



# ABORIGINAL IMAGINATION

5 – 21 February 2004  
Blacktown Arts Centre Gallery

# ABORIGINAL IMAGINATION: AN INDIGENOUS SCREEN AND NEW MEDIA ARTS EXHIBITION

*Aboriginal Imagination* is about Indigenous people taking control. Taking control of the images representing their culture, taking control of their media and its production; taking control of translations of their knowledge systems. *Aboriginal Imagination* is also about showing us different ways of understanding and using technology in the development of creative expressions.

This exhibition gives us fresh, exciting, even raw perspectives of differing elements of contemporary Aboriginal Australia. The images presented have been taken through the artists' own eyes and not through the lens of a white man's camera. Aboriginal lifestyles have been cultures of study for many, many years. With this history came misinterpretations and misappropriations. But 'new media' or 'digital' technologies in the hands of these artists have the ability to change all this. Not only are they tools for making art, but they are also important mediums for the recording and preservation of language, knowledge systems and cultural activities.

New media art is a hybrid practice; so is Indigenous art. This exhibition showcases four works that demonstrate this mix.

Warlpiri (PAW) Radio Network to eleven communities across the Central Western Desert Region. Their video production facilities, music recording studio and now web-based new media works have received national and international acclaim.

Media and misappropriation of culture have been concerns for Warlpiri people for a long time. Even before national television was seen in the desert (early 1980s), Aboriginal people were experimenting with video production as a means of recording cultural information and communication. No wonder, when the first Australian owned satellite AUSSAT was launched which would bring national television to remote communities for the first time, concern was raised about the cultural appropriateness of the programming, and for the level of local content.

WMA became both a hub through which all television and radio programs coming into the community were controlled. Not realised by many, interactive television has been operating in Central Australia for decades. WMA broadcasts locally produced television programs, news, and events by interrupting one of the national broadcasters' signals to transmit to the community - this is soon to change with the launch of a local Indigenous TV station with a broadcast signal of its own, PAW TV. Yuendumu transmission commenced in October 2003 on a dedicated channel. WMA's video production is extensive,

adventure as it turns out, with a group of young Warlpiri men who play in a band together. They are driving to Alice Springs for a gig. With no mechanics, tools or parts around for kilometres, the boys use their knowledge of the land and its resources to fix any problems they encounter. The richness of this documentary lies in its humour. It is fundamental, almost slap-stick in its approach. The boys seem to have an ability to laugh at themselves while laughing at others viewing this work.

It demonstrates an Indigenous or 'bush' ingenuity, resourcefulness and an ability to adapt to any situation they confront. This document gives a contemporary insight into the ways Indigenous culture has always changed and adapted according to the resources available at the time. In this way, the technologies they have developed are used for their own means. It is not a 'static' culture. Their lifestyles constantly reflect the changing environments, resources and technologies.

*Bush Mechanics-The Game* is another example where the WMA is experimenting with different forms of technology, and interactivity. Here the audience becomes the players of the game, interacting as passengers in the car. The desert environment is transformed into a screen-based world of bold, colourful and totally striking visuals. Instead of straight video, the 'Bush Mechanics' concept is translated into a fusion of animation, graphic design,

the Northern Territory. His grandmother's country is Gurindji country in the direction of Kalkaringi in the Northern Territory, an Aboriginal town formally known as Wave Hill. His grandfather's country is located near Roper River up towards the Limmen Bight region of the Northern Territory. This is the area of the Ngalakarn, Mara and Bundiyