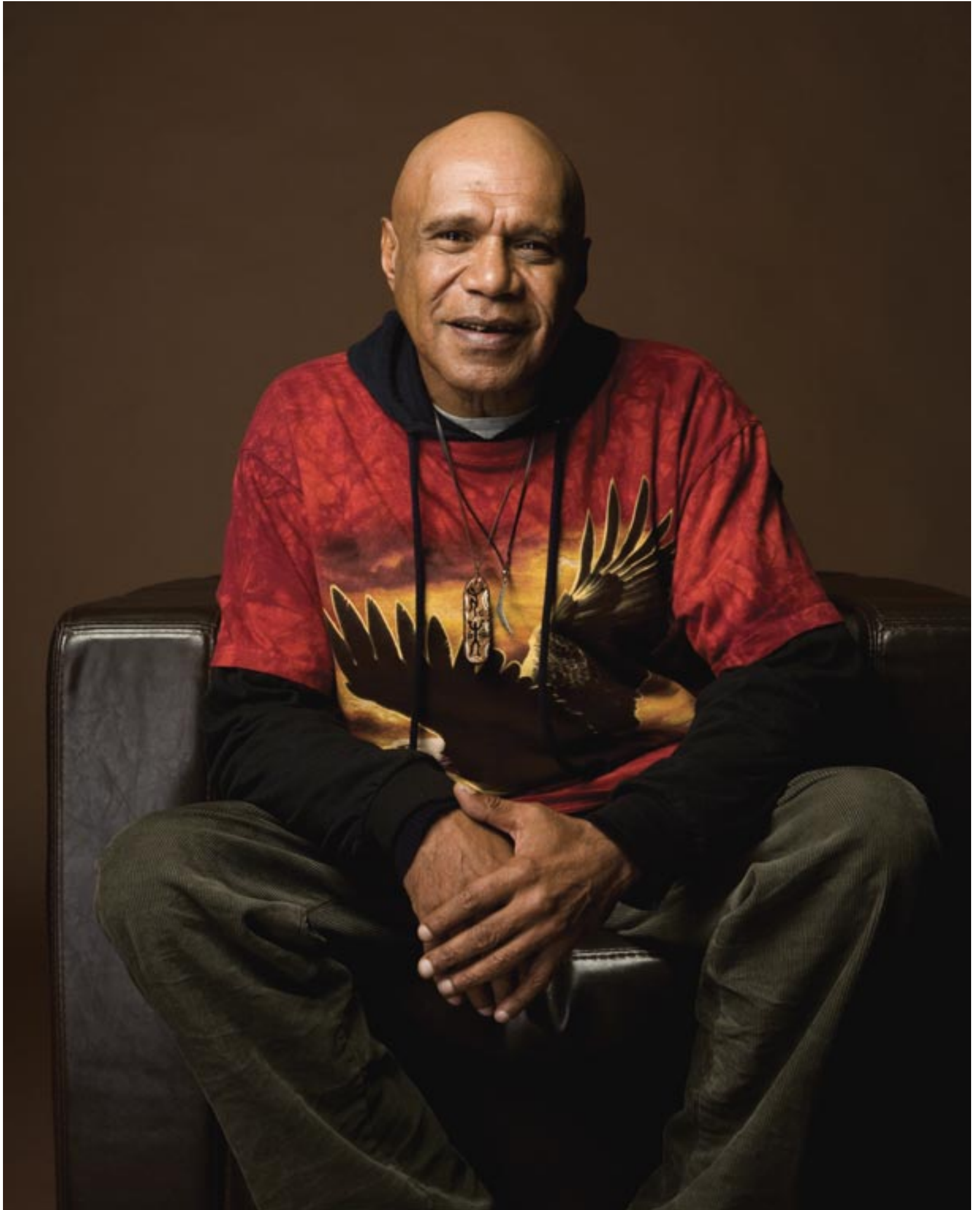


# ARTS YARN UP



Australian Government



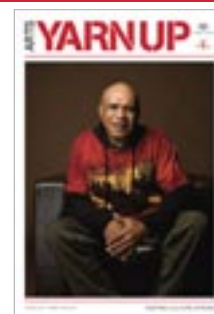


Photo: Stu Spence.

## FLEXIBILITY AND INNOVATION

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board is a lively, active and constantly evolving group of people who are always looking for ways to increase opportunities for artists and arts organisations.

With this issue we welcome four new members to the board—Rachael Maza-Long, Monica Stevens, Melissa Lucashenko and Jeanette James. As you can see from their short bios on page 20, this is a talented and experienced group of individuals from fields as diverse as theatre, dance, literature and visual arts.

Artists like Tasmania's Jeanette James represent traditional Indigenous crafts such as shell necklace stringing and bring a unique perspective to the board.

Members of the board understand what it is like to try and carve out a living in the arts and they recognise and reward excellence through the various grants, fellowships and awards. While the primary role of the board is to assess grant applications, it also considers new initiatives that will deliver real benefits to the sector. On the table at the moment are three new initiatives—the Dreaming Award, Accelerate Indigenous Leaders Program and 21st Century Stories.

The Dreaming Award will provide an opportunity for a young and emerging artist aged between 18 and 26 years to work with a mentor (see closing dates on page 24). The Accelerate Indigenous Leaders Program is being offered in partnership with the British Council and responds to the Australia Council's strategic priority of developing arts leaders by providing an opportunity for Indigenous leaders to undertake a residency in the UK.

21st Century Stories is a new initiative that invites artists to propose ideas for arts projects that explore and celebrate events that have shaped Australia since 1 January 2000.

Through these and other initiatives, the board is showing flexibility and innovation—hallmarks of the arts.

**Dr Mark Bin Bakar, Chair,  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board**



Photo: Stu Spence.

## EMBRACING OUR LEADERS

This issue we celebrate the achievements of two Indigenous arts leaders—Archie Roach and Kylie Farmer—via the 4th National Indigenous Art Awards, announced at the Sydney Opera House on the anniversary of the referendum, 27 May.

The awards give us all an opportunity to stop and 'smell the roses' by celebrating some outstanding individuals who not only excel in their artform but also embrace their roles as leaders.

Kylie won an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Fellowship to pursue a career as a director, while Archie took out the prestigious Red Ochre Award (read more on pages 3 and 4).

We extend our heartfelt congratulations to both.

In this issue, we explore a challenging topic—the intergenerational transfer of knowledge.

While knowledge and expression of culture are fundamental human rights that every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child should expect in the 21st century, the fact is that just three percent of the Indigenous population is over 65. This means there is an urgent need to honour and share their knowledge.

The younger generation are using a raft of new digital technologies to express their stories (see pages 12, 13 and 14) and, increasingly, share the knowledge of their elders. This is an exciting development that will enable the broader Australian population to engage more fully with Indigenous artists.

We have a stark reminder of the passing of a generation with the loss of the celebrated Aboriginal ceramicist, Dr Thancoupie Gloria Fletcher AO (Thancoupie), Papunya Tula artist, Kumanytjayi Napanangka (see page 21) and the sports legend, Lionel Rose.

We mourn their passing and use it as an opportunity to respect our elders and keep our culture strong.

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

# Kylie's confident directions



**The talent, hard work and passion of actor, director and writer, Kylie Farmer, has been recognised with a prestigious Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Fellowship.**

Raised in the wheat-belt town of Pingelly (Wilman boodjar) near Perth in Western Australia and fluent in Nyoongar and English, Kylie Farmer (Kaarlijilba Kaardn) has carved out a successful acting/directing/writing career in the arts.

She has stunned audiences with her energy and charm, playing Juliet for the Australian Shakespeare Company's production of *Romeo and Juliet* in 2008 and Kay in Belvoir Street Theatre's revival of *The Sapphires* last year.

Now she is striding into the world of directing with the help of a two-year Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Fellowship from the Australia Council for the Arts.

Cutting her teeth as a teenager in performances with Yirra Yaakin, Kylie's impressive list of performance credits spans theatre, film and TV — from drama to romantic comedy.

Although she had never applied for funding anywhere before, Kylie's powerful application gained her the sought-after fellowship for 2011 and she will now work alongside two of Australia's leading theatre directors — Rachael Maza-Long from Ilbijerri Theatre Company and Kyle Morrison from Yirra Yaakin.

'I feel like I'm at the right point on my pathway now. I have an extensive background in Indigenous theatre and I've worked with some of the major players in this country. I'm ready for that next phase,' says Kylie, who turns 31 this year.

'I'm absolutely passionate about my culture and any way I can share and maintain it, especially my language,' adds Kylie, who also presents the children's TV show, *Waabiny Time* (playing time) in Nyoongar language on NITV.

'It can be a challenge to share our art with the world when you have a bit of that shame factor inside. It's obvious in a lot of our young kids today and I experienced a bit of that growing up too,' she adds.

'Had it not been for Yirra Yaakin, I might not have overcome that. I can still be a little bit reluctant to be "out there" in this industry, but that shyness dissipates as each day passes. I'm gaining more confidence, especially now that I'm directing.'

Kylie will visit her two mentors several times a year for the next two years learning what it takes to direct, from planning through to production.

'Rachael and Kyle understand what I want to achieve and the knowledge I want to accumulate,' she says.

'Both of these moorditj (strong, excellent) artists come from a background of acting. Seeing them make the transition from performing to directing is inspiring. They each have their own unique style and I can learn a whole lot from them.'

'They are probably quite modest and wouldn't put themselves in the spotlight, but to me their success, passion and work ethic is exceptional. They lead by example.'



As one of very few Indigenous or women directors, Kylie also aims to lead by example.

'I've always been an inclusive person. It's not just about me gaining knowledge and experience. I want to share it.'

She wants to give back to Yirra Yaakin, to their projects and to the young artists coming through.

'The company gave me 11 years of great training and all the stepping-stones I needed to get here. I feel indebted to them.'

She has lined up three other director/mentors to help her make the transition to directing: David Milroy, Wayne Blair and Paige Newmark.

She will also film a 'guerrilla style' mini-documentary about her journey, which she hopes will become a resource for young aspiring Indigenous directors.

