of *Arts Yarn Up* is filled with further inspiration. There's a focus on Torres Strait Islander artists who are working to keep their culture strong.

There are stories about artists making connections overseas, and insights from lawyer Terri Janke about how we might protect our cultures better.

There is also a comment from dancer Tim Bishop that sums up the many ways that our culture makes us strong.

When talking about the challenges he's faced, Tim reminds us that: 'Culture is like a compass. If you know where you're coming from then you can figure out where you want to go.'

**Dr Chris Sarra, Chair,  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts board**



Photo: Stu Spence.

## CELEBRATING ARTISTS AT WORK

2009 promises to be a year of strength and celebration. At the Australia Council, highlights of 2008 included our delegation to the Festival of Pacific Arts and our first national Indigenous arts awards.

Finding ways to keep our cultures strong will continue to be our priority in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts in 2009.

An important tool to do this will be an Indigenous visual art code of conduct, with Arts Minister Peter Garrett releasing a draft just before Christmas. I'd like to thank everyone who contributed their ideas to the first draft, and invite you all to comment on the proposed code.

In this larger edition of *Arts Yarn Up*, you'll find more about another initiative to strengthen our culture. The 'artists in work' initiative aims to boost Indigenous employment across the arts sector, and you can read more on page 12. There are also profiles of Indigenous artists who have been recognised for their lifetime of work – including Red Ochre Award winner Doris Pilkington Garimara and fellowship recipient Margaret Harvey. Inside, you'll find focus on Torres Strait Islander artists as we celebrate their works and their culture.

And there are all the usual great yarns – about Vernon Ah Kee, who's heading to the Venice Biennale this year, through to artists working on the edge of technology, Indigenous theatre companies who are making global connections, and the first rehearsals of the national Indigenous children's choir.

Wishing you the very best for the coming year.

**Lydia Miller, Executive Director  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts**

The Australia Council for the Arts is the Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body.

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ISSN 1442-5351

The Australia Council respects Indigenous communities and culture.

Readers should be aware that this publication may contain images or references to members of the Indigenous community who have passed away.

Cover: **Jeffrey Aniba**. Photo: **Mervyn Bishop**

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# New Indigenous art code of conduct ready for comment

The Australia Council for the Arts is welcoming feedback on a draft commercial code of conduct for the Indigenous visual arts industry.

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**D**rawn up with input from an industry-wide consultation group, the draft code will strengthen fair trade and address problems of unethical commercial practices in the industry.

The industry alliance group working on the code includes Indigenous artists, Indigenous curators, gallery managers, art centres and auction houses.

The code of conduct lays out commercial frameworks for fair negotiation and payment to Indigenous artists, and seeks to ensure that they work under proper conditions.

It specifies a set of minimum standards for dealers, agents, and artists – and defines terms of trade, and rights and responsibilities for the sale and management of artworks. The implementation of the code was a key recommendation of a Senate Inquiry report into the Indigenous visual arts and craft sector, which revealed unscrupulous and illegal practices towards Indigenous artists.

Lisa Michl, a practicing artist and chair of UMI Arts in Cairns, took part in the consultation group and is optimistic the code will provide the basis for better industry practices.

‘The code is an important step forward in developing policies to protect the rights and interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists,’ she said.

‘As a young professional Indigenous artist from West Cape, Queensland, it was encouraging that so many voices came together to emphasise the need for fair and equitable dealings with Indigenous artists and the sale of their works.

‘The code is one way to ensure that both consumers’ and artists’ rights are protected to a minimum standard. Most importantly, the code identifies activities that are not ethical and are not acceptable conduct,’ said Lisa. ‘It’s important that Indigenous artists, and organisations such as UMI Arts, support policies and procedures that ensure that dealings with Indigenous art and artists are done the proper way.

‘Most importantly, I think it is important that the selling of Indigenous art is conducted in an honest and transparent

way. The code will be a positive step towards increased confidence in the Indigenous arts market in Australia,’ said Lisa.

Elizabeth Tregenza, general manager of Ananguku Arts in South Australia, believes the code is an important step forward at a critical time in the development of the sector. Ananguku Arts represents over 400 practicing Indigenous artists who own and work from seven regional art centres across the APY Lands (Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara).

‘Our members believe the code is workable and a good basis for the much-needed restructuring of certain areas of the industry,’ said Elizabeth.

‘The need for regulation has been the subject of much discussion over the past 12 months and we’ve been able to form a strong regional position supporting it.

‘Art centre managers across the APY Lands agree that this restructuring will be important in maintaining the price-point of generally strong work.

‘With the continuing demand for high quality work, we are totally upbeat about the future of Indigenous art in the region and believe the code will have actual economic benefits for Indigenous artists,’ said Elizabeth.

Lydia Miller, the Australia Council’s executive director of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts, welcomed industry interest in the code.

‘This is chance for the industry to set standards for itself,’ she said. ‘We hope the voluntary code will boost confidence, helping consumers check the authenticity of works and delivering a competitive advantage to dealers and traders who sign up to the code.’

The draft code is open for public comment until 20 March 2009 at [www.australiacouncil.gov.au/indigenousartconsult](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/indigenousartconsult).

**Lisa Michl creating artworks.** Image courtesy of Colyn Huber, Lovegreen Photography.

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# Australian delegation inspires the Pacific

Forty-two of Australia's best Indigenous artists have returned exhilarated and inspired from the 10th Festival of Pacific Arts.

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Held in American Samoa in late-July 2008, the two-week festival brought together artists from 26 Pacific nations. The Australian delegation was programed around the theme of 'Welcoming the new day'.

Festival of Pacific Arts (FOPA) is held every four years and provides opportunities for artists across the Pacific to connect, to stop the erosion of traditional customary practices and to explore cultural solutions to common problems.

Australian delegation members later told of the unforgettable and uplifting experiences that they had in American Samoa.

Writer and film producer Pauline Clague said that there were 'so many highlights from the festival, but the one that stood out is the night the Australian delegation performed at the stadium.

'The dancers were amazing. Our ancestors were with them on stage for everyone to see. I felt extremely proud and humbled by their performance,' said Pauline.

Bronwyn Razem, a traditional basket weaver, said that a highlight of FOPA was 'experiencing the diversity of the Island cultures, the traditional dress, dance, music, song, arts and crafts. I was also able to determine how important basket weaving and weaving is to these Island cultures and how diverse the techniques were.'

'I was also impressed by the unity of our group and how we supported each other. It was more like a family, rather than a group of performers,' said Bronwyn.

Visual artist Pamela Croft-Warcon said that she was moved by the impact the Australian delegation had on participants from other Pacific nations.

'They told me they had watched the Australian delegation and learned how they could reclaim and maintain cultural aspects in their lives that were being lost. Sometimes it is difficult to reflect and recognise how strong we have become with reclaiming and maintaining our culture and history. I was really proud that other peoples were looking to us as role models in this way,' said Pamela.

Lee Darroch is a Yorta Yorta woman whose art includes mediums as diverse as possum-skin cloak-making, carpet and textile design, and large-scale public art installations.

'At FOPA I had some fantastic experiences of the strength of our culture, art, language, dance and song to keep forever,' said Lee. 'The festival was a rich experience of meeting many different Pacific Islanders and sharing — in particular with the Tongan and Norfolk Islander mobs — how we are going about cultural revival, cultural retrieval and cultural maintenance.

'The experience of devising and performing real cultural ceremony as a group will stay with me forever. The Aboriginal mob that wore the three sections of the cloak we made together showed everyone the power of our ancient culture. I felt proud to be the vehicle for this to happen,' said Lee.

**Top: Australian delegation at Festival of Pacific Arts.**

# 'I was really proud of our group'

Wesley Enoch, artistic director of Australia's delegation to the Festival of Pacific Arts, spoke with *Arts Yarn up*.



## What were the highlights of the festival from the Australian delegation's point of view?

I think we made a huge splash with the uniform and the sense of tight organisation we had. It was a really great group of artists and they mixed in so well. There was a real fascination with our group. Our uniforms had an image of interwoven hands, showing the connections between our traditional and contemporary cultures.



## Were there similarities between Indigenous Australian culture and those of other Pacific nations at FOPA?

The colonial influences are very common. I must admit to rekindling my interest in the bible whilst in American Samoa. It was amazing to be in a country where the cultural protocols of the Indigenous people were embedded in the forms of governance, organisation and law.

## What were some differences between Indigenous Australian culture and those of other Pacific nations at FOPA?

We have very unique styles of dance, music and visual arts. I noticed how the locals were transfixed by the dance styles in particular. We performed a lot more than some other groups. I reckon the key difference is that it is easier for some of the other countries to showcase their culture because often it is one culture for each country, but in Australia we are over 500 language groups and different experiences. To represent our country you have to rely on ideas of diversity. One dance group can not represent the breadth of what is happening in the country.

