

## ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ARTS

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is the oldest living continuous culture in the world, and we cherish the importance of traditional arts practices and the dynamism of new forms of artistic practice. The Council acknowledges the need for artists, arts organisations and communities to participate in a cultural life, and to conserve and innovate traditional and contemporary artistic expressions for future generations to appreciate and engage with, as they understand their cultural inheritance and identity as Indigenous peoples. Artistic and cultural vibrancy are a key focus of the work produced by Indigenous arts organisations.*

In 2014-15 a total of \$10.7 million was invested in arts and cultural activities with a predominantly Indigenous focus, through direct project grants (\$2.3 million), the Major Performing Arts companies, Key Organisations, strategic initiatives, and grants in other areas of practice.

Throughout the year national Indigenous arts forums held about the new grants model and the Strategic Plan engaged some 300 people from metro and regional communities. The introduction of the new grants model resulted in an increased number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expert peers participating in Council assessment panels. The March 2015 grant round highlighted the creative ambition of Indigenous artists, with projects demonstrating artistic innovation and dynamic international collaborations.



Reko Rennie, *Regalia*, 2015. Aluminium, steel, synthetic polymers 240 x 560 cm.  
Image courtesy of the artist and Blackart Projects



Wesley Enoch, Lee Ann Buckskin, Dr Gary Foley, Kahl Wallis and Brenda Croft at the 2015 National Indigenous Arts Awards.

Image credit: Caroline McCredie

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Strategy Panel, guided by the Indigenous Culture Framework, met in August 2014 and May 2015 to consider the cultural dimension of Indigenous artistic expression in the arts ecology.

The strategic scope of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts includes music, dance, theatre, literature, visual arts, festivals, community development and organisations at a national and international level. In addition to core grants, the Australia Council delivered strategic investment and capacity building activities which included: forums, workshops and planning sessions with the board and staff of BlakDance; support for the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair, National Indigenous Festivals forum, National Indigenous Theatre forum, Yellamundie Indigenous playwriting festival, the ACCELERATE alumni program delivered in partnership with the British Council, and significant work in Canada with the Native Earth festival, including roundtable discussions with the Canada Council, Ontario Arts and Indigenous festival producers and curators to develop exchanges, collaborations and a partnership for future activity. In May 2015 the Council consulted with 40 national Indigenous arts organisations to identify strategic priorities for a culturally ambitious nation in partnership with the sector.

The Council's National Indigenous Arts Awards were held on 27 May 2015, celebrating excellence and achievement by exceptional Indigenous artists. These prestigious national awards include the Red Ochre Award for lifetime achievement, two year Fellowships for mid-career and established practising artists, and the Dreaming Award for a young artist to produce a major body of work through a mentorship or in partnership with an organisation. The Red Ochre was awarded to prominent writer, activist, actor and educator Dr Gary Foley. The fellowships were granted to artist, curator and scholar Brenda Croft and visual artist Reko Rennie. The Dreaming was awarded to dynamic young musician Kahl Wallis.