'Listening to the stories and teachings of my elders, I worked hard at putting the pieces together and planning my dreams,' she says. 'Now, I am determined to make the most of the opportunities in front of me.'

She will make her directorial debut with David Milroy's award-winning *Windmill Baby* for Sydney's Belvoir Street Theatre in July 2011 and is the company's associate artist for the year.

'It's very surreal, but I'm not going to waste an opportunity—ever!'

Without the fellowship, Kylie would not have been able to immerse herself in directing to this extent. She is also grateful to family members and artistic allies.

'I feel very blessed. Now I just have to knuckle down, focus and get it done!'

**Above: Kylie Farmer in *The Sapphires*.**

**Photo: Mark Rogers**

# Red Ochre Award for Archie Roach



25 year contribution to music acknowledged.

**Singer/songwriter Archie Roach is this year's Red Ochre Award winner. The award, presented by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board of the Australia Council for the Arts, honours a lifetime of outstanding achievement in the music industry. Archie's career spans more than 25 years and includes six albums, a swathe of awards, international touring, extraordinary songwriting and soulful singing talents.**

When Archie Roach found out that he had won the Red Ochre Award he was sitting at his kitchen table, a place where he says a lot of things happen.

'I wrote a lot of songs around the kitchen table and I still do. I remember years ago now, I performed at a Red Ochre presentation to Uncle Bob Maza and we [Ruby Hunter and I] went along to the Sydney Opera House to play some music. I thought it was pretty special and that he was a worthy fella to receive it at the time,' Archie told *Arts YarnUp*. 'I never thought I'd receive it myself. It's an honour and a privilege to receive an award like the Red Ochre.'

Archie's stellar music career was launched with the song, 'Took the Children Away', which he was moved to write after speaking to Gunditjmarra elder, Banjo Clarke. It was Uncle Banjo, as he is affectionately known in Archie's lyrics, who told him to stop singing other people's songs and to write about his own life. Archie sat down and wrote 'Took the Children Away' — the now legendary anthem for Australia's Stolen Generations.

Music has been Archie's personal salvation since he was taken away from his Aboriginal family at Framlingham, near Warrnambool in Victoria. As a young child Archie and his brothers and sisters were fostered out. When he was 14 and living with his third foster family, Archie discovered his Aboriginal heritage. Enraged, he left to find his real family with nothing but a guitar on his back.

He spent the next 14 years travelling and living on the streets. Not an easy life, he admits, but during that time he met his soul mate, fellow musician Ruby Hunter, who recently passed away. Together they forged a life of music, raised a family of three and have supported many other young people whose experiences mirror their own.

From the moment he started performing, Archie enraptured audiences with his songs and continues to do so. He remembers the first time he performed 'Took the Children Away' in Sydney during the protest movements at the bicentenary celebrations of Australian settlement in 1988. It was at La Perouse, near Botany Bay, and many people, black and white, came to camp and protest.

'There was an open forum and people camping there, mobs coming to march against the bicentennial. I said, 'I got nothing much to say but I'd like to sing you this song. I played 'Took the Children Away'. Afterwards, what struck me first, was the complete silence. Everybody in the crowd, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, all had their heads bowed. After that, all these old people started coming up to me, one by one, and asking me who I wrote that song for. I said

I wrote it about me. The old people just gathered around me, crying because they were taken away too. I didn't realise the extent of what was going on in this country.'

Archie's music has enlightened audiences to the disastrous treatment of Aboriginal people in Australia. He is the only songwriter to receive an international Human Rights Achievement Award for the composition of 'Took the Children Away' — an honour bestowed upon him in 2000.

He says there have been many highlights in his career, but working on *Ruby's Story* with renowned jazz musician and musical director, Paul Grabowsky, and the Australian Art Orchestra in 2004 holds a special place in his heart.

'Doing *Ruby's Story* with them is one thing I'll remember for the rest of my life. My life is about collaboration and my best creative collaboration was to create *Ruby's Story*. I see it as a standout.'

Archie is a quiet fella who admits he doesn't talk much. Instead he communicates through his music. He reckons the attention he has received since the release of his first album, *Charcoal Lane*, has been pretty amazing.

He remembers his first big gig, supporting co-producer Paul Kelly at Melbourne's Concert Hall in 1989 to an audience of 2,000 people. He got up on stage and told the audience, 'This next song is about something that happened a long time ago'. He then sang 'Beautiful Child'. Again there was silence. Archie thought, 'Well, bugger it if they don't like me.' Then came the deafening thunder of clapping.

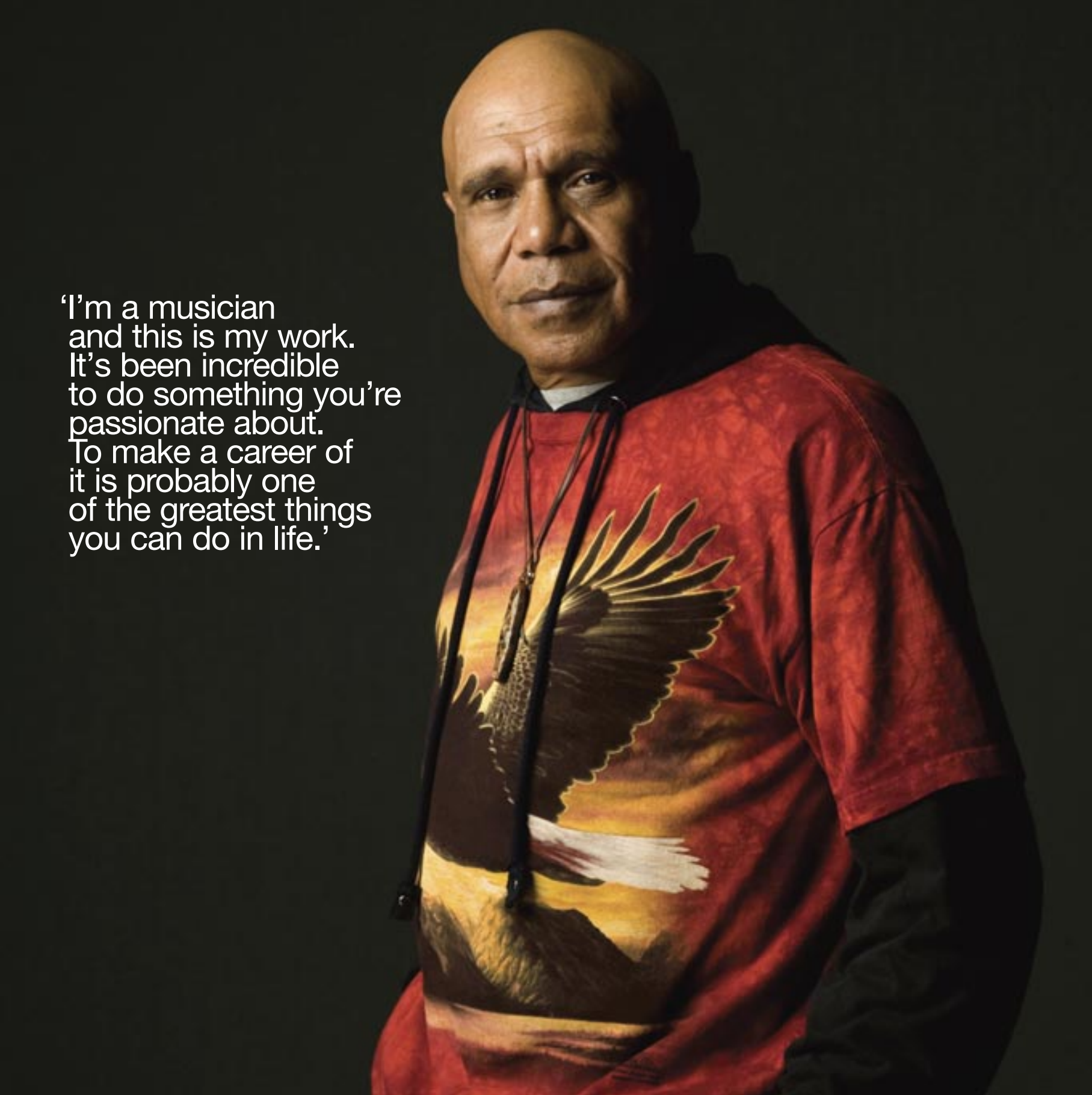
'I'd only ever performed in front of the Koorie community in Melbourne up 'til then, and some events, maybe [to] a couple of hundred people. I didn't know what to expect. I wasn't prepared for the response. To get used to the attention I received from *Charcoal Lane* took a couple of years,' he says.

'I'm a musician and this is my work. It's been incredible to do something you're passionate about. To make a career of it is probably one of the greatest things you can do in life.'

Archie advises other aspiring musicians to stay true to what they do and not to be too hasty or jump at the first thing that comes along.

'Through experience, I've learnt that there are a lot of good people in the music industry. It's a business and some are out there to make money of course, and you're just seen as a product. But art is more than a product if it truly comes from people's hearts.

'Don't go with the first person who comes along. Make sure it's right for you and that you have all your bases covered because it can be tricky. If you remain true to your



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art and you love it, chances are the rest of the world will love it too,’ he advises.

Archie admits his journey hasn’t been easy, but it has made him the person he is today.

‘In the beginning I started off with different foster parents and I ended up with a lovely family, the Coxes. I would never change my time with the Coxes, that’s where I learned to appreciate music. I look back now on my life and I believe that we’re the sum total of our experience as human beings. Through the bad and the good, I’ve taken all the good stuff. I’m the person I am today through all those good things.’

With the recent passing of Ruby, Archie says he is now reflecting on his life. He wants to write a book about meeting her and their life together and release a new album about healing and moving on from sad times.

‘You can’t stand still, life continues,’ he says.

To date Archie has released six albums: *Charcoal Lane* (co-produced by Paul Kelly), *Jamu Dreaming*, *Looking for Butter Boy*, *Sensual Being*, *Journey* and *1988*. His first album, *Charcoal Lane* is in record collections around the world.

