First Nations Curators Program announced for 2017 Venice Biennale

The Australia Council for the Arts has today announced that nine Australian First Nations Curators will take part in an international exchange program at the 57th International Art Exhibition in Venice next week.

Executive Director Strategic Development and Advocacy Dr Wendy Were said that the First Nations Curators Program at the 2017 Venice Biennale builds on the First Nations Curators Exchanges held at 8th Asia Pacific Triennial in 2015 and in New Zealand in 2017. It also aligns with a deep First Nations focus by Australian at the 2017 Venice Biennale, with Tracey Moffatt as the first solo Indigenous artist to represent Australia at this prestigious global art exhibition.

“The week-long professional development opportunity supports Australian First Nations curators to build partnerships based on reciprocal and mutual exchange with other First Nations international curators from Canada, New Zealand and Norway, as well as increasing networks and collaborations between artists and curators,” Dr Were said.

“This delegation of established and mid-career First Nations curators from Australia will mentor the emerging curators attending the Venice Biennale as part of another Australia Council professional development program; participate in a weeklong immersive networking program that will build and leverage vital international connections; and take part in a two-day intensive workshop, which includes a keynote address by respected Indigenous anthropologist and geographer Professor Marcia Langton AM; and generally engage in market development and exchange at one of the great international visual arts gatherings.

“This program has been generously supported by Sam Meers and the Nelson Meers Foundation through the highly successful public-private partnership model of the Venice project,” Dr Were said.

Held during the Vernissage (preview) week of the Venice Biennale, the First Nations Curators program runs from 9 May to 15 May. After an exploratory period of network building and immersion in the Biennale, the participants will have a two day exchange to share practice ideas and responses.

The Australian participants are:

- Bruce Johnson-McLean (QLD)
- Carly Lane (WA)
- Clothilde Bullen (NSW)
- Djon Mundine OAM (NSW)
- Franchesca Cubillo (ACT)
- Nici Cumpston (SA)
- Nicole Foreshew (NSW)
- Stephen Gilchrist (NSW)
- Teho Ropeyarn (QLD)

As part of their professional development, the Australian First Nations Curators will network and be involved in various sessions with First Nations Canadian, New Zealand and Norwegian Curators, with a particular focus on critical discourse; how to critique our own culture; the value of First Nations expression and having agency; and ways to strengthen and improve artist collaborations and exchange. This year has also provided the opportunity for two First Nations Curatorial Assistants, Hannah Pressley and Coby Edgar, to be part of this remarkable project.
The First Nations Curators program will run alongside and intersect with the Australia Council’s broader Venice Biennale Professional Development Program which has been in place for 20 years, supporting more than 150 arts workers to attend and work at the Biennale. This year 40 visual arts professionals will benefit from these professional development opportunities, with two thirds identifying as First Nations peoples – the largest representation to date. This year the programs enable established and emerging curators, arts writers and arts professionals to develop their skills and deepen their arts knowledge while networking and connecting with overseas peers, artists and organisations.

**2017 Australian First Nations Curators:**


**Clothilde Bullen (NSW)** is a Wardandi Aboriginal woman with English/French heritage. She commenced as Curator of Indigenous Art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in January 2005, after previously managing a commercial art gallery. Clothilde worked for Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company after departing the Art Gallery of Western Australia in 2015 and was an independent curator and writer at this time. Clothilde’s last independently curated exhibition was *Darkness on the edge of Town* at Artbank in Sydney. Clothilde has been a sitting member of the University of Western Australia’s Cultural Collections Committee, an Australia Council Peer Assessor, a board member of Yirra Yaakin Theatre and committee member with the National Indigenous Advisory Reference Group (Australia Council for the Arts) and the Wesfarmers Indigenous Advisory Committee. Clothilde has written for a range of publications including *Artlink* and *Sturgeon* as well as feature essays for *Artsource*, *Next Wave*, the *National Indigenous Art Triennial* in 2009 and 2017, *Being Tiwi* and numerous catalogues. Clothilde has been a judge for numerous awards including the Fremantle Print Award, the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award and recently the John Fries Award, as well as presenting at a variety of forums including as one of the moderators for the Artists Forum Tarnanthi in 2015, and for Kaldor Public Art: Spotfire 2 public symposium, as part of Jonathan Jones exhibition *barrangal dyara*. Clothilde has curated 15 exhibitions and is a British Council Accelerate Alumnus, receiving the scholarship in 2014. Clothilde has recently moved to Sydney to take up the position of Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Exhibitions and Collections at the Museum of Contemporary Art.

**Carly Lane (WA)** is the Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. She is a Murri woman from Queensland and has lived in Perth for more than 20 years. Carly has been working as a curator for roughly the same time. She has worked in both museums and art galleries, including the Berndt Museum, National Museum of Australia, National Gallery of Australia and Art Gallery of Western Australia; and as an independent curator. At different
times since 2002, Carly has worked as a curator and associate curator at the Art Gallery of WA. She was formally appointed to the newly named position of Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art. Carly was the inaugural curator of the Western Australian Indigenous Art Awards, and guest curated the second National Indigenous Art Triennial for the National Gallery of Australia. In 2017, she curated Everyone has a History: Part One – Plain Speak, which was the Art Gallery of WA’s contribution to the Perth International Arts Festival in 2017.