Right: Wesley Enoch making his mark on the possum skin cloak created at the Australian Fale, at FOPA. Bottom: Dewayne Everettsmith performing at the Australian Fale at the festival village. Bronwyn Razem with hand woven eel trap  
Photos: Mervyn Bishop



# Doris' childhood dream reaps Red Ochre Award

The Australia Council's prestigious 2008 Red Ochre Award recognised the great writer Doris Garimara Pilkington.



**D**oris Pilkington Garimara won the 2008 Australia Council Red Ochre Award – the premier award for an Indigenous artist – for her lifetime's contribution to Indigenous literature. Doris, author of the internationally successful book *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*, says she tells her children: 'Whatever you do, do it well'. True to her own words, she is a great writer and a passionate activist and patron for the Stolen Generations and reconciliation campaigns.

Her writings and appearances around Australia and the world have helped to inform new audiences about the history of Indigenous Australians. Her book *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence* has been translated into 11 languages and she has been on speaking tours to Japan, China, Norway, the USA, Canada, Europe and South Africa.

'As a writer, the success has given me the freedom to do whatever I like and the opportunity to travel to see places I've only dreamed about and meet people everywhere, like Japan's Indigenous people, the Ainu,' said Doris Pilkington Garimara.

'I've even been to Hollywood with Philip Noyce, the director of *Rabbit Proof Fence*, for pre-Oscars parties and

met actors, directors and producers. It was too overcrowded for me though. It was so packed I couldn't move forward, backward or sideways. I looked around for another Aboriginal, brown or black face, whatever, there was none.'

But travel and the glamour of Hollywood take a back seat to home and family for Doris. 'I am very contented. I have heaps of grandchildren and great grandchildren. They bring joy to me wherever I go and wherever I am they come and visit me.'

Doris also delights in defying stereotypes. 'Years ago, when Sally Morgan's *My Place* was on the best seller lists, this author said that to be successful, an Aboriginal woman writer must be young and beautiful. So I just thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts board and the Australia Council for giving me the opportunity to dispel that myth.'

Doris Pilkington Garimara has dreamt of writing ever since she was nine years old. That's when she was taught the English classics at the Moore River Native Settlement where she lived until she was 24. 'I always loved writing and my composition was always good in assignments. I had a good imagination as well. When I was 12, I wanted to become a journalist.'

Doris still writes, reads and travels a lot. 'It's important as an author to read broadly, my family are avid readers.' Her other passion is classical music. She has a huge collection. When she travels she like to visit art galleries, museums and libraries and take in the architecture of another country. 'I find that helps me to relax.'

It also gives her ideas for stories. 'Ideas would come to me traveling on a bus, say from Perth to Jigalong, a long trip. I think of stories. The landscape and scenery helps me to write. I see something in a ghost town and use my imagination to put characters there and what they were doing. How they did everything in those days. So imagination comes with travel.'

Doris has recently finished writing her next book, her fifth. Titled *Red Roses for Angelina*, the new novel is about love, romance, culture and history based on an Aboriginal couple in the 1900s and in the mid-1950s.

She said she had a marvellous time writing it. She just needs to go back home to Exmouth and type it on her new laptop before it goes to her publishers.

Nominated by Gadigal Information Service Aboriginal Corporation in Sydney, chair Dr Anita Heiss said that through her work, Doris had moved hundreds of thousands of people across the world and promoted greater understanding of the issues of the Stolen Generations.

The Red Ochre Award was presented by Ms Thérèse Rein, as part of the Australia Council's inaugural national Indigenous arts awards at the Sydney Opera House on 30 May 2008.

**Doris Pilkington Garimara. Photo: Sharon Hickey**

# Margaret's fellowship to explore Island stories

An Australia Council fellowship will allow Margaret Harvey to research Torres Strait stories.



**M**argaret Harvey, a Torres Strait Islander descended from Saibai Island, is one of Australia's best-known Indigenous actors working in theatre, film and television.

Her most recent project is seeing her work on creating a collaborative theatre process and dialogue for telling Torres Strait Islander stories. She will bring together her skills from more than 16 years working within a western-based model of theatre with her knowledge of her people, initially from Saibai Island and around the Strait.



'All these years of working as an actor, I've mainly been involved in telling Aboriginal stories. But this has made me realise that there aren't enough Torres Strait stories,' Margaret said.

We need more of our stories on our stage within the theatrical medium. We need it in all mediums, but I'll approach it from my industry and find a way to tell them.'

Margaret Harvey said a \$90 000 Australia Council fellowship over the next two years is giving her the means to explore a concept that has 'been brewing' for six years.

Western theatre does not provide a framework for telling Torres Strait Islander stories, Margaret said, because those stories are 'from a different culture, an age-old tradition of story telling around a fire, in a hut, it's just a part of life.'

For the next two years Margaret's work will be mostly research-based – gathering stories and talking to family and other community members living both in the islands and on the mainland.

'How do Torres Strait Islanders envisage their own stories should be told? That's what I want to explore,' said Margaret. 'I wouldn't rule out producing something at the end of this, but I don't want to get ahead of myself or pressure my people to do that.'

The threat of global warming adds extra urgency to Margaret's quest. 'Most of the islands are threatened by rising sea levels. We don't know how long they're going to be around for. It's something Mum has been saying to me for years: "You need to find a way to tell Saibai Island stories, it's very important".'

For Margaret, the thought of Saibai Island going under is unthinkable. 'To lose whole communities of cultures would mean losing a unique part of Australian identity. What's important to my people is that we try not to lose as much as we can.'

Margaret was presented her fellowship by the Minister for the Arts, The Hon. Peter Garrett MP, at the Australia Council's inaugural national Indigenous arts awards ceremony at the Sydney Opera House.

Margaret Harvey's recent work includes the SBS television series *RAN (Remote Area Nurse)*, the film *Peregrine – The Deaf Float*, the highly acclaimed mini-series *After the Deluge*, the semi-regular role of Bella in *McLeod's Daughters*, and the short films *Infinity* and *Shifting Ground* written, produced and directed by Des Connellan.

**Minister for the Arts The Hon. Peter Garrett with Margaret Harvey.**  
Photo: Sharon Hickey

# Purple-blue lightning in American Samoa

Seu ngapa Mura Buwai, Ngai apapudthiz koeu Gagathau Muruigal ar Kuiku Mabaigal. (*Greetings to all the clans. I acknowledge the elders and the spiritual ancestors of this land.*)



Supporting a plume of cassowary feathers at the Festival of Pacific Arts (FOPA), held during July 2008 in American Samoa, was the Torres Strait Islander cultural group, Ariu Poenipan.

Jeff Waia, the group's cultural teacher and a high school teacher, says that the group members like to present themselves to perfection so that people will come and see their performances.

Ariu Poenipan means 'the lightning that strikes in the middle of the storm of the monsoonal rains. The lightning that is a purple and bluish colour that almost blinds your eyes,' said Jeff Waia.

The 11-strong team of dancers, singers and artists that is Ariu Poenipan was formed when elders and authorities throughout the Torres Straits felt that there was a need for a concerted effort of cultural revitalisation, restoration and preservation.

'The dancers in Ariu Poenipan use dance to preach our beliefs of culture,' said Jeff Waia. 'Yes, there is erosion in our cultures in the younger generations from powerful influences of the western world. I witness this in our classrooms.'

'Our identity as the custodians of the land, sky and the sea is weaved through our cultural beliefs, our spiritual beliefs. In the form of dance, music and apparatus usage — and through dance, music and storytelling — we will pass on the stories of our people.'

Ilario Sabatino, chair of Ariu Poenipan, said that traditional ways are being affected by the western influences of machinery, infrastructure and technology. Changes to traditional hunting, carving and cooking often go against traditional protocols. Now Islanders face the challenge of balancing traditional and western ways of doing things.

'I think what is really inspiring is the knowledge transfer passed on by Uncle Jeff for this Festival,' said Ilario Sabatino. 'Eleven different apparatuses or cultural objects were handcrafted especially for use in FOPA and took the group four months to make. They included headdresses, bows and arrows, traditional musical instruments, warup and kulap shell shakers.'

To accompany the stories, songs and dances at FOPA, the group conducted talks about their culture.

Torres Strait Islanders also share with the native Fijians deep concerns about climate change and globalisation. FOPA provided the opportunity to discuss strategic relations between the nations around the effects these issues are having on cultural maintenance and preservation.

'What is important is not only performing arts but also governance,' said Ilario Sabatino. 'With the water rising, they are having the same issues, but their nations are able to sustain their culture, right up to embedding it in their governance. Our objective is to learn through that too. We've got a long way to go and lessons to learn.'

Jeff Waia said that 'like an octopus, we can change our colours so we're able to maintain that traditional side of things... but that we are skilled to be able to change between our and the western systems easily.'

For some members of Ariu Poenipan, FOPA was their first international trip.

Left: Michael Babia. Above left to right: Chelsea Aniba, Cassandra Addidi. Photos: Mervyn Bishop

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# Urban Islanders celebrate the light

A surge of contemporary Torres Strait Islander work showcased in Sydney.

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A diverse exhibition of Torres Strait Islander arts, crafts, literature and ceremonial objects was held at Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Gallery in Sydney during July 2008.

The exhibition, titled *Zulai 1*, showcased contemporary culture in urban areas and was the first of its kind in Sydney. It was a highlight of a week of activities celebrating the Coming of the Light, or Christianity, to Darnley Island in the Torres Strait.

The annual event, traditionally marked on 1 July, was hosted by Lagaw Kodo Mir Torres Strait Islander Corporation (LKM). LKM chair Mary Day said the exhibition aimed to 'raise awareness about our culture, our different lifestyle in music, the visual arts, oral history and storytelling'.

The exhibition showcased contemporary works of Torres Strait Islander artists included Dennis Nona (2007 Telstra Art Award major winner from Badu Island), Alick Tipoti, Aicey Zaro, David Bosun, Lisa Sorbie Martin, Eddie Nona and Rosie Barkus.

Curator Nancy Bamaga has been involved with the arts in Queensland for over 20 years and has seen the development of Islander artists since the late 1980s. 'Torres Strait artists are doing exceptionally well, with Dennis Nona the shooting star right now,' she said.

She said Dennis' major Telstra Art Award helped put Torres Strait Islander artists on the map. The work of emerging Torres Strait Islander artist David Bosun has also recently received great recognition. During the *Zulai 1* event, David was in New York as a cultural ambassador and held a concurrent exhibition at the United Nations Headquarters.

While Torres Strait Islander men are forging new pathways as master carvers and makers of lino prints, the women artists are specialising in beautiful craft works. Moving on from textile and print making, Rosie Barkus is now making impressive carvings in pearl shell, images of island life and the sea creatures of the surrounding waters of the Torres Strait. Lisa Sorbie Martin has established herself with fashionable textile prints.

Nancy Bamaga said 'it is important to showcase the ways that urban Torres Strait Islander people show their strong links to the islands and island culture and each other'.

The eclectic exhibition was supported by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts board and included objects such as handicrafts, paintings, photographs, books and even personal objects donated by community members including Bangarra dancer Elma Kris, Thelma Quartey and singer Christine Anu.

Items displayed including island drums (warups), dharis, basket and mat weavings, handmade head dresses, coconut brooms and conch shells surrounded by the artworks and the reconstructed bedroom of Anu's personal possessions. These were complemented by traditional food cooked by elder Auntie Bonnie Robinson, performances by the Baiwa Dancers and talks from Christine Anu and other artists.

'*Zulai 1* is not just a Christian celebration these days, it's about celebrating survival and cultural maintenance and people coming together on that day,' said Nancy Bamaga. 'It's about who you are as a Torres Strait Islander on that day, in your own environment'.

Left to right: **Elma Kris and Nancy Bamaga**. Photo: Nancy Bamaga

# Literature anthology gathers 81 of the best



The best of Indigenous writing, gathered in one volume.



## MACQUARIE PEN ANTHOLOGY of ABORIGINAL LITERATURE

Edited by Anita Heiss and Peter Minter

Dr Anita Heiss and fellow editor Peter Minter were working on the Macquarie PEN Anthology of general Australian literature in 2004, when they realised that there was not a comprehensive collection of Aboriginal literature.

The duo decided to remedy that, and have now edited the first *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature*. The collection features 81 Aboriginal writers and their political, social and cultural works in chronological order. The works span letters, opinion pieces, protest documents, journalism, speeches, plays, poetry, scripts, exotica, fiction and non-fiction, children's stories, essays and songs.

As a collection of writings, the anthology shows Aboriginal people's thoughts and feelings since colonisation. The recurring themes of Aboriginal struggles for justice, recognition and cultural protection dominate.

The anthology begins with a letter from Bennelong to Lord Sydney's steward soon after Bennelong arrived back in Australia from his trip to England. The letter speaks of Bennelong's dismay about being out of favour with both his own mob and in the colony; being caught between two worlds.



The first Indigenous newspaper – *The Flinders Island Chronicle*, published during the 1830s is included. So are excerpts from the works of the first published Indigenous author, David Unaipon.

This collection of writings continually reminds the reader of the hurdles Indigenous people have had to overcome to get recognition and assert their identity.

There are milestones of Indigenous protest – including the Day of Mourning petition in 1938, Vincent Lingiari's Gurindji petition to the Governor General, the first book of poetry by Oodgeroo Noonuccal in 1964, the first published Indigenous play (Kevin Gilbert's *The Cherrypickers* from 1971) and the Yirrkala bark petition.

The last 20 years have seen a flourishing of fiction writing from Aboriginal authors. Contemporary works by Miles Franklin Award winners Kim Scott and Alexis Wright – and today's young Indigenous authors, including Tara June Winch, illustrate the wealth of emerging talent.

'The hard task wasn't finding writing and writers – it was culling enormous amounts of material down to 81 authors,' said Dr Anita Heiss. Selecting authors for the anthology without displeasing someone was particularly difficult, she said.

One omission is the newly created genre of writings in Koori chick lit, including some by Anita Heiss herself. Neither her work, nor that of her published co-editor Peter Minter, is included in this collection of writings.

Anita and Peter hope that the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature* will inspire schools to showcase more of Aboriginal history and provide greater access to the writings, many of which are hard to locate. Now they are easily accessible in one book. The editors hope that these examples will help to improve the rates of Indigenous literacy and inspire more young people to write.

'The collection is a tribute to people who have passed and who enabled such a great diversity of Aboriginal people to continue telling Indigenous stories,' said Anita Heiss.

The *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature*, edited by Dr Anita Heiss and Peter Minter, is published by Allen and Unwin and was partly funded by the Australia Council for the Arts' literature and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts boards.

Dr Anita Heiss. Photo: Pedro de Almeida

# Triumphant Black Arm Band back with symphony

Arts Yarn Up spoke with one of The Black Arm Band singers; actor and MC Rachael Maza Long.



## What does The Black Arm Band hope to achieve?

The feeling was unbelievable at the very first concert we did at the Melbourne International Arts Festival. It was before the apology, and it seemed like we tapped into this deep, deep part of our psyche as Australians, the audience included. It was like we all shared one agreement, that we want to acknowledge who we are, acknowledge our past, our stuff ups, but we also want to move forward into the future and that will only happen by acknowledging our past. With this new show we're now post-apology, and the feedback from community and elders is that we all acknowledge that 'sorry' is just a word. It's just a beginning, but now there's a willingness to move forward. Australia is a different country now.

## How does it feel onstage?

It's just the most phenomenal feeling to be standing on stage with the artists from my whole CD collection! At the concert hall or opera hall, you really listen, there's a specialness about those halls. It was like you heard the words for the first time. Those songs are written from the deep core of our artists. Those songs were written because they needed to be written. It's one of the only ways we've got a free voice – through the music. With the next show, it will be with the Melbourne Symphony

Orchestra and there will be the beautiful 41-piece orchestra behind us and 61 people on stage at the same time.

## How did it feel particularly to be playing in the UK, the country of the colonisers?

I tell you, the response on that night was over the moon. It was almost like they acknowledged their part in colonisation as well. Half the room was expats. Those Aussies, they were so hungry, and so almost desperate to share in the apology, the ecstasy was tangible. It was like they were finally acknowledging our dodgy past. It's all part of the healing isn't it? We gotta be able to own up to that past, the horrific treatment of convicts and Indigenous Australia.

## How long is the life of The Black Arm Band?

We thought it was gonna be only one gig. It's blowing everyone out that it is still going. It wasn't 'til the first night we performed, that we all felt like, 'Omigod, omigod!' No-one anticipated what was to come. My gut feeling is we're gonna be around a long time and evolve and develop. There might be a women's The Black Arm Band, maybe smaller incarnations. Who's to say?

**Black Arm Band MC Rachael Maza Long.**

Image courtesy of the artist

## About The Black Arm Band

The Black Arm Band is a flexible collective of Indigenous musicians and friends who came together to perform Indigenous music and culture in the spirit of reconciliation and to offer professional development opportunities to Indigenous musicians. They debuted to great critical acclaim with their first concert *murundak* (meaning 'alive' in Woiwurrung) at the Melbourne International Arts Festival in 2006. In 2008, The Black Arm Band won the Helpmann Award for Best Contemporary Music Concert and performed at the Royal Albert Hall in London.

The Black Arm Band performed their second project, *Hidden Republic*, at the 2008 Melbourne International Arts Festival.

The Black Arm Band members for *Hidden Republic*: Dave Arden, Mark Atkins, Lou Bennett, Salley Dastey, Emma Donovan, Kutcha Edwards, Joe Geia, Shane Howard, Ruby Hunter, Jimmy Little, Rachael Maza Long, Shellie Morris, Stephen Pigram, Archie Roach, Peter Rotumah, Amy Saunders, Dan Sultan, Bart Willoughby, Ursula Yovich, Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu plus the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

The Black Arm Band is funded under the Australia Council's 'music bound' strategy, to turn up the volume of Indigenous music in the mainstream music industry.