Archie received two ARIA awards in 2000, one for *Charcoal Lane* and another for Best New Talent. He has received numerous Deadly Awards for his contribution to Indigenous music. He has graced the cover of *Time* magazine and has travelled around the world, touring and supporting artists such as Bob Dylan, Joan Armatrading, Tracy Chapman, Suzanne Vega, Patti Smith and Billy Bragg. He counts fellow musician, Paul Simon, and author Alice Walker as personal friends.

Archie is a role model for his community, an inspiration to his fans and a worthy recipient of the Red Ochre Award.

Above: Archie Roach. Photo: James Penlidis

[www.archieroach.com.au](http://www.archieroach.com.au)

# Mia deadly serious about comedy

It takes guts to be a stand up comedian—but perhaps even more to ask for advice.



Comedian Mia Stamford will be cracking audiences up across the country when her first one-woman show hits the road later this year.

After winning a coveted spot in a national mentoring program, Mia has been workshoping ideas with a professional comic.

Mia was one of 49 successful applicants to the 2011 JUMP National Mentoring Program for Young and Emerging Artists. The 10-month program helps boost the careers of artists aged between 18 and 30 who are in the first five years of their professional practice. In Mia's case, this means one-on-one advice from John Burgos, known on the comedy circuit for his fast-paced satirical observations and social commentary. He has been relishing his director's role in Mia's show.

Mia first hit the stage at the Melbourne Comedy Festival's *Deadly Funny* in 2007. The event is Australia's only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander comedy competition and, like the JUMP program, receives Australia Council for the Arts support.

Since then, she has won three awards, written shows with the Ilbjerri Theatre Company and performed around the country.

But Mia says JUMP has pushed her career even further. 'It's extremely validating. For the last four years I have been in comedy as a collaborator. The new show is my first solo project opportunity,' she says.

'Not only do I own this work, I'm realising that I am an artist; I fit into this group of 49 mentees. These are people whose work I admire and they're telling me that they like mine too.'

Mia first met John through a comedy workshop he was running at The Comic's Lounge in Melbourne. She approached him with a script she was working on and he gave her some tips on comedy mechanics and rhythm.

'Both John and I are really excited to be working together,' says Mia. 'For John this is the first time he has directed and I think he's happy about the challenge. He has awesome ideas—the staging is bigger than Ben Hur!'

'When it came to asking John to be my mentor and help me with my JUMP application, I asked him to coffee and he thought I had another script I needed help with,' Mia laughs.

'I'm so happy to legitimately have his time now. I get this one-on-one with someone I have always enjoyed working with and whom I admire. John has been so generous with his time, even coming into town on his Sunday to watch a rehearsal and give me feedback.'

Through her work Mia hopes to connect with people, honour her ancestors and pay respect to her family.

'I have such respect for stories; for everyone's story. They are all we have at the end of the day and I am learning what story it is I want to tell.'

'Everything I do is from the heart, so my favourite moments are when people come up and tell me their story or connect with something I've said.'

JUMP is supported by the Australia Council, managed nationally by Youth Arts Queensland and delivered in collaboration with state partners.

The CEO of Youth Arts Queensland, Julie Woodward, says: 'The program champions the next generation of arts industry leaders, ensuring that geography and cultural diversity are not barriers in identifying and promoting artistic excellence.'

'Successful applicants show excellence in their artistic practice and have a clear vision of how a mentor can assist them to step up to the next stage of their career.'

**The next round of JUMP applications will open in late August, 2011.**

Top: Mia Stamford. Photo: Katie Harmsworth

# 170 year-old ceremony revived in Melbourne

An intergenerational collaboration between an elder and a contemporary dance artist has brought a Boon Wurrung ceremony back to life.



Victorian elder Carolyn Briggs wept tears of joy as she saw the first modern Boon Wurrung Ngargee performed in front of 2,000 people on 5 February this year in St Kilda, Melbourne.

Carolyn had been talking with Idja Dance Theatre Artistic Director, Jacob Boehme, over a period of five years to help revive the 170-year-old ceremony.

Carolyn, a Boon Wurrung elder from southern Melbourne, credits the success of the ceremony to Jacob's ability to listen.

'The ability to listen shows a good person who is true to their craft and who honours their ancestors,' she says.

'You must learn to listen to the old values, learn to remember, wait and then find your voice.'

Jacob, who is a Narangga and Kurna man from South Australia, said that reviving the traditional dance ceremony was 'an exciting, but an excruciatingly frightening privilege'.

'I was guided all the way by Aunty Carolyn. She fed me information about stories and country. I became immersed in the land I walk and live on, in the stories and energy; I felt its heartbeat,' says Jacob.

By saturating himself in the process, he was able to create something authentic and relevant. In fact, he became so immersed that he began dreaming about country.

'I'd wake up at two am, sit bolt upright and start singing in Boon Wurrung language. It was scary, but proof that I was truly listening,' he says.

Jacob and Carolyn revitalised the cultural ceremony using early settlers' documents and journals describing the last Ngargee (ceremony or corroboree) that took place in 1843. Jacob deciphered the text and translated it into movements.

'For instance, one section described the head male dancer leading the others with clap sticks marching forward. I couldn't imagine a traditional dance form with

men marching forward like a battalion of soldiers. With my years of doing traditional dances, I interpreted it as stomping,' he explains. Communities were immediately interested, volunteering stories from their collective memories. The final performance included 50 dancers from three different communities, ranging in age from two to 63.

Carolyn was overwhelmed when she saw the final performance. 'I thought [the ancestors] may not see you, but they will certainly hear you singing up country and dancing up country. The kids and their fathers and uncles danced while their mums or aunties played the possum skin drums,' she explains.

The final dance invited the audience to join in, with around 500 people dancing together on the ceremonial stage at sunset. Many strangers came up to thank Carolyn afterwards, giving her hope.

'We need to continue this with our young people. We have to give back. We've been so busy trying to educate the mainstream that we sometimes forget to educate our own. Reclamation gives more satisfaction because the kids' response is always overwhelming,' says Carolyn.

The experience has led to greater community trust and helped to develop the skills of the artists involved.

'It also helps to strengthen our own identity. We learn old stories about our ancestors and we bring it to a new world. This is what our culture is about—the sharing and caring we always talk about. Young people want to have a role in giving back to modern Aboriginal society.

'We have something to give and invite others to share our vibrant culture. Only then can we understand how everything is connected to the land, people and animals. Every living thing is a part of you,' insists Carolyn.

The experience has also added hope to Jacob's dream of one day running a Victorian-based Aboriginal dance academy.

Above: **Boon Wurrung Ngargee in Melbourne, 2011.**

Photos: Bindi Cole

# China exchange inspires Indigenous artists



A visit to China's Yangtze River inspired a Yaegl artist to auction work for schools in China and Australia.

**'Imagine Australia – the Year of Australian Culture in China' is building long-term relationships between leading contemporary artists from the two countries. Starting last June, it is a year-long feast of Australian performances, exhibitions and forums and one of Australia's largest-ever international cultural promotions.**

As part of 'Imagine Australia' seven contemporary Indigenous and emerging artists toured China's historic cities, met some of the country's top contemporary artists and completed a one-month residency in Beijing last year.

The resulting exhibition, *Hard Sleeper*, drew on the artists' unique travel experience and gathered crowds when it opened at the trailblazing Red Gate Gallery in Beijing last October. Two of the artworks exhibited later raised \$17,000 at auction for primary schools in China and Australia.

Yaegl woman, Frances Belle Parker, was one of the artists selected for the Red Gate Cultural Exchange program and was assisted with a Presentation and Promotion grant from the Australia Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Division.

She says 'the whole experience was stunning' but admits it 'took a month to get used to the dense population, the pollution and the crazy driving'—hence the exhibition title, *Hard Sleeper*.

With her were established and emerging Indigenous artists Fiona Foley, Guy Maestri, Peter Gardiner, Phil James, China de la Vega and Zhou Xiaoping.

Together they met artists in communities in some of China's most intriguing provincial cities, including Pingyao, Xi'an, Chengdu, Chongqing and Shanghai.

They also spent time with children at Xingren primary school, built by Australian steel company, Bluescope, in the earthquake-ravaged province of Sichuan. They were invited, as VIP guests, to experience the Australian Pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo where Torres Strait Islander cultural group, Ariw Poenipan, recently performed (see *Arts Yarn Up* Summer 2010).

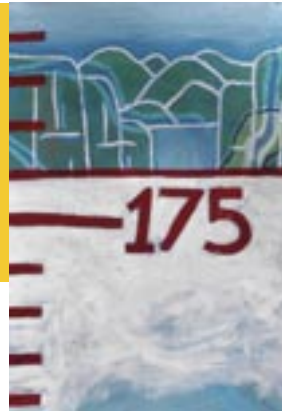
During their month-long residency in Beijing, the group explored artists' studios and galleries in the 798 Art District, as well as the Chaochangdi and Songzhuang Artists' Villages.

'I know how hard it is to be an artist and how much you struggle to make a living, so I had an instant respect for all the artists I met in China,' says Frances.

Her creative work was influenced by the devastating impact of the Three Gorges Dam in eastern China, which led to a 175-metre rise in the level of the Yangtze River.

The result, *175*, consists of a series of acrylic works that meditate on the effects that the world's largest hydropower project has had on the landscape.

'The Three Gorges Dam is impressive, but in a really



scary way—you can't even imagine the scale of it. Whole communities lost their livelihoods and were relocated into apartment blocks for the project.'

According to the Three Gorges Project Corporation, around 1.24 million people were relocated. For Frances, these people haven't just lost a landscape.

'Rivers are the veins of our existence,' says Frances, whose subjects are usually Yaegl land and the Ulgundahi Island in the Clarence river region of New South Wales, where her mother grew up.

'When we were young, we were told stories about the sacred sites of the Clarence and the river itself. If we lost the river now, we'd lose our stories too.'

The paintings in the *175* series depict a river valley transformed. A crude 175-metre line dissects a diverse geographical landscape; below this is nothing but a singular blue-grey wash.

One of these paintings, along with a work by Guy Maestri, was auctioned by Red Gate Gallery, raising an impressive \$17,000 for the Xingren school and the Epenarra School in Australia's remote Northern Territory.