Djon Mundine OAM (NSW) is a member of the Bandjalung people of northern New South Wales. Djon has an extended career as a curator, activist, writer, and occasional artist and is reknowned as the concept curator for the Aboriginal Memorial installation permanently exhibited at the National Gallery of Australia. Djon was awarded an OAM in 1993 and was Research Professor at Minpaku Museum of Ethnology in Osaka over 2005-2006. He is currently Indigenous Curator-Contemporary Art at the Campbelltown Art Centre.

Franchesca Cubillo (ACT) is a Larrakia, Bardi, Wardaman and Yanuwa woman from the ‘Top End’ of the Northern Territory. Until recently Franchesca was senior curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the National Gallery of Australia where she is now a Senior Advisor. She was privileged to lead the curatorial team in developing 11 purpose-built Indigenous Australian art galleries, the largest display of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in the world. In 2006, Franchesca undertook a Churchill Fellowship to investigate international responses to the repatriation of the ancestral remains of Indigenous nations worldwide. For a number of years, she was the Senior Curator of Aboriginal Art and Material Culture at the Museum and Art Gallery of Northern Territory where she developed the collection, curated several Indigenous art exhibitions and delivery the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Islander Art Award. Her professional journey has taken her across the country and she have worked with many Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory as well as in communities in the western and eastern Kimberley region, the lower Murray River region of South Australia and parts of north Queensland. She is a member of the Australia Council for the Arts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy Panel.

Nici Cumpston (SA) is an artist, a curator, a writer and an educator who is of Afghan, English, Irish and Barkindji Aboriginal heritage, a descendant of the Darling River people of north western, New South Wales, Australia. She is currently employed by the Art Gallery of South Australia as Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art and has recently been appointed as ongoing Artistic Director of the prestigious TARNANTHI | Festival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Visual Art from 2017 – 2021. She has been exhibiting her own works of art since 1998 and is represented in most major Australian public institutions as well as many prestigious private collections.

Nicole Foreshew (NSW) is a Sydney-based Aboriginal artist, writer and curator and a member of the Wiradjuri nation, Central West NSW, Australia, working across a range of mediums, from photomedia to sculpture, film and video. In 2015, Nicole was Curatorial Fellow at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney and Primavera Curator, MCA’s annual exhibition of young Australian artists aged 35 and under. In 2014, Nicole was the NSW Aboriginal Art Fellowship Recipient administered by Arts NSW and the winner of the prestigious NSW Aboriginal Parliamentary Prize. Nicole has completed an international artist residency at the Parramatta Artist Studios residency program in Montreal, Canada at the Darling Fonderie studios in partnership with the Canadian Council for the Arts, 2012 and was awarded NSW Parliamentary Prize College of Fine Arts Professional Development Award in 2012. Nicole has taken part in several notable group shows across Australia and internationally, most notably in Maamungun Compatriots, a group exhibition with works by Michael Riley at Lalit Kala Akademi; Australia’s Oz Fest Festival in India in 2012; Shadowlife at Bendigo Art Gallery, curated by
Natalie King and Djon Mundine in 2013; a major public artwork commission *Born in Darkness Before Dawn; 2013 for Place Projections; Eora Journey*, a City of Sydney arts initiative, curated by Hetti Perkins; *Hereby Make Protest* at Carriageworks, 2014: *Wiradjuri Ngarumbanggu* at the newly opened Murray Art Museum Albury, 2015; and *Shimmer* at the JamFactory, part of Tamanthi – the inaugural Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, South Australia 2015.

**Stephen Gilchrist (NSW)** belongs to the Yamatji people of the Inggarda language group of northwest Western Australia. Stephen is Associate Lecturer of Indigenous Art at the University of Sydney. He is a writer and curator who has worked with the Indigenous Australian collections of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (2003–05); the British Museum, London (2008); the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2005–10); the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, New Hampshire (2011–13); and the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University (2014–16). He has curated numerous exhibitions in Australia and the United States and has written extensively on Indigenous art from Australia. He is currently completing his PhD at the University of Sydney.

**Teho Ropeyarn (QLD)** is an emerging artist and curator from the community of Injinoo, Cape York Peninsula, Queensland, Australia. Teho is a descendant of the Seven Rivers Peoples of Angkamuthi, and Yadhaykana clan group located on the west and east coasts of Northern Cape York Peninsula. He has extended heritage to Moa, Badu and Murray Island in the Torres Strait and Woppaburra – Great Keppel Island and the Butchalla people from Fraser Island. Teho was selected as one of 10 participants to undertake the Wesfarmers Indigenous Arts Leadership intensive program at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra in 2013. In January, Teho commenced a new position at the Cairns Regional Gallery as Assistant Curator. Prior to taking up the new role, Teho worked for UMI Arts Ltd as a Gallery Curator. Teho first commenced work with UMI Arts as an Indigenous Development Officer in 2011 and then promoted as the company's first Gallery Curator in 2013. Teho established the organisation's visual arts programs setting a benchmark with a range of programs to support and progress Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists from Far North Queensland.

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