<[www.blackarmband.com.au](http://www.blackarmband.com.au)>



# Fred Leone's impossible odds

The 'artists in work' program helps Fred Leone and Contact Inc. to engage with young hip hop artists.



**B**risbane based MC Fred Leone is perfectly placed to support and assist young and emerging hip hop artists.

As a youth worker and an Indigenous lyricist/rapper renowned throughout Brisbane, Cherbourg, Weipa and the Palm Islands, Fred intimately understands the trials, tribulations and exhilarations of breaking into the performing arts scene.

Six months into a two-year placement as the Indigenous programs coordinator at community art group Contact Inc. in Brisbane – a position funded by the Australia Council's 'artists in work' program – Fred's latest protégés have won the best hip hop track award at the 3rd annual Q Song Awards.

Following a series of hip hop workshops called Common Ground – a program geared towards breaking down tensions between youth from different cultural backgrounds on Brisbane's Southside – Fred organised the making of a video with the young artists to give them something tangible to take away. The group became the Contact Crew and they naturally called their song *Common Ground*.

'It was just for fun really, something to acknowledge all their hard work,' said Fred.

'They were amazing and they're itching to come back next year. Some have been coming to the workshops for three years and their skills speak for themselves. Last year one went on to the Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts and another won a traineeship with the Queensland Writers Association.

'The problem with a lot of these programs is the

lack of continuity. It concerns me that these kids really excel at something, but then there's nothing – nothing to keep them creating and performing,' said Fred.

'A key aspect of my role here is to work on that. We're talking with arts-based community groups about developing ongoing programs. There's a real lack of Indigenous hip hop arts workers and dedicated programs in Queensland.'

As the front man with the award-winning and chart-busting hip hop outfit Impossible Odds, Fred is a welcome addition to Contact Inc. He brings a wealth of industry experience and knowledge. Fred sees hip hop as a vital art form for young and emerging Indigenous artists.

'Growing up poor, I chose hip hop because I couldn't afford guitars and instruments. The only way I could find to express myself was beatboxing and writing raps,' he said.

'It saved me going down a really bad road that I saw others go down. I got some good feedback, then a few gigs...and now I'm a part of something. I have a say in it and it's really exciting to see all these new artists coming through.

'I can't imagine working anywhere else. Really, Aboriginal people slot straight in to the arts, it's our culture. We sing, we dance, we paint. Frankly, from our perspective, the "arts" is the most logical thing about European culture,' said Fred.

'What Indigenous artists have achieved in the last 20 years is amazing. Where else do you see so many great role models? Maybe sport, where we also excel, but nothing like the arts.'

**Fred Leone at the 2004 Riverfestival. Photo: Riverfestival**

## Artists in work

Employment is being touted as a key to closing the disadvantage gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The arts are well positioned to provide culturally meaningful work.

'Artists in work' is an initiative providing support to break down barriers to employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the arts.

The initiative assists organisations to develop traineeships in management, production, technical knowledge, sales and marketing, and administration – and supports Indigenous employees to develop relevant skills for long-term careers in the arts.

Lydia Miller, executive director of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts board, said there is a growing need to address barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment – particularly now that more than 40 per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is aged under 15.

'Management and production roles in the arts remain viable career paths for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – "artists in work" is one way of opening doors.'

# Making a living in the arts



Ausdances NT's Indigenous dance officer sparked by nightclub inspiration.

**D**ancer Tim Bishop knows all too well the difficulties young Australians can face finding worthwhile work in today's society – particularly young Indigenous Australians.

Tim discovered his own passion for dance relatively late – at the age of 20 – after some difficult years struggling to find his place in the world.

A decade on, after a successful career as a dancer –



including a Deadly Vibes nomination for Male Dancer of the Year in 2003 – Tim has taken up the role of Indigenous dance officer for Ausdance Northern Territory, a new two-year position created with assistance from the Australia Council's 'artists in work' program.

Tim's new role is to coordinate the development and training of aspiring Indigenous dancers throughout the Northern Territory.

Growing up in Oatley, Sydney, Tim left school in 1993 unsure of where life was leading him. An interest in health saw him enrol in a dietician's course and start work at a local hospital but he struggled to find a sense of place or purpose there.

Two years later he quit, dissatisfied, and took a job in an office but soon realised he couldn't relate to that either. To cope, Tim began going out most nights and partying hard.

'I used to go out, get messed up and take it all out on the dance floor. All I wanted to do was get trashed and dance,' he said.

It was at a gig by UK dance band The Beloved at the The Metro in the mid-1990s that Tim found his true calling.

'There were these two amazing black women dancing in silver body suits. They embodied everything lacking in my life. They were amazing – and they were getting paid for it!' he said.

'At that moment I had a realisation. I stopped, closed my eyes and just felt my body. I felt it in a way I never had before. Since then I've seen dance completely differently.'

Not long after Tim's nightclub epiphany, a dance documentary on the ABC led him to the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association dance college.

'I'd always felt I didn't have a good enough command of language, and when I discovered dance as a means to explore and express myself it was such a relief. Suddenly I was able to say things through dance I'd never been able to say before,' Tim said.

The rest is history. Tim won a four-year place at the school and went on to dance with the legendary Bangarra Dance Theatre throughout Australia and overseas. It was during these travels that Tim began to reconnect with his culture.

'Sydney can be very confusing, especially for a black kid in a white world. Through my journey I've come to understand the value of mob and family and I've become proud of my culture. Our culture is our way of life - it keeps us alive, literally,' he said.

'To us, art isn't an extra curricular activity, it's the fabric that holds community together. It's about language, food, dance, painting. To put it simply, culture is like a compass. If you know where you're coming from then you can figure out where you want to go.'

**Tim Bishop performing in Rainbow Valley, NT in 2006.**

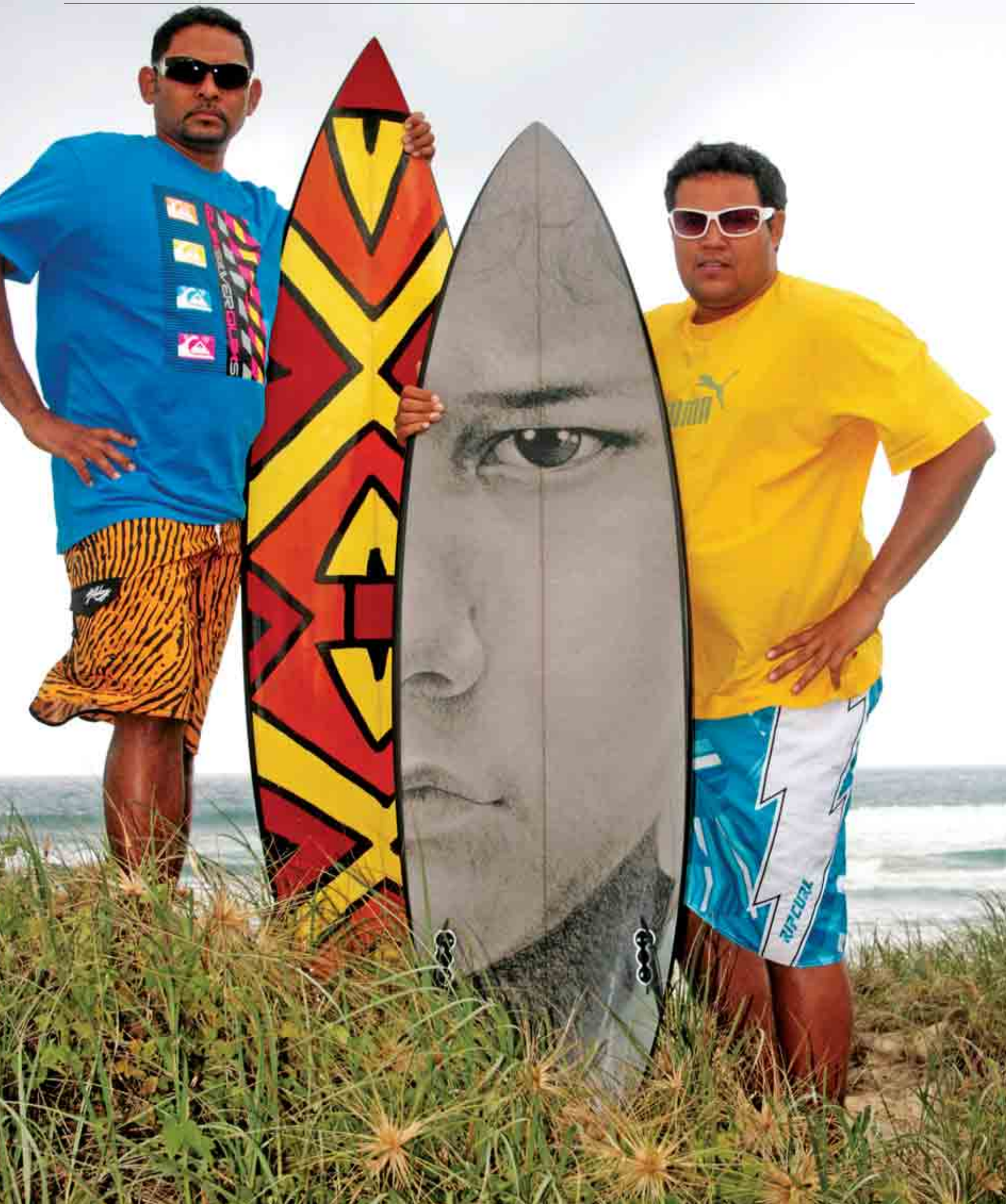
Photo: Yolande Brown

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# Vernon surfs into Venice

Vernon Ah Kee's challenge to Australia's surf culture will be exhibited at the 2009 Venice Biennale.