*Hard Sleeper* was shown at Redfern's Damien Minton Gallery in February, 2011.

Above clockwise from top left: Frances Belle Parker's *175*.

Schoolchildren from Xingren Primary School.

Artists on tour in China (l-r) Peter Gardiner, Frances Belle Parker, China de la Vega, Fiona Foley, Catherine Croll, Phil James, Guy Maestri, Brian Wallace (Red Gate Gallery Director), Guan Wei, unknown. Photos: Courtesy of Frances Belle Parker.

## Connecting generations through traditional and new media



According to the Bureau of Statistics, just three per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population are over 65 years of age. This means that there is a critical need to ensure our elders pass their knowledge down to the next generation – 50 per cent of which are under 25.

Whereas our elders have traditionally told their stories through the ‘media’ that nature provides (trees, sand and rocks), storytelling is evolving through new media, from photography and video to new platforms such as *Second Life* (see page 18).

Young people recognise the opportunities that digital technology provides. They may not always have access to broadband, but many are using the media facilities provided through art centres in remote communities (see pages 12, 13 and 14).

While digital technology provides new methods for knowledge transfer, it is still just a tool. Knowledge transfer remains embedded in the stories themselves and the arts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders – young and old.

Delrick Holland in the Wilurarra Creative recording studio.

Photo: © Wilurarra Creative

# New journey on Canning route

A record-breaking 124,000 people visited the National Museum of Australia for a unique multimedia exhibition showing one of Western Australia's most controversial projects through Aboriginal eyes.



In 1908, West Australian government surveyor, Alfred Canning, and his men tore out a 1,800 kilometre track through the WA desert, stretching from Wiluna to Halls Creek.

The Canning Stock Route was to be the answer for the cattle industry, which needed a droving corridor to move cattle from the Kimberley to Kalgoorlie, where the gold rush had created a booming market.

But the route cut through the countries of multiple Aboriginal language groups, dramatically affecting people's lives.

Almost 100 years later, *Ngurra Kuju Walyja – One Country, One People: The Canning Stock Route Project*, set out to explore the track's complex history through the prism of contemporary Aboriginal art.

The project was conceived in 2006 by FORM, a West Australian arts and cultural organisation, and involved consultative workshops with established and emerging artists, including return-to-country trips.

Indeed, at the heart of the project are the Aboriginal stories of the land and lives that were touched by this corridor.

Co-curator, Hayley Atkins, grew up in Jigalong on Martu country and now lives in Newman where she works at the Martumilli Artists' Centre. She was mentored by local professionals for the duration of the project.

'When I first started with the project I didn't know what it was about, but when we went on the first trip back to country I started to find out,' she explains.

'People from all different parts of the desert came along. It was like a new beginning for them to come back to country. Some of the old people still remember the cattle coming down the route.

'I went on the trip with a blank mind and came back with everything. I've got the Canning Stock Route in my heart now. Currently I'm painting the story of my journey along the route,' Hayley adds.

In 2009, the National Museum of Australia partnered with FORM to produce the ground-breaking exhibition *Ngurra Kuju Walyja – One Country, One People: The Canning Stock Route Project*.

A wide range of multimedia tools were used to capture precious cultural knowledge that has traditionally been told through painting, weaving, carving,



photography, oral histories and songs. The exhibition emphasises family groupings and mapping of the country, as this is how the collective wanted to share their work with the world.

Each artwork has tiles next to it with a photo of the artist, a biography, maps, explanations of the artwork and general knowledge. These draw the viewer in and humanise the artist and artwork.

Other interactive features include film clips of the artists, oral history recordings and *One Road*—eight metres of 115cm multi-touch cells, similar to giant iPads — enabling audiences to interact with over 150 videos, 500 images and 32 scalable paintings.

The project's co-founder and manager, Carly Davenport, believes this is the first time a contemporary fine art exhibition has been combined with a social history approach.

'We didn't want to have another exhibition where paintings just hang on white walls. Through all the design elements we invite people to get to know the artists and their stories,' says Carly.

'Hopefully we transport them into the Western Desert to see it through Aboriginal eyes.'

The six-month exhibition attracted a record-breaking 124,000 visitors to the National Museum of Australia, where it ended in January this year. It is now touring selected national venues, with two books and a 'behind the scenes' DVD about to be released.

The project has not only been a big hit, but has helped to develop professional skills and build relationships between nine art and cultural organisations in 17 remote communities.

Above left: **Canning Stock route interactive table.**  
Photo: Jason McCarthy, National Museum of Australia.

Above right: **Content approval workshops with Warlayiryt artists in Balgo.** (L-r): Monique La Fontaine (Content Manager), Carly Davenport (Co-founder and Project Manager), Hayley Atkins (Emerging Curator), Doolmarria Louise Mengil (Emerging Curator) and Putuparri Tom Lawford (Project Cultural Advisor).  
Photo: Tim Acker 2009 © FORM

# Technology dreaming



**An explosion in digital media cultural production in remote Australia is connecting communities—and generations. Inge Kral reports.**

**‘Just like the old people, we are dreaming. We have a new dream with technology.’**  
— Curtis Taylor, youth media worker,  
Martu Media, ITIC Symposium July 2010

In Indigenous Australia, like the rest of the world, young people are embracing new media and using it to connect, create and shape their world.

From the desert of Western Australia to the Top End of the Northern Territory, young people are accessing digital technologies through community arts projects and remote Indigenous media organisations. Personal ownership of small mobile media technologies is also on the rise.

Software programs such as iLife, iMovie and Final Cut Pro give young people the opportunity to tell the stories they want to tell. GarageBand easily records the musical messages they want to convey.

The results are a blend of traditional cultural elements and innovative techniques. And they mean the young are holding onto their local linguistic and cultural identity while immersing themselves in global youth culture.

The way young people are deftly threading and weaving intercultural symbols images and messages into these new productions shows the pride they have in their Indigenous culture.

**‘Through the media we have a story to tell. There’s a connection between young and old, coming together, working (and) trying to keep Warlpiri strong by learning the history and passing it on to the next generation.’**  
— Shane White, youth media worker,  
Lajamanu Community

Many of these young people are acutely aware of the responsibility their elders have given them to look after their linguistic and cultural heritage.

**‘Music is our way to give a strong message. Looking after our sacred areas and waterholes and grandfathers’ land; that’s a strong message. The younger generation can see that and listen to that and understand what the message is. We have responsibility in singing and letting people know and getting the message out there.’**  
— Chris Reid and Nathan Brown, musicians,  
Wingellina Community

As the mediators between old knowledge and new technologies, these young people are realising new roles and responsibilities.

**‘We got all these things like technology. We can record all these stories, videos, songlines, everything when we go. As long as we leave something behind so all the kids can look after it and so they can pass it onto the next**

**generation. From knowing this media, I’m starting to know these old people and knowing what they got.’**  
— Maxwell Tasman, youth media worker,  
Lajamanu community

Arts festivals and exhibitions are also celebrating and affirming a positive contemporary Indigenous youth identity with multimedia performances that display this continuity, transformation and innovation. A recent example of this is the *Yiwarra Kuju*, or Canning Stock Route, exhibition (see page 10-11).

Music and film festivals featuring innovative young musicians and filmmakers who have a broader community commitment to maintaining language and culture are also booming. In the Northern Territory, for example, the bi-annual *Milpirri Festival* at Lajamanu and the annual *Walking with Spirits* festival at Beswick act as a showcase for young and emerging talent. There are also music festivals in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and remote Indigenous media festivals.

These events display the creativity and technological capacity of communities. They also offer a rare chance for collaboration and exchange between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Below, left to right: Chris Reid, Amos Urban, Ricardo Weston, Shane White and Maxwell Tasman.

Photo: Jane Hodson



## Digitising the desert

Inge Kral reports.

**'There is a dynamism in Aboriginal culture most vividly expressed by youth presentations from Wilurra Creative, the astonishing achievements of the most deprived youth in the country. Youth are bringing their own cultural expressions to the fore and these expressions are examples of the resilience of Aboriginal culture. With just a digital video camera or mobile phone, they are able to insert themselves into national Australian and international cultural life.'**

— Professor Marcia Langton, Chair, Australian Indigenous Studies, Melbourne University

**'The young people are like the eyes for the old people seeing into the future. Through this project, you can see the young people standing up for themselves and speaking out. Now is the right time for people to take notice.'**

— Ngaanyatjarra leader, Livingstone McKain West, speaking about Wilurra Creative

In the Ngaanyatjarra Lands in remote south-eastern Western Australia, young people are engaging with new media technologies as filmmakers and musicians in arts projects, media centres and online. Through these, they are documenting contemporary youth practice, reflecting on change and projecting pride in their linguistic and cultural heritage.

At Wilurra Creative, a project based in Warburton, the largest of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands desert communities, young adults are embedding digital media into a range of creative projects.

Beginning in 2004 as the Warburton Youth Arts Project, it has gone from strength to strength. It supports arts and cultural activities for emerging artists aged between 17 and 30 in the Warburton, Wanarn, Blackstone and Warakurna communities.

At Wilurra Creative, established and emerging artists explore art practices across the generations. Artists also gain opportunities to explore new technologies and techniques.

The high-quality program of cultural maintenance and renewal uses a dynamic combination of traditional creativity and diverse contemporary artforms.

Digital media is pivotal. Music and video take centre-stage with productions uploaded to [www.wilurra.com](http://www.wilurra.com), YouTube or distributed via locally-produced CDs and DVDs. Artists use new media and multimedia forms to link to the continuing cultural practices and history of the Ngaanyatjarra region and reinterpret this knowledge from a fresh perspective.

At Wilurra Creative, young musicians are drawing on a rich local tradition of music production and performance. The centre uses the old recording studio space where local



bands such as the Mirlirtjarra (Warburton) Band cut their early tracks.

The pre-digital generation of musicians are role models for contemporary music practice and the new recording studio is a multigenerational site. Older musicians transfer cultural authority and rights over their song recordings to emerging artists and work with the technical expertise of the younger generation to record music in the digital environment.

'Recording songs in local languages provides a positive framework for cultural maintenance and communication spanning generations,' says the Artistic Director of Wilurra Creative, Ben Fox.

Meanwhile, children hover on the periphery developing their musical skills through observation and imitation and, if they're lucky, practice on the drums!

Jade Giles has been around music since he was young. He used to go to the old music recording studio with his father, Kunmarnarra Giles, a musician in the Warburton Band who encouraged him. Now Jade plays with his father and other relatives in the Central Desert Band.

Creative digital media production is not isolated to Warburton. Across the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, young people are acquiring digital skills through art centres like Warakurna Artists and Ngaanyatjarra Media, a remote Indigenous media organisation based in Wingellina close to the West Australian and Northern Territory border.

Ngaanyatjarra Media provides workshops in digital video, editing and music recording. Musicians record and produce their own CDs and create music videos that are uploaded to YouTube or sold locally and through national music retail outlets.

Media artist, Jasmine Lawson, trained with Ngaanyatjarra Media and has since honed her media skills. In 2005, she co-directed the Wilurra Youth Arts Festival alongside local musician, Carl Smith. In 2010, she curated a film night using the Wilurra Creative Digital collection. Jasmine is a strong role model for the upcoming generation. She and others like her are shaping the future in the Ngaanyatjarra region.

Above: Ngaanyatjarra Media Garage Band wing.  
Photo: Inge Kral

[www.wilurra.com](http://www.wilurra.com)

# Media projects keep culture strong

Inge Kral reports.



**D**jilpin Arts is a community-owned and controlled arts organisation. It produces the annual *Walking with Spirits* festival, supports a youth and media training project and operates an arts retail business at the Ghunmarn Culture Centre in Beswick, Northern Territory.

The focus of Djilpin Arts is maintaining culture, but it is a very adaptive approach that prioritises youth.

**‘Different work we have: media and festival. And I’m learning how to be a manager, running the arts centre and making sure all the art workers work together, you know. I think it’s really important that we keep our culture strong.’**

— Revonna Urban, Manager Ghunmarn Culture Centre

The Ghunmarn Culture Centre trains and employs young women to manage and operate the centre. It also supports a café and beauty products enterprise, making soap and lip balm out of bush plants.

Enterprise comes out of young people’s connection to kin, country and traditional practices. Intergenerational exchanges are pivotal. Augustina Kennedy, a young arts worker, describes how she loves working at the centre ‘because they’ve got my grandfather’s and great grandfather’s stories and paintings.’

She shows tourists the permanent collection and tells her grandfather’s story. ‘I can remember and I always pass that on,’ she tells visitors.

Centre manager, Revonna Urban, sees her ‘other job’ as ‘doing the media with some of the younger people like me’.

‘I made one documentary about my grandfather. It’s called *Boss for his country* which is for this place and I showed it at the festival—*Walking with Spirits*—and I was so excited to see it!’ she explains.

At Djilpin Arts, a philanthropic organisation has funded a non-formal digital learning project for young people who want to engage with their cultural heritage and learn media skills.

Although some participants have had little or no schooling, through the youth media project they have developed personal strengths, as well as new technical skills.

Djilpin Arts integrates youth media into various community arts projects. In these projects young people are given responsible roles as filmmakers and directors. Amos Urban and Ricardo Weston are now employed as professional cameramen.

**‘We filmed a music video clip for one of the tracks on the *Muyngarnbi* CD (songs from *Walking with Spirits*)...Amos was the camera operator for that gig. He’s fantastic at camera, so when gigs like that come up we employ the experienced participants. In Sydney, Amos was there again because the old guys were going to perform concerts for the World Youth Day and we sent Amos along to document it. When the festival is on and all the lead up preparation for the festival, it’s Amos and Ricardo’s job to get out there and film the rehearsals and workshops. They are really documenting all the arts and cultural activities in the community. That’s their job and they are paid for that.’**

— Fleur Parry, Djilpin Arts, General Manager

Collaborations between traditional songmen and western musicians have provided the focus for the *Walking with Spirits* festival.

Djilpin Arts General Manager, Fleur Parry, says that with the festival, ‘everybody dances, everybody works and everybody’s involved.’

Projects are multiplying and young people are taking on new roles as filmmakers, writers and directors. They are pitching stories to national television and creating innovative traditional and contemporary dance and music videos such as the popular *Muyngarnbi* DVD—a series of five videos filmed and directed by young filmmakers.

‘We are all the young people working in media and working in the cultural centre. And we’ll keep our community and culture strong,’ says Revonna.

Above left: Revonna Urban. Photo: Inge Kral

Interviews and stories written by Inge Kral, a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy at the Australian National University in Canberra. Inge travelled throughout the desert and Top End for her paper: *Plugged in: Remote Australian Indigenous Youth and Digital Culture*. The full version can be found here: <http://caepr.anu.edu.au/StaffProfiles/Inge-Kral>

## Hip hop kids find new ways to sing old songs

When Tiwi Island elders noticed that their old Tiwi songs were disappearing, they came up with an imaginative way of revitalising their culture, making it relevant to younger generations.



The *Ngarukuruwala* ('we sing songs') project began in 2007 when Tiwi Island women and Sydney jazz musicians performed together at the Sydney Opera House and Darwin Festival.

The women could see their traditional songs were disappearing, along with their stories and histories, and came up with the idea of rearranging old Tiwi songs into new ones. The project was a huge success and a source of great pride among the community, with the group's self-titled CD (*Ngarukuruwala*) winning 'Best Traditional Music Album' at the 2008 Northern Territory Indigenous Music Awards.

'The songs are new arrangements, but the lyrics are in old Tiwi language. One of the old songs, a traditional turtle hunting song, became a reggae turtle hunting song on the CD,' explains the classically-trained musician, Genevieve Campbell, who performs with the *Ngarukuruwala* band.

'The new style renews and engages the younger generation's interest in traditional music. For the older people, it means that the traditional songs are being sung again,' she says.

The *Ngarukuruwala* project also led to the discovery of anthropological Tiwi Island recordings from 1912 and 1928 at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra. A subsequent repatriation visit to the institute included senior song men who gave their knowledge and approval of the project.

Songman, Eustace Tipiloura, was one of 11 elders who went to the institute.

'None of the young people know how to use the right words, like old Tiwi style of language,' says 65-year old Eustace. 'I was 40 when I started singing. I started listening to the old people and how they sang. I caught up as they sang and on the pronunciation as well. It's good. I didn't know I was going to carry it on through the family,

but I do now. My mum was a singer and my mother's husband was a singer as well. It's inside me already.'

Genevieve says that hearing the institute's recordings was immensely moving for the whole group.

'Everybody heard the voice of, say, their father or grandfather and some people heard themselves as young people. There were lots of old songs that had been forgotten, even performance and vocal techniques and melodies. There were ways of singing which the old men recalled their ancestors singing.'

The group's newest project *Ngarivanajirri* ('strong kids song'), communicates strong cultural messages to Tiwi youth through song. It is a blend of traditional music and modern hip hop and is a collaboration between women's groups from three Tiwi Island communities.

The first *Ngarivanajirri* composition features high school children performing hip hop versions in English with newly-produced music beats and hip hop breaks. The final version will sample the original 1912 recordings so that past and present generations of Tiwi Islanders can come together in song.

Genevieve and Tiwi elder, Teresita Puruntatameri, are coordinating the project. 'The group has come up with a list of values, messages and goals for their young people to live by, such as being strong and proud in your identity and culture and showing respect for elders,' explains Genevieve.

The songs are sung in both Tiwi and English, so all Tiwi Islanders can understand the words and meanings. Eustace says, 'It would be great to pass songs onto the young people because the young ones are distracted by everything else. If they can't pull their socks up now, it's all gone. I won't be here forever.'

Above left: Rehearsals at Wurrumiyanga, Bathurst Island.

Above right: Recording session with the strong women's group. Genevieve Campbell pictured, middle.

Photos: Genevieve Campbell

# Art brings cyberTribe together

Digital galleries and collectives are combining traditional and modern styles for stories that engage younger and older generations.



Through the Blackout Collective and the online gallery, cyberTribe, Indigenous artists from Australia, the Pacific and the Americas are creating innovative and politically important works that speak across the generations.

For Indigenous artist, Jenny Fraser, screen-based media and traditional Aboriginal art are fundamentally concerned with the same thing—getting the message across.

‘They are only different because of the medium, whether it be drawing in the sand or using video,’ says Jenny. ‘What’s important in Indigenous art is the story.’

‘Traditionally, artists told stories and developed their skills as they told the story, not because they were picked out and told “you’re a good artist, so you tell the story”. They were the custodian of the story and they had to tell it.’

‘Someone might have what you would call a naive style and someone else would be more sophisticated, because they’d been put in the position of developing visual literacy over time.’

‘The problem these days is that many Indigenous people still have their own stories, but they don’t have the same opportunity to tell them. If they’re given the opportunity, they bloom.’

Jenny is the founder and curator of cyberTribe, which has just celebrated a decade of exhibiting the cutting-edge work of Indigenous artists online and in galleries around the world.

‘CyberTribe showcases the work of urban artists doing conceptual, new media and contemporary work, alongside those innovating in traditional or customary practices. It also comments on individual and collective Aboriginal experiences,’ adds Jenny.

To mark cyberTribe’s 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the online gallery is featuring a new exhibition, *ingenious*, which ‘focuses on the moving image, non conventional media and also inter-disciplinary media with screen-based perspectives from far and wide,’ explains Jenny.

Artists appearing in *ingenious* are: James Luna, Bert Bennally (USA), Terrance Houle and Skawennati Tricia Fragnito (Canada), Latuff and Sergio Novello Barco (South America), Rachel Rakena and Niwhai Tupaea (Aotearoa), Dan Taulapapa McMullin and Polytoxic (Samoa), Torika Bolatagici and Salote Tawale (Fiji) and Tracey Moffatt, Michael Riley, Destiny Deacon, r e a, Jason Davidson and Jenny Fraser (Australia).

An earlier cyberTribe milestone was winning the ABC Radio National Indigenous Cultural Centre/Keeping Place Award in recognition of its unique place in Indigenous art.

Jenny says the Indigenous new media movement has developed substantially since she launched cyberTribe in August 2000.