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That Vernon Ah Kee is still described as an emerging artist, even after being selected to represent Australia in the 2009 Venice Biennale, is testimony to his talent and potential.

For the 2009 Venice Biennale, Vernon will install a show called *Cant Chant* that he created for Brisbane's Institute of Modern Art (IMA) which he says is 'an examination of white Australian beach culture, particularly surfing and the role that surfing has in white ideologies, and how the ideal of the beach informs surf culture.'

The idea came to him around six years ago, around the time of the Cronulla riots in Sydney, when the IMA offered him a major show. 'They made it urgent and it was the right time to do it,' said Vernon. The show's title refers to the chants by Cronulla locals in the riots: 'We grew here, you flew here'.

Vernon Ah Kee said: "We grew here, you flew here" is an insincere statement and they were chanting it over and over again. It's a way to exercise racism. I'm like "WE grew here, say what you want, but we're the fellas that grew here".

The work that Vernon will exhibit in Venice features video, images, installation and text – including video of his three cousins in bright beach garb with surfboards decorated with Aboriginal rainforest shield designs from his country.

'These guys look like they really think they fit in, when black people don't. Black people just don't fit in. It's about territory and belonging but not fitting in at all.'

Vernon's work also features footage of Aboriginal surfer, Dale Richards surfing on one of the painted boards to the music of the Warumpi Band's *Stompem Ground*.

Another part of the video shows boards, wrapped in barbed wire, being shot with a shotgun. One is tied to a tree and one is hung in a tree. These boards will be taken to Italy riddled with bullet holes representing bodies.

'The irony of my selection in the Biennale doesn't escape me,' said Vernon. What I'm trying to do is get white Australians, who play a role in maintaining the myth of popular culture here in Australia, to question themselves.

They don't question themselves. People in power, why should they? Everybody must bend around them.'

Vernon Ah Kee, 41, hails from Queensland and is of Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidindji and Gugu Yimithirr people.

Vernon's stablemates are Richard Bell and Gordon Hookey, part of the politically conscious artists collective *ProppaNow* who exhibit together annually. Of them Vernon says: 'We all walk around with our eyes open and do work that has something to say. It's not meant to match your curtains.'

'With Venice, I want the international audience to ask questions of Australia as a nation. How come this portrayal of beach culture in Australia doesn't look right? How come there are black people in this video when Australian beach culture is white?'

Vernon also wants more people to challenge his ideas. When *Cant Chant* was first exhibited, 'people got all the references to the Cronulla riots but I don't get a lot of critical response. I think people are a little bit put out by the themes I deal with, and don't know how to take it. Which is fine, but you want to have some critical to and fro.'

'People are used to seeing blackfellas having much less power, being much less assertive. Whitefellas prefer their blackfellas this way, even blackfellas prefer their blackfellas this way,' said Vernon.

'Our lives are lives of discomfort. Our lives are established for us and our powerlessness just reinforces that. I accept that our lives are lives of discomfort but what I don't agree with is that whitefellas should feel comfortable. The history of blackfellas in this country should mean they have no right to feel comfortable.'

'Anyone who's not white in this country should not feel comfortable too. If your life is comfortable you should take a hard look at yourself.'

**This page: Vernon Ah Kee, *Cant Chant*, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2007 (installation view). Vernon Ah Kee. Image courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane**

**Previous page: Vernon Ah Kee, *Cant Chant (Wegreshere)*, video still, 2007. Image courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane**

# Jenny makes it happen in new media

Jenny Fraser is a Murri artist working at the forefront of Indigenous arts in new technologies that often defy categorisation.



An artist, curator and the founder of the online Indigenous art gallery Cybertribe, Jenny Fraser says that there are many Indigenous artists using new media who are yet to be recognised within Australia.

Jenny said that mainstream media arts curators don't include the works of Aboriginal artists working in new media, and neither do most curators of Aboriginal arts.

'Rather than waiting around for someone else to do it, Aboriginal artists should be producing exhibitions. We all have good ideas for exhibitions, and to make it happen is a beautiful, empowering thing,' said Jenny.

'We are a nation of artists with unique creativity and we need to be the custodians of our culture: past, present and future.'

Across the world, Indigenous artists are producing works in new media. The native Canadian artist Skawennati Fragnito's online collective AbTech is working in Second Life. For seven years running, native Canadians have hosted the imagineNATIVE film and media art festival, which gave Jenny an honourable mention for her work *Unsettled* in the best new media category in 2007.

Although many consider new media arts to be a niche area, Jenny Fraser believes that audiences are found across the spectrum of the Indigenous, arts, technology and education communities. She prefers to curate exhibitions that include the range of mediums that Indigenous artists are using – beyond that considered traditional or customary.

'Audiences appreciate this approach as a snapshot of contemporary culture. We don't just use technology, we live with it,' Jenny said.

'There is a lot of re-purposing [artwork] happening out there – whether it be for amusement, such as reworking photos of politicians, or re-presenting and re-imagining the public image of Aboriginal people in a positive way through music videos, for example.'

Jenny said these works are not only produced by artists, but by Aboriginal people with an 'all-rounder' approach.

Jenny Fraser also sees potential links between traditional Aboriginal culture and contemporary online networking. 'We live in these times, we need to be documenting and responding to our current experiences and expectations. With social networking sites like Facebook and Bebo now more popular than ever, maybe we can consider new methods of communication akin to the ancient notion of songlines.'

From the Yugambah people of the Bundjalung nation of south-east Queensland, Jenny is redefining the role of artist/curator as an act of sovereignty and emancipation.

For more than 10 years she has produced and compiled domestic and international exhibitions combining many mediums of artworks. Her online gallery Cybertribe has curated over 20 exhibitions. In 2006/07 she curated the first Indigenous triennial *The Other ACP* exhibition – an adjunct to the fifth Asia Pacific Triennial that was included in the 2008 Sydney Biennale online venue.

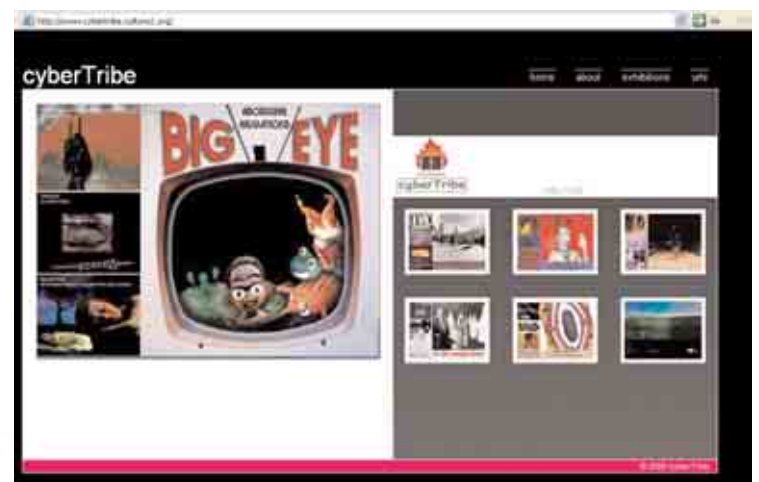
Jenny's most recently curated exhibition, *Big Eye Aboriginal Animations*, features machinima, a new area for Indigenous artists that involves the production of stories combining filmmaking, animation and real-time 3D game engines in virtual worlds.

In *Big Eye*, Sydney-based artist Aroha Groves' work titled *What's a Blakfulla doing in Second Life?* repurposes shots of her Second Life journey that are later edited with narrative text.

*Big Eye Aboriginal Animations* opened at the 24hr Art: NT Centre for Contemporary Art in Darwin in August 2008 before travelling to Perth in October/November and to Boomalli Aboriginal Art Gallery in Sydney in late 2008. It is also available at the Cybertribe Online Gallery at <<http://www.geocities.com/cybertribeoz/index.html>>.