‘Back then most artists didn’t have their own website, so cyberTribe was a place to show their work. Now they all have blogs or use social networking websites like Facebook and Bebo to help out. Every day things are changing. Artists are publishers now.’

She believes mainstream institutions in Australia have been slow to adapt to these changes.

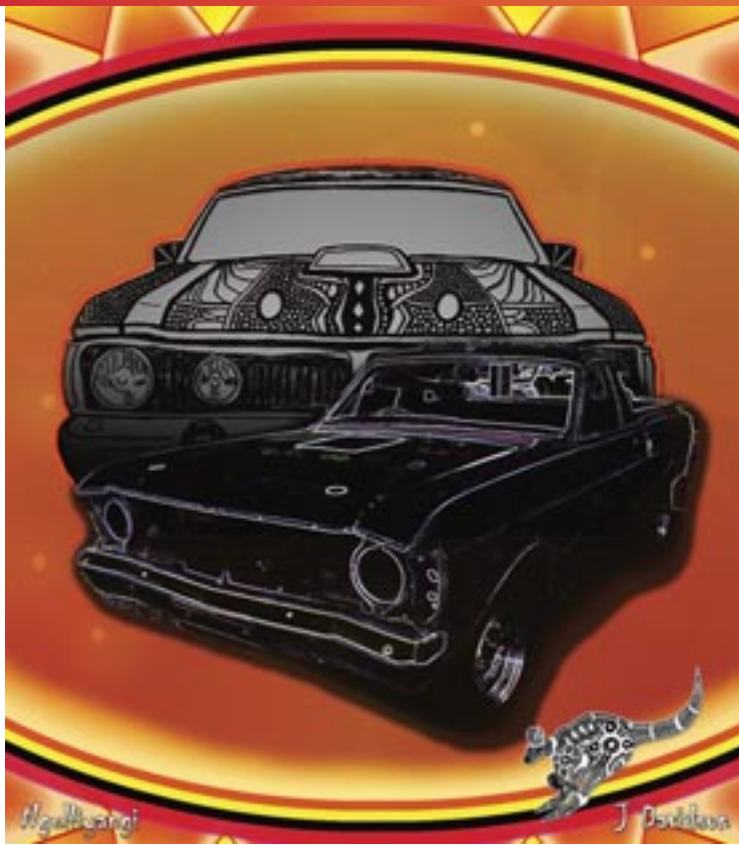
‘While artists are progressing with screen-based techniques, like animation and video, institutions don’t seem to see the potential for it. They’re more interested in getting people through the door, rather than having lots of artists’ work on their websites.’

‘By contrast, the Smithsonian, the world’s largest museum and research complex in Washington DC, has whole departments concentrating on online work. In Australia it tends to be a simple website, with a few pictures. We are a bit behind.’

Jenny studied at the Queensland University of Technology and now splits her time between Darwin and Brisbane. She uses a diverse range of creative media in her own work, such as photography, video, text, sound, language and other screen elements.

Her creations have been exhibited and screened internationally, including at *ISEA/Zero1* in San Jose (US) and the *Interactiva Biennale* in Mexico. She has also served as a member of the Australia Council’s New Media Arts Board.

Jenny’s recent work includes a video installation called



*Indian Cowboys/Cowboy Indians* at the Indonesian Contemporary Art Network in Jogjakarta. It came about after she took a closer look at photographs of some of her ancestors, who worked on cattle properties far away from their homelands. They were dressed up in suits and frocks to have their photographs taken.

'I noticed that the photographs had been doctored to lighten their skins. It seems they were too black,' she says. 'The new work is a communication to my old people.'

In the contemporary setting for the video installation, her Indigenous subjects wear a mixture of theme park-inspired cowboy and Native American costumes, complete with stolen loot, rifles and bear-claw necklaces.

'I want to propose a theory that creative projects are good for filling the spiritual void we have. It's part of the healing process.

'Australia is in a cultural war: the mainstream against the other. Politicians have tried to discredit history, to diminish history. Aboriginal people need to get out there and tell their stories, either by texting each other, using the video on their phone and plugging it into the TV, or engaging with digital storytelling techniques in general.'

*Arts Yarn Up* asked Jenny if she believed there was a role for new media artists taking traditional stories back to the older generation in a new media format.

'It depends,' she said. 'People in remote places always like to see themselves on video and video has been around for a long time. Many might feel more comfortable with that than going to a gallery, which they might see as too highbrow.'

'My old people sometimes ask me to explain how

they can tell if something is by an Aboriginal artist. If they see a woven basket they can tell it comes from Far North Queensland or the Northern Territory, or wherever. But I tell them an Indigenous artist will always tell you who they are and where they are from. It's there in new media somewhere.'

Jenny also exhibits with other Indigenous new media artists in the Blackout Collective.

'Because we work in a variety of disciplines and come from diverse backgrounds we have achieved some groundbreaking works which comment on our own Aboriginal experience while keeping our unique styles.'

Another Blackout Collective collaborator is Jason Davidson, a Gurindji/Mara, Ngalakarn artist, now based in Canberra. Jason studied Visual Art at Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory and in 2003 completed his Masters via research into cross cultural communication breakdown in Aboriginal health.

His work involves elements of animation, video, music and his unique 'X-ray' art – hand-drawn, sci-fi style designs of animals and body organs. Jenny described Jason's work as having 'a sophisticated visual literacy, both ancient and modern art at the same time'.

One of Jason's most impressive works is entitled *Street Machine Project*, which he has been working on since 2003 when he found an old car on his uncle's land and decided to rebuild it by integrating new media elements. It explores ideas about new media art and health.

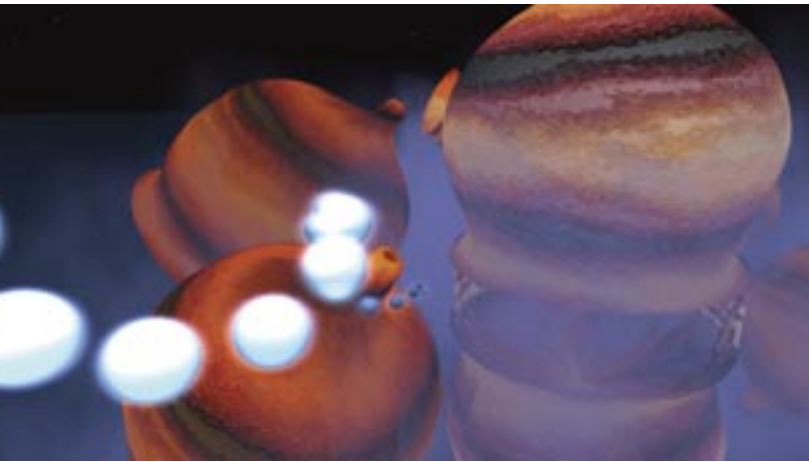
Jason recently launched a website, *Aboriginal Imagination*, which promotes Indigenous artwork in an Aboriginal-controlled environment free of other cultural gatekeepers.

**Left page, left to right: Jenny Fraser's *Indian Cowboys/Cowboy Indians*. *Time Traveller™*, 2008, *Machinima* by Skawennati Tricia Fragnito. Images: Courtesy of the artists.**

**Above, left to right: Jason Davidson's *Warrior Within*. *Love*, 2003, experimental video collaboration with Gary Hillberg by Tracey Moffatt. Images: Courtesy of the artists.**

## Indigenous artist gets a *Second Life*

Aroha Groves plays with notions of identity and finds new audiences online.



Tech-savvy artist Aroha Groves' latest artwork exists entirely in *Second Life*, a 3D virtual world where users socialise, connect and create.

*Connections2* takes the viewer on a wildly-colourful interactive journey through the black soil plains of north-western New South Wales and through ocean, desert and forest landscapes, accompanied by a thumping soundtrack.

'*Connections2* is about coming from a really dark place in your life through to a place of joy and beauty,' explains Aroha, who created the images by taking photographs around the south coast of New South Wales, where she now lives. She then used the textures and shapes from the waves, rocks, soil, plants and seaweed to create sculpted 'prims'—the basic building blocks of *Second Life*.

'When I was a kid, I'd look at paintings and wonder what it would be like to be inside them and look around the corner. In these works you can do exactly that.'

'*Second Life* is an excellent medium to play with ideas of identity. You can be anything you want – from a butterfly to a snazzy-looking avatar,' she explains.

Aroha's avatar, Sistagrlro Wei, roped in *Second Life* buddies, Curious J and Odogg, for *Connections2*'s deep house soundtrack. The duo is part of the team behind the Minneapolis (US)-based internet radio station, dogglounge.com. Aroha uses their mixes, editing them to fit her videos, which are streamed live in *Second Life*.

*Second Life* has not only been a wonderfully creative medium for Aroha, it has also been a smart move in getting her work seen internationally, with around 38,000 people being immersed in *Second Life* at any given time.

While Aroha believes 'the possibilities [of this kind of work] are infinite' she does not define herself as a 'techno-geek' and has only been active in the virtual world for four years.

'I'm not a tech person coming into art; rather an artist coming into technology.'

She explored other mediums before finding her

groove in the digital space. 'I'm on a constant learning curve, but I love it,' she exclaims.

Last year she took part in an Australian Centre for Virtual Art (ACVA) lab – a project funded by the Australia Council's Inter-Arts section. It brought 10 artists from around Australia together for a three-day workshop.

'I was the only blackfella there,' Aroha noted.

The lab included sessions on the historical context of virtual art, gave participants the opportunity to view ground-breaking work done by other digital artists and provided additional networking opportunities.

Aroha has enjoyed strong support from ACVA, which loaned her an ACVA sim—rather like renting *Second Life* real estate—for the project. Without this support, it would have been too costly for her to exhibit.

Aroha has attempted to establish a *Second Life* group for Indigenous people, but is waiting for the technology to catch up.

'You need good machines to handle the graphics and lots of us don't have access to that yet. But computers are getting faster and it won't take long.'

*Connections2* was shortlisted for the 27th Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, receiving a highly commended mark from the judges. It was also recently exhibited at the Australia Council's offices as part of a *genart\_sys* exhibition which showcased 19 innovative artists, collectives and organisations.

'I hope this work inspires more of our people to create works in similar environments, because the possibilities are endless. I don't understand why everyone is on Facebook and not on *Second Life* where you can play in a 3D world and contribute to it!'

Aroha will exhibit a new *Second Life* work, *Meandering*, as part of ACVA@ISEA2011, an ACVA presentation for the Inter-Society for the Electronic Arts 2011 conference in Istanbul in September, 2011.

Above left: *Connections2:Gumnuts*.

Above right: *Connections2:Waves*. Photos: Courtesy of the artist

## Vibrant Wakartu talks of country

Reflections from senior Walmajarri artist, Wakartu Cory Surprise.



It is Thursday late March in Fitzroy Crossing, a small town in the Kimberly region of Western Australia. The town is anticipating ‘yitalal’ (cold weather), now that the flood waters have receded and the air carries the smell of composting grass and river mud.

What might a desert woman like Wakartu Cory Surprise make of the flood? There are no rivers, only ‘karru’ (small creeks that run after rain) in her country.

At over 80 years of age, the senior Walmajarri artist—who last year won Australia’s richest Indigenous art prize, the Western Australian Indigenous Art Award—is finally slowing down. She now lives at Gwardi Ngadu, an aged care facility in Fitzroy Crossing.

*Arts Yarn Up* approached Wakartu to learn more about her paintings and what her work is trying to teach others. She is lively and happy to talk, but she takes the conversation on a slightly different trajectory, telling *Arts Yarn Up* she was more interested in the experience of the award ceremony than the ‘fuss’ her paintings caused.

She travelled to Perth to receive her award with fellow painter, Sonia Kurrara, who was awarded the \$10,000 prize for her exuberant paintings of the sacred country around Noonkanbah.

Wakartu remembers the large crowd of *kartiya* (non-Aboriginal people) eating food in the gallery, the strength of the air-conditioning and how she felt at the time.

As with many senior artists, for Wakartu the strength and importance of her work is embedded in the paint and the stories she has told and retold throughout her life.

She spoke quickly and almost entirely in Walmajarri about the subject of her paintings and the country itself. She named the waterholes where she walked, leaving her listeners with a sense that she was back there, walking through the country as she called their names.

Wakartu’s story becomes rich and layered in song and women’s stories. Her daughter Carol arrives and sits close by, listening.

Wakartu talks about the need to respect other people’s countries. ‘Self we paint, we can’t paint other

places, [this] makes trouble,’ she explains.

When asked if her family is following her career path, Wakartu says, ‘No one is painting because they are frightened.’

Carol agrees, saying she is not confident knowing the difference between what she can and cannot paint.

‘I would like to paint but I don’t know all of the secret sites,’ says Carol, highlighting how the younger generation depends on the older generation to pass on their knowledge through stories and songs.

But Wakartu objects to her reticence. ‘All of the paint and calico (canvas) is there, you just need to start,’ she says.

Painting became a passion for Wakartu as a student at Karrayili Adult Education Centre in Fitzroy Crossing in the eighties. The centre used painting as a way to enhance its literacy and numeracy classes and to tell Indigenous stories to non-Indigenous people.

She went on to exhibit her work around Australia over the next 20 years, winning over critics with her intense and vibrant paintings that speak eloquently of her country.

She talks about her days as a student at Karrayili with a great deal of hilarity. ‘The idea of me, an olgaman [old woman] going off to school was so funny,’ she says.

She remains enormously amused by the chiding of her grandchildren, who would joke with her that she had to get to school as they were getting ready for school themselves.

But her enthusiasm for her literacy classes and the depth and breadth of her knowledge of her country highlights a significant and ongoing cultural exchange at many levels. Her paintings provide a glimpse of this exchange — one in which Wakartu has been a strong and willing participant.

Above left: Wakartu Cory Surprise, her daughter Carol and family members. Above right: Wakartu Cory Surprise.

Interview and photos: Courtesy Karen Dayman.

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# Indigenous arts gets injection of new talent

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board of the Australia Council for the Arts has four Indigenous arts leaders appointed to its board.

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The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board is made up of practicing artists, people who work in the arts, or who are community interest representatives. Together they make decisions about who receives grants and what types of activities will help the sector as a whole. Joining current board members,

Leo Akee (Torres Strait Islands), Desmond 'Kootji' Raymond (Northern Territory) and Lee-Ann Buckskin (South Australia), are four new board members: Monica Stevens (Queensland) Melissa Lucashenko (New South Wales) Jeanette James (Tasmania) and Rachael Maza-Long (Victoria). 'We are extremely pleased to

welcome four new board members to contribute to charting the direction for Indigenous arts at a national level,' says board chair, Dr Mark Bin Bakar. 'Their wealth of experience will be invaluable on the board, which is diverse but united in a common journey in retaining, protecting and celebrating our place in Australia.'

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## Rachael Maza-Long

Rachael Maza-Long is one of Australia's most recognisable performers with a long list of film, TV and theatre credits. Rachael has a long list of film, TV and theatre credits. She is Artistic Director of Melbourne's Ilbjerri Theatre, has a long association with Sydney's Company B and has

played leading roles in theatres Australia-wide.

'I'm really excited about the role, but I'm also aware what a huge responsibility this is. This is an opportunity to advocate for the arts to ensure a healthy and vibrant industry,' says Rachael.

'Indigenous arts are experiencing major growth right now and need to be stepping up to the mark—both in calibre and in growing the number of artists out there.'



## Melissa Lucashenko

Melissa Lucashenko is a Yugambah/Bundjalung woman and an award-winning novelist. Her writing explores the stories and passions of ordinary Australians. Melissa is keen to fund projects that are innovative, inspiring and 'make a difference'.

'The appointment means being able to help shape policy in a small

way. It's exciting to get a chance to argue for writers in particular,' she says.

She has an ear for 'the off-beat and marginal' and wants to hear from 'people who don't have much to lose, because they speak a particular kind of truth'.

Melissa is currently working on *Mullumbimby*, a contemporary novel of romantic love and cultural warfare set in a remote New South Wales valley.



## Monica Stevens

Monica is an Aboriginal mBarburum woman and is of Yidinji and Kuku Yalanji ancestry of Far North Queensland. She is a dancer, choreographer and director who brings strength and cultural sensitivity to Australian dance. Monica has performed with the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre, is a founding member of Bangarra Dance Theatre and helped form

the national Indigenous dance peak body BlakDance.

'It's a great honour to be part of the board and to have an opportunity to direct policy. Australia comes out with some great talent that needs to be supported,' says Monica, who is keen to support emerging talent from all age groups, particularly in regional areas.



## Jeanette James

Jeanette James is a traditional shell necklace stringer whose work is in museums and private collections, nationally and internationally. Jeanette received a Telstra Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Award in 2000 for her fine work.

'I'm very proud to be a representative for my community and state,' says Jeanette.

With an interest in unusual artforms and new media, she is encouraging young Tasmanian artists by telling them about funding opportunities.

'I like to see artists who think outside the box a little bit,' she says.

Read more about the board here: [www.australiacouncil.gov.au/artforms/aboriginal\\_and\\_torres\\_strait\\_islander\\_arts](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/artforms/aboriginal_and_torres_strait_islander_arts)

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# Vale Kumanytjayi Napanangka



**Kumanytjayi Napanangka. Born between 1922 and 1932.  
Passed away in January 2011 in Alice Springs.**

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The art world was deeply saddened by the loss of Kumanytjayi Napanangka (Makinti Napanangka) in early January, 2011.

Although Kumanytjayi only took up painting in her seventies, her unique and vibrant style immediately turned her into a leader in the Western desert art movement.

She reached celebrity status in 2008 when she won the country's richest Indigenous art prize, the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award.

Hetti Perkins, Senior Curator, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, told *Arts YarnUp*, 'Kumanytjayi will be remembered as one of the founders of a significant era in the history of Papunya Tula Artists and, more broadly, Australian art.'

'Kumanytjayi's light-filled, kinetic paintings embody a unique artistic interpretation of cultural identity. In her paintings, Kumanytjayi captured the brilliance of desert light, the ever-changing yet constant nature of her country and expressed the joy and vitality of women's ceremony,' says Hetti.

Kumanytjayi's country, people, family and language inspired her life and art.

She was a Pintupi-speaking, Western Desert woman from the Karrkuritinytja (Lake MacDonald) region near the border of the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

In her early years, she led a traditional nomadic life with her people and husband, only encountering white people as a young adult at Lupul near Lake MacDonald. In the late 1950s, she moved with her people to Papunya, a settlement 240 km north-west of Alice Springs. When many Pintupi people returned to their traditional homelands in the 1980s, Kumanytjayi moved with her family to Kintore in the Northern Territory.

The renowned Papunya Tula Artists became a focal point of Kumanytjayi's life when she started painting for the Aboriginal-owned and directed cooperative in 1996.

She painted themes common to many Western Desert artists – water and the creation story of *Kungka Kutjarra* (or two women). Many of her works were associated with a Lupul rockhole, where local legend says she was born.

Despite sharing similar themes to her peers, the General Manager of Papunya Tula Artists, Paul Sweeney, says her works were 'vastly different' in style.



'From the very outset Kumanytjayi defined herself with a purely painterly technique, which reflected an unwavering confidence and ability to "write" in paint exactly what she wanted to say,' he says.

He describes her early works as complex networks of coloured roundels denoting rocks and water sources and says she dedicated hours to creating intense explosions of yellow, orange, lavender and off-white on the canvas.

By the early 2000s, Paul explains, Kumanytjayi's style had shifted to a more minimal palette. She began to replace the tightly-drawn roundels with long, sweeping arcs representing the hair-string skirts of her dancing female ancestors. Yellows and whites became her signature colours, occasionally interrupted by a single stripe of orange or purple.

'Throughout her career, Kumanytjayi passed on through her paintings a clear vision of her spirituality and oneness with her country,' says Paul. 'To the observer they may seem simple, but to study the care and emotion spent marking out those seemingly simple lines is to begin to understand her, not just as an artist, but as a person.'