Jenny Fraser. Photo: Jenny Fraser

Below: <http://www.cybertribe.culture2.org>



# Evolving festivals keep culture strong

Attend any Indigenous festival in Australia and you will witness the thriving customs and cultures of the world's oldest living peoples.



Indigenous festivals are held regularly around Australia – many of them in regional areas affirming connection to land and cultural practices. You could travel the country from end to end and always see something new – from the Torres Strait Cultural Festival in far north Queensland, to the Northern Territory's Garma or Barunga Festivals, to the KALACC Law and Cultural Festival in Western Australia.

Festivals offer performers the opportunity to develop skills, gain experience and may help economic independence, providing a launching pad to other international opportunities.

Cultural teacher, singer and poet Bobby McLeod manages the Doonoch Dancers – a group of five young men that he travels with to festivals and international events. He said the group has developed from dancing at local gigs on the South Coast of NSW to traveling to more than 28 countries around the world; including Italy, USA, Canada, India, New Caledonia, Scotland, American Samoa, Mexico, Vietnam and Brazil.

'Travelling to festivals really helps on a professional level,' said Bobby. 'It also helps Australia and the world to know we have high quality cultural performances. When you dance overseas, you're up dancing alongside Russians, Chinese, Irish, Vietnamese, Scottish, Indians and Hawaiian dancers. We're proud to be black and show that our dancers are as good as the rest of the world. We can compete on any level.'

The Doonoch Dancers regularly feature at the annual international Indigenous Festival, The Dreaming, held every year at Woodford in Queensland. Artistic director of The Dreaming Festival, Rhoda Roberts, said: 'At The Dreaming, one of the big things is for

communities to embrace, acknowledge and respect each other, and to connect or develop collaborations.

'Whether its cultural tourism, arts, business communities, small cottage industries, local food outlets, performers or the many sectors in our communities – the outcomes of festivals help to develop, showcase and highlight work and find new audiences,' said Rhoda.

Modern-day Indigenous festivals are not unlike traditional festivals held on country to celebrate seasons of abundance – like the Bunya Festival in south-east Queensland – or those held for traditional spiritual or ceremonial purposes. Many festivals include spectacular opening and closing ceremonial displays of dance and song. These events showcase talents and help keep cultures strong.

Indigenous festivals have evolved with time and – along with singing, dancing and feasting – may include storytelling, theatre, knowledge workshops, along with forums for debate, comedy, visual arts and new-media displays.

The celebrations are now shared with huge gatherings of spectators from around Australia and the world, often held on country in beautiful surroundings. Some – such as Laura, Garma and The Dreaming – run over a number of days, allowing audiences to camp out and get a taste of bush life, maybe with bush foods on the menu.

For the Doonoch Dancers, festivals help maintain a high profile for their performances and contribute to a regular stream of work. In the past they have received some funding for travel from various bodies but, Bobby says proudly, 'now we're often just invited by festivals and paid to perform overseas.'

**The Doonoch Dancers; Arthur McLeod (front) , Cecil McLeod (holding didgeridoo), Darren Compton (far back), Andrew McLeod (right) and Robert Ebsworth (front right). Photo: Ian Talbot**

## Key Indigenous festivals

Key Indigenous festivals in Australia, supported by the Australia Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts board celebrations festival strategy, are:

**The Dreaming, Qld**

**Laura Aboriginal Dance Festival, Qld**

**Gulf Biennial Festival - Mornington Island, Qld**

**Zenadth Torres Strait Cultural Festival, Qld**

**Garma Festival, NT**

**Barunga Cultural and Sports Festival, NT**

**KALACC Law and Culture Festival, WA**

**Blak Nite Youth Festival, SA.**

# Gathering Ground rocks the Block



Redfern comes alive for three-night extravaganza.



Redfern's performance extravaganza, *Gathering Ground*, continues to woo audiences and build momentum, not only as a vehicle for community empowerment and reconciliation, but as a significant visual and performing arts festival in its own right.

*Gathering Ground* has cemented itself into Sydney's cultural calendar following the phenomenal success of its second multi-art promenade performance at The Block in May 2008. Described by organisers as part ceremony, part protest and part historical walk, *Gathering Ground* welcomed more than 2,000 visitors onto Gadigal land over three nights to experience a cultural, political and artistic celebration. Developed to foster community pride and nurture reconciliation, *Gathering Ground* stretched beyond its manifesto by delivering spectacular performances and leaving visitors in no doubt that they had witnessed something very special.

While The Block has long been viewed as a site of resistance and protest, *Gathering Ground* demonstrated its parallel significance as a site of inclusion, hope and healing. Around sunset each night, an enthusiastic crowd of hundreds gathered at the top of Eveleigh Street waiting to be led through The Block – a walk that was to cover far more territory than the four famous streets of Louis, Caroline, Eveleigh and Vine.

Visitors were invited into the heart of a living community and taken on a journey of mind, body and spirit through performance and narrative.

More than 50 young Indigenous people from Redfern and Waterloo, together with 30 artists and performers, captivated visitors with a street-smart fusion of dance, poetry, hip-hop, fashion, puppetry, film, stilt-walking and aerial work choreographed into the laneways, doorways, windows and open spaces of The Block.

'It was a wonderful coming together. For three nights we were literally busting into people's backyards,' said Lily Shearer, Sydney City Council's cultural development officer at Redfern Community Centre.

Conceived and initiated by the Redfern Community Centre and PACT Youth Theatre; *Gathering Ground* was

supported by Sydney City Council, Arts NSW, Vincent Fairfax Family foundation and the Australia Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts board. Lily sees endless potential in *Gathering Ground* and said its success is already creating opportunities for the young people of Redfern and Waterloo.

'Performers and audiences doubled this year and it was great to see some of our Indigenous artists actually getting paid. But it was fantastic to see how much the festival assisted our emerging artists and inspired the younger ones to consider their artistic potential,' said Lily.

'It was such a great focus for them. They've gained enormous confidence through this experience. By developing their artistic and physical skills they're also learning how to communicate and negotiate, make decisions and resolve conflict'.

The fledgling performers from the Redfern/Waterloo community participated in workshops over four weeks leading up to the event. They were proactive in the creative development of this year's event, identifying real life issues that they helped weave into their performances. After wooing audiences and tasting of the thrill of live performance, many are keen to continue their training.

'We raised enough from the *Gathering Ground* donation boxes to give \$800 to the Waterloo Girls Centre and about the same amount to a continuing circus school here in Redfern – but that will only last a couple of months. Redfern Community Centre has supplied the practice space but we will need more funding to keep the program running', Lily said.

'We've got 20 to 25 kids who can't get enough – they're the first ones up there every Thursday afternoon for training. The kids from LA (La Perouse) have heard about it and we've got about eight of them coming down to check it out.

'It is beautiful to watch their creative and artistic interests awaken, to see their creativity blossom. They're now starting to look for stories they can use from their own lives, from their own families.'

Scenes from *Gathering Ground*. Photos: Alexandria Crosby

# Indigenous theatre goes global

A showcase for the best of global Indigenous theatre is set to be expanded, following the success of the latest event, held in Perth during July.



The Honouring Theatre Festival featured three productions – from Australia, New Zealand and Canada – to packed houses and critical acclaim. But many of the benefits of the festival, the second of its kind, were found offstage in the connections made by Indigenous artists from the three countries.

Executive producer Sam Cook, from Perth's Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre, said the over-arching aim of the project, which began in 2006, is to 'tour Indigenous work from the three countries with Indigenous methodology and protocol'.

The Perth Honouring Theatre Festival, which also travelled to New Zealand, included:

- Australian Tammy Anderson's one-woman show *I Don't Wanna Play House*
- Canada's Native Earth Performing Arts production of *Annie Mae's Movement*, and
- New Zealand's Maori musical *Re Heo Aroha*.

Tammy Anderson's work – based on her experience during her first 15 years of 'living in 16 houses, three caravans and going to 12 schools' – evoked such a powerful response that a performance to a Maori audience in New Zealand ended with members of the audience spontaneously singing traditional songs and individually embracing both Tammy and Sam Cook.

'It was a very powerful moment. Tammy and I were both bawling our eyes out,' said Sam Cook.

Tammy Anderson said that the issues raised in her work – 'of abuse, domestic violence, love, survival, dysfunctional families and hope' – 'are relevant to many cultures around the world'.

Since performing in New Zealand, Tammy has

received letters from young Maoris who are experiencing the same difficulties she covers in her work.

'One of my aims is to get people talking about these issues,' said Tammy. 'They are heavy issues, but laughter is the way we survive and I've found that out through my work.'

The New Zealand and Canadian artists from Honouring Theatre visited the Noongar Aboriginal community in Perth and the regional communities of Nyikina and Mowanjum. At the Mowanjum Cultural Festival, 'it was mind blowing for the international artists to participate in ceremony,' said Sam.

The hosting of Honouring Theatre in Perth brings the project's original concept 'full circle', said Sam.

Honouring Theatre began in 2006, when Australian and New Zealand productions travelled to Canada. The Australian play for that first event was *Windmill Baby*, the multi-award winning play by David Milroy.

'Bringing Honouring Theatre back to its original point of conception, to Perth and to Yirra Yaakin, is like coming back home,' said Sam Cook.

The success of this year's festival has spurred Sam to explore the possibility of expanding participation in future festivals beyond the three countries originally involved.

Indigenous artists in Hawaii have already invited the festival to visit, and Sam Cook is considering expanding to Indigenous arts communities from around the world, including Gaelic artists and the Sami people from Norway.

The Honouring Theatre Festival was supported by the Australia Council for the Arts.

**Left: Actor Heath Bergerson dancing at the Honouring Theatre opening night. Right: Tammy Anderson in *I Don't Wanna Play House*. Photos: Jon Green**



# CraZyBoyZ bring Top End sounds to Sydney



Seven teenagers from Maningrida wow World Youth Day crowd.

Like many teenage bands, Northern Territory Indigenous group CraZyBoyZ began its life disrupting lessons up the back of a school classroom. 'We called ourselves CraZyBoyZ because we were making our music teacher crazy,' said vocalist and dancer Bernard Rankive.

The BoyZ returned from a whirlwind tour of Sydney during World Youth Day where they wooed crowds of more than 30,000 at Barangaroo on east Darling Harbour, blitzed a live-to-air broadcast on SBS Radio and swept Sydney's Koori Radio off its feet. They also got the chance to swap trade secrets with young musicians from all over the world.

The trip, funded with the philanthropic help of Artsupport Australia, gave the BoyZ a wealth of creative and professional contacts as they took their brand of Arnhem Land music – fused with ska, reggae and rock – to the world.

Band members Eugene Marulunga, 16, Kingsley Murphy, Jordan Thompson, Terrance Hayes, Alwyn Pascoe and Bernard Rankive, all 17, and 18-year-old Mattiaus Maxwell have been playing together for three years.

During that time, these talented musicians from the remote community of Maningrida, 500 kilometres from Darwin, won the 2006 Battle of the Arnhem Land School Bands before going on to collect the School Band of the Year Award at the prestigious NT Indigenous Music Awards last year.

For such a young group of musicians they have performed at an incredible number of major events, including the Garma Festival in north east Arnhem Land, and the Maningrida Recovery Festival for Cyclone Monica in 2006.

They have also supported major NT acts such as Jessica Mauboy, Wild Water Band, Nabarlek Band, Sunrize Band and Letterstick Band.

Maningrida youth rarely get the chance to travel, due to the long distances and high cost of travel, so the BoyZ are playing an important role taking their music and culture to wider Australian and international audiences.

In a community of only 3000, where more than half are under the age of 24, the BoyZ are continuing the strong tradition of contemporary Australian Indigenous music. They are yet another example of the incredible exciting talent spread across the sparsely populated Top End.

With songs sung in both English and Burarra (most of the band members speak several languages) and layered with traditional Aboriginal instrumentation and arrangements, these seven teenagers are proving themselves to be fine custodians of their language and culture.

Maningrida Youth Services co-ordinator Noeletta McKenzie said the community was very proud of the boys' achievements.

'The way they handled themselves – that was the biggest crowd they'd ever seen in their life and they got up there and played like they'd done it a million times before,' she said.

'Their musicianship was amazing. They really are natural performers. They made lots of contacts and got to play with musicians from everywhere – from New Zealand, Mexico, Spain, Fiji; not to mention the local Sydney Koori mob.'

Noeletta's husband Paul, who has been teaching the boys music for four years, believes they are destined for big things. Paul, an accomplished musician in his own right, travelled with the band to Sydney.

'I was so proud of them. When they were up on the big stage I had tears in my eyes,' he said.

The Crazy BoyZ are next slated to perform at the Maningrida Festival on 20 June, 2009.



Left, left to right: Alwyn Pascoe, Eugene Marulunga, Terrance Hayes, Mattiaus Maxwell, Jordan Thompson, Kingsley Murphy, and Bernard Rankive.

Photo: Carla Omiciuolo/SBS Radio

# Gondwana voices come together



Three choirs join to hit the high notes.

Young people from Indigenous communities across Australia sang together on stage for an audience of millions in Sydney in July 2008. As the newly-formed Gondwana Indigenous Children's Choir the children performed together for the first time in front of the Pope for World Youth Day.

The 46 young choristers performed together with the Sydney Children's Choir and Gondwana Voices, Australia's national children's choir. The children sang in Latin, English and Indigenous language as part of a traditional Indigenous 'welcome to country'.

'The World Youth Day celebrations were a great opportunity to launch Australia's first national Indigenous children's choir,' said Alexandra Cameron, general manager of Gondwana Voices.

The 200-strong combined choir presented a specially commissioned piece by young Sydney composer Dan Walker, with the talented young Tyus Arndt from the Torres Strait Islands making a solo debut.

'It was an amazing opportunity to encourage children to reach these high standards' said the choir's artistic director, Lyn Williams OAM.

'When you set a standard of excellence for children they rise so quickly to your expectations,' she said. 'It was an incredible experience for the children, both musically and culturally.'

It was the first time many of the children had been to a big city. They met peers from the Torres Strait Islands, north-west NSW (Dubbo and Walgett), Griffith, and the greater Sydney area (Campbelltown, Mt Druitt, La Pouse) and inner-city Sydney.

They also had a chance to see some Sydney landmarks such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Sydney Opera House and Taronga Park Zoo.

The choir had great feedback from choristers, teachers and parents alike.

'Our children represented their families, schools and Torres Strait community in a manner that all can be proud of. Musically, they grasped what was required naturally; socially, they interacted with people of all ages and backgrounds easily. Mentally, they were challenged and excelled,' said Rubina Kimiia, a teacher and chaperone from the Torres Strait Islands.

Rhoda Roberts, the Indigenous coordinator for the Liturgy and Youth Festival events for World Youth Day and artistic director of The Dreaming Festival said 'the development of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander choir will leave an incredible legacy for our youth and also result in some very positive and long-term outcomes socially, economically and politically'.

The three choirs who performed on World Youth Day are part of Gondwana Voices, who trains young people not only to be our singers of the future, but to broaden their understanding of the arts in general and foster a rich appreciation of Australian culture.

The Gondwana Indigenous Children's Choir builds on a two-year project between the Sydney Children's Choir and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Gondwana Voices is planning a national program to include Indigenous children from across Australia in the choir. The Choir hopes to work with artists and musicians from different regions.

'We are seeking funds to develop this into a truly national project to fulfill its and the children's potential,' said Lyn. 'The Choir has fantastic potential to explore song and to discover what it really is.'

The Gondwana Indigenous Children's Choir has already been invited to perform at The Dreaming Festival in 2009.

<[www.gondwanavoices.com](http://www.gondwanavoices.com)>

**Gondwana Indigenous Children's Choir Photo: Jared Furtado**



# Towards a national Indigenous cultural authority



Report spurs debate on model for cultural protection.



**A**t last year's 2020 Summit held in Canberra, Indigenous lawyer Terri Janke proposed that the Federal Government consider the need for a national Indigenous cultural authority.

The idea came out of Terri's seminal report *Our Culture: our future*, about the issues of Indigenous cultural protection, published in 1999 by Michael Frankel and Company and commissioned by Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. That report, she says, provides a starting point. 'I'm putting the idea on the table, but it needs a lot of discussion.'

The protection, preservation and regulation of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights are a recurring issue for Indigenous people not just in Australia but all around the world.

These rights are enshrined in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, adopted in 2007. Protection of traditional cultural expression and

traditional knowledge is also the subject of work being undertaken by the World Intellectual Property Organisation.

In the Pacific region, Palau, Vanuatu, the Cook Islands and Fiji all have draft traditional cultural expression bills, and proposed traditional knowledge bills for infrastructure and national cultural authorities.

International models recognise the need for the protection of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property (ICIP), but Terri Janke says that Indigenous artistic expression and traditional knowledge are still largely unprotected in Australian law. Western models are based on an individual's right to economic gain through the protection of their copyright – however many Indigenous communities operate on the basis of communal rights; where guarding cultural integrity, recognising sources and protecting sacred knowledge are important.

Terri proposes that a national Indigenous cultural authority would promote ICIP, develop standards for the appropriate use of ICIP, maintain cultural integrity, acknowledge the sources for the use of Indigenous knowledge, help with the preservation of culture and knowledge, and develop an economic basis for its use.

She says developing an economic basis is an important acknowledgement of the rights of Indigenous people to control and benefit from the use of their ICIP. An authority would set guidelines and develop contracts and a basis for royalties back to Indigenous communities. The authority would assist Indigenous communities to manage their ICIP through collective management and advocating for ICIP rights.

The model for an authority would draw on the models of Viscopy and the Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA). Societies such as Viscopy and APRA collect millions of dollars in royalties and distribute them to their members. They also foster artistic endeavour, create jobs, maintain recognition, and advocate for artists. And they help to provide an economic basis for professional career development and independence in their industries.

Terri Janke says that an authority 'is a way of getting people to see the value of the role of Indigenous cultural expression and traditional knowledge and recognises that Indigenous cultural custodians are important in the fabric of Australian society'.

So far there has been no formal government response to the proposal for an authority, which was one of the recommendations of the 2020 Summit. Despite this, Terri says, there is still 'a good basis from which Indigenous people can advocate and lobby for the discussion and development of ideas to further protect our cultural and intellectual property rights.'

Terri Janke is also the author of the Australia Council's *Indigenous protocol guides*. See [www.australiacouncil.gov.au/prototocolguides](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/prototocolguides)

**Terri Janke.** Photo: Nancia Guivarra

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# Career boost for Indigenous dancers

'Treading the pathways' places dancers with established companies.

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**D**ancer/choreographer Vicki Van Hout has been picking up fresh ideas from the innovative Chunky Move dance company as part of the 'treading the pathways' Indigenous dance initiative.

Chunky Move is known for its genre-defying dance and use of multimedia. Already experimenting with new technology in her own cross-cultural dance works, Vicki Van Hout has been inspired by seeing director Gideon Obarzanek in action.

Spearheaded by the national Indigenous dance coordinator, Marilyn Miller, the 'treading the pathways' initiative is the first of its kind in Australia. 'It is a great opportunity for those already on a career path to take stock of what it is to be a successful dance artist,' said Marilyn.

Still in its first year, the program places mid-career Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance artists in established dance companies for four weeks. It gives them an insider's look into the workings of a successful dance company at all angles, from business management to the creative process.

'The experience has helped me quantify my practice ensuring it makes an impact, and reaches a wider audience,' said Vicki Van Hout. 'It's hard to wing it on your own. I picked up essential business strategies and ideas for successfully attaining funds from, not only the national funding bodies, but also the corporate sector, as well as beneficial services in kind. I also observed first hand how artists build and maintain a prolific body of work.'

'Director Gideon Obarzanek inspires his dancers. He keeps them vital and refreshed. He's open about his ideas, and is prepared to go out on a limb and experiment,' said Vicki.

'There is a high mutual regard between dancers and directors at the company. It's a collaborative body, and symbolic of community. This makes for successful, creative work.'

This year's program has also placed two other Indigenous dance artists: Gary Lang is working with The Australian Ballet, and Rita Lane Pryce with Expressions.

'We have one highly successful national Indigenous dance company, Bangarra Dance Theatre, and it has been a real challenge until now to say "yes, we are valid, as Indigenous performing artists we have a diverse voice",' said Vicki. "'Treading the pathways" ensures the growth and visibility of Indigenous dance.'

The program also provides invaluable networking opportunities. With support from 'treading the pathways' Indigenous dance artists met at the World Dance Alliance in Brisbane in July 2008 to share discoveries and talk about best practice.

'We are geographically so far apart, but also in a very special position to create something new and

strong. This means increasing the discourse between community and urban art forms.'

'How do you help someone from an isolated community understand contemporary art in a day? Dialogue is crucial to maintaining mutual understanding and respect, and to avoid unwittingly offending people.'

Vicki is currently redeveloping *My Right Foot, Your Left Foot*, a series of contemporary vignettes inspired by traditional welcoming ceremonies for a potential second life. The piece premiered at the Australian Choreographic Centre in Canberra last year.

She is further developing a piece *Briwyant* in conjunction with the Performance Space, to play at the Carriageworks in Sydney this October. *Briwyant* uses relationships between dancing, singing and storytelling to ask how to imbue a painting with ancestral magic to make it shimmer.

'I'm both inspired by, and beholden to, the Indigenous community,' said Vicki. 'You have to get out there and do what you want to do. You have to be fearless. And you have to enjoy the journey.'

## New Indigenous dance directory

Everything you need to know about Indigenous dance in Australia can now be found in one place, with the click of a mouse.

The new dance directory is part of the *Black Book Online*, the portal to Indigenous media and arts in Australia. Launched at the Opera House in May 2008, the new directory has information about Indigenous dancers and choreographers and dance companies. It includes details on their work and how to contact them. Anyone working in the field can submit a listing. The *Black Book* also lists over 2,700 Indigenous organisations and individuals working across the media, arts and culture.

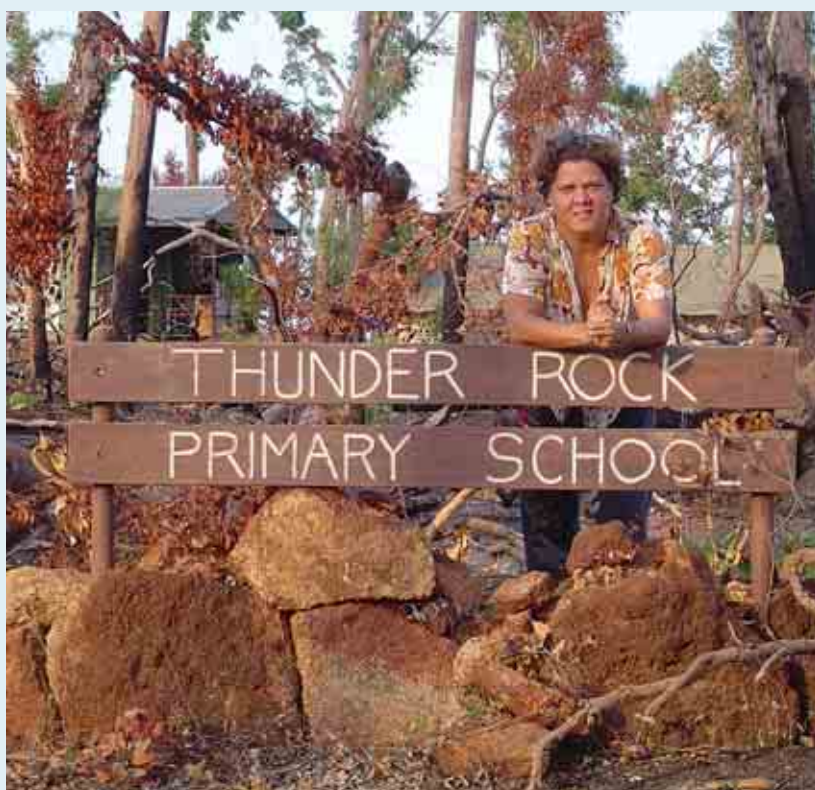
It includes a *Black Book Library*, which details artistic works by Indigenous people. The Library lists 2,000 works from the late 1890s until now. It has three main sections on publications, music and screen productions, with sub-categories like documentaries, plays, features, and albums. Each listing includes the artist name, publisher, release date, distributor contacts and, for publications and screen productions, a synopsis. The *Black Book* also has up to date information about events, jobs and training opportunities, and profiles of leading Indigenous artists.

<[www.theblackbook.com.au](http://www.theblackbook.com.au)>

# ROUND UP

## Albers foundation residency

From Kakadu to Connecticut – Iwaidja artist Christine Christopherson has been selected as the second Australian ever to be offered an artist residency at the Joseph and Anni Albers Foundation studio in Connecticut, USA – supported by the Australia Council for the Arts. Lydia Miller, executive director of the Australia Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts division, said Christine joins a select group of artists who have worked at the estate of the late Bauhaus-school artists – Joseph and Anni Albers. 'This residency is a once in a lifetime opportunity for Christine to work in one of the world's leading residential art studios and develop her practice,' she said. A visual artist from Darwin whose past works have been inspired by her staunch opposition to mining in Kakadu National Park, Christine's works are currently on display in *Culture Warriors* – Australia's first national Indigenous art triennial. Christine said she was delighted to be selected for the residency, which will give her the space to continue developing a series exploring kinship and connections to country.



Christine Christopherson. Image courtesy of the artist.

## Making solid ground

The Australia Council for the Arts' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts board is reviewing its key organisations funding program and Indigenous arts infrastructure across the country.

A report summarising consultations on the Australia Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts key organisations has been released. The making solid ground review examined the Australia Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander key organisations program and new ways to support the national Indigenous arts infrastructure.

More than 180 people attended meetings and workshops held in 11 centres across Australia, including all capital cities, Cairns, Broome, Launceston and the Torres Strait. Australia Council executive director Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts Lydia Miller said: 'I'd like to thank everyone who took part in the national consultation and contributed their time, thoughts and ideas on a new funding model for key organisations.'

The report identifies 10 priority areas for supporting the growth and sustainability of Indigenous arts infrastructure. If you would like to discuss the report, contact Lydia Miller, executive director Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts, on 02 9215 9170 or 1800 226 912 or email [l.miller@australiacouncil.gov.au](mailto:l.miller@australiacouncil.gov.au). The full report is available at [www.australiacouncil.gov.au/makingsolidground](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/makingsolidground)