Kumanytjayi's work is represented in several major public and private collections in Australia and overseas.

Three of Kumanytjayi's children, Ginger, Narrabri and Jacqueline, became artists with Papunya Tula Artists.

She will be greatly missed.

**Untitled, 2008, by Kumanytjayi Napanangka.**

Photo: Courtesy of Papunya Tula Artists



## The two of us

Curators work hard to ensure Indigenous art is recognised and enjoyed by as many people as possible.

**Franchesca Cubillo is the Senior Curator of the Indigenous Galleries at the National Gallery of Australia (NGA). She was born in Darwin and has Yanuwa, Wadaman, Bardi and Larrakia heritage. When Cyclone Tracey hit in 1974, her family moved to Adelaide where Franchesca completed her secondary schooling followed by postgraduate studies in Aboriginal affairs and anthropology. Prior to joining the NGA she worked at the South Australian Museum, the National Museum of Australia, Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Centre and the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.**

### Franchesca's Story

Djon and I have come to the areas of our professional careers from very different directions. At a personal level, I see him like an older brother. At a professional level, a colleague whose opinion I really value. We have a running joke about who's the real curator. He's a curator from an art background and I've come from a museological background.

I've been interested in exhibitions since I worked at the South Australian Museum in the early 1990s. I have always been mindful of my culture and my career path and felt a strong obligation to make these institutions more accountable and accessible to our people, because they are about us and our heritage. I tread carefully and respect the cultural protocols and the instructions from the leaders of the communities. I'm passionate about getting more Indigenous people to work in this area so they can engage and represent our art and culture, our way.

I'm very lucky to be working in an institution where the entire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curatorial staff are Indigenous. I've relished the opportunity to work

with my colleagues, Tina Baum and Kelli Cole. We've just opened the largest display of Indigenous art in the world, spread across 11 new galleries at the National Gallery of Australia. It was an important milestone because the Aboriginal Tent Embassy is just down the road. Forty years ago our communities were fighting just to be recognised as the legal owners of the country.

I met Djon when I was a curator at the South Australian Museum. I was aware of his work in Ramingining in the Northern Territory and the Aboriginal Memorial that he curated—200 hollow log coffins made by 43 Aboriginal men and women. That work is so powerful. It's a bicentennial protest piece, but also a memorial to the Aboriginal people who have died over the past 200 years. It celebrates cultural survival.

Djon always leads with his heart and is determined to follow and stick by his beliefs and principles, but he is also very open to discussion. He's done well against all odds at a time when there was little support for Indigenous people, their art and its place in Australia's art heritage. That hasn't been an easy path. He's arguably Australia's first Indigenous curator and has worked consistently in this area since the late 1970s.

When I came to Canberra, Djon and I shared a house. We've always talked openly about issues that have been problematic for us. We don't always agree, but these discussions would often involve many laughs, cups of tea – or a duck laksa.

Djon commands a lot of respect from people in the industry. He's very smart and charming. His depth and breadth of art knowledge isn't just restricted to the Indigenous sectors. He's always telling me about films, books or artworks he's engaged with, not because it's a job, but because he loves this stuff.



**Djon Mundine OAM is an independent curator, activist, writer, critic and commentator. He has just begun a PhD at the College of Fine Art at the University of New South Wales. He is a Bundjalung person from the north coast of New South Wales and a distinguished, pioneering Indigenous curator with several major exhibitions to his credit. He writes for *Artlink* and *Art Monthly* and publishes reviews. He is currently working on a collection of essays and a stone carving memorial to be installed along the walk to the Sydney Opera House.**

## Djon Mundine's Story

I'm a curator and I'm interested in history; by inference I mean all Aboriginal history. I'm from the Mundine family who are very active politically. Lots of other Aboriginal people know what we do, but it seems people in the press don't—they pursue the sportsmen in our family. My father, Roy Mundine, is from Baryugil [northern New South Wales]. He got us talking about politics and public life and where we came from. He spoke Bundjalung language but had no one to talk to. Trying to keep our family of 13 together with my three sisters and seven brothers was a really big financial struggle for mum and dad. Tony [Boxer, Anthony Mundine's father] and his now-deceased sister came and lived with us in Grafton and we all went to high school in the town.

I went to Darwin in the late 1970s. I think that's when I first met Franchesca but then she went to Adelaide to work at the South Australian Museum. I think I saw her on and off at conferences and such. We were part of a general movement in the 1970s and 1980s which put on exhibitions and tried to get

Aboriginal art to be seen as an important part of Australian art. We were interested in institutional collections and how to get these to people in the community so they could see the history embodied in their objects. We tried to get museums to realise their responsibilities to Aboriginal people.

At the time, a lot of people were going into politics, sloganeering and making demands of government. We really thought about what we wanted, how we could make it happen, rather than burning down a museum or something. Curating is not just a bit of window dressing. It's about how people would like to see themselves and allowing others to understand things clearly.

We were in a special position because of our education and the time in history, but you can't just be ambitious, blunt bastards. In this industry a lot of people are ambitious and walk over the top of other people to get what they want—a bigger job or a bigger name. We weren't interested in that. We wanted to achieve something in the system.

Franchesca thinks through her ideas. People might have seen her as this attractive, quiet, Aboriginal woman and tried to patronise her. But it was very clear to me that she was going to do what she set out to do. She's a quiet achiever who has resolved or rationalised her Aboriginal identity. That's an achievement to start with when you work within the system. She's an intelligent person.

When I was a Visiting Research Fellow at the Australian National University in 2000, Franchesca got the job at the National Museum of Australia and she moved into my spare room in Canberra. It was almost like having family stay. We got on together. We didn't have any religious clashes. She put up with some of my eccentricities.

When we weren't working, we used to walk into town to have Saturday breakfast, or see a film and try to enjoy life a bit. We both had very intense careers and were involved in all these other issues. So we did casual things that allowed us to have discussions and meet people, get out and take a break from our professional lives.

Franchesca doesn't make lots of noise or rage. But she always says her piece and is happy. She's outgoing socially and doesn't put up with crap. I like people who can hold their own in conversations without being aggressive and who can think through ideas. Somebody once said to me, 'You like people who are like yourself!'

Franchesca's legacy will be the current hang of the new wings of the NGA. That's a major achievement, hanging 600 objects. I think she should speak and write more about it. She's a person of humility, someone who has energy and an ability to do things, who's not out blowing her own trumpet. That's rare in the art and culture world.

**Above left: Franchesca Cubillo and Djon Mundine.**

**Photo: Chris Canham.**

## Planning for success



Getting more Indigenous performers onto the world stage—where they can inspire audiences and bring Australian culture to life—is not something that happens by accident; it needs a focused plan of action.

In seeking to assist the sector, the Australia Council for the Arts recently interviewed dozens of Indigenous artists and arts organisations, including its theatre and dance boards, about what could be done to help them.

After much discussion and debate, the Australia Council has now released a collaborative action plan with activities

that will make a real difference to individuals and organisations in the dance and theatre sectors.

The main activities of the new Indigenous Market Development Strategy (2010-2016) are:

- skills development through strategic mentorships with benchmark organisations experienced in touring Indigenous performing arts
- capacity building through resourcing artists and organisations with planning tools for market development and marketing
- growing infrastructure by establishing a national Indigenous touring consortium
- increasing demand by developing a contextualised base for international and national buyers, supporting them to view works 'live' at key Indigenous festivals.

Merindah Donnelly (pictured left), Indigenous Program Officer in the Australia Council's Market Development section says: 'The strategy builds on the growing contemporary Indigenous performing arts scene. It mobilises people and creates pathways to new opportunities for the next generation of producers, directors, actors, playwrights, dancers and choreographers.'

The skills development initiative will offer full-time mentorships to three Indigenous producers, enabling them to spend 18-months in organisations which are experienced in touring.

We will bring you details on those organisations and other developments in the next issue of *Arts YarnUp*.

## Conference young and old: connecting generations

Our feature on the use of digital technology and the intergenerational transfer of knowledge is something that the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) has also been thinking about.

In September this year, it will bring together some of the best minds to consider the key issues facing younger and older Indigenous Australians in urban, regional or remote areas.

The conference, entitled, *Young and old: connecting generations*, will consider the fact that, in 2008, almost half of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was aged under 20 years, while just three per cent was aged 65 years or over.

Leading researchers, policy makers, community members, academics, representative organisations, consultants, traditional owners and service providers will attend.

Topics are likely to include education, health, cultural heritage, arts policy, sport, economics, language anthropology, archives and information technology.

The 2011 AIATSIS National Indigenous Studies Conference will take place from 19-22 September 2011 in Canberra.

**Details:** [www.aiatsis.gov.au](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au).

**Email:** [conference2011@aiatsis.gov.au](mailto:conference2011@aiatsis.gov.au).

**Phone:** 02 6261 4221.

## Closing dates for Australia Council grants 2011

**ArtStart** — up to \$10,000 to help recent arts graduates start viable businesses. Applications for the next round close 27 September, 2011.

**New Work** — the closing dates for grants to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and organisations create new artworks for presentation is 15 July and 18 November, 2011.

**Presentation and Promotion** — grants to support the exhibition, publication, recording, presentation and promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Indigenous artists, organisations and accredited affiliate non-Indigenous arts organisations are welcome to apply by 15 July and 18 November, 2011.

**Fellowships** — these grants provide recognised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists with financial support to develop a major creative work. Fellowships are only available for cross-arts or arts administration projects. Applications close 18 November, 2011.

**The Dreaming Award** — for young and emerging Indigenous artists aged 18-26 years. Applications close 18 November, 2011.

**The Red Ochre Award** — honours an eminent Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander artist who has made an outstanding contribution to the recognition of Indigenous arts in Australia and internationally. Nominations close 18 November, 2011.

**Indigenous Arts Workers Program** — provides funding to employ an Indigenous arts worker. Applications close 15 July, 2011.

**Accelerate Indigenous Leadership Program** — in partnership with the British Council, this new program provides an opportunity for an Indigenous arts leader to undertake a UK residency. Applications close 22 July, 2011.

For more information see [www.australiacouncil.gov.au/grants](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/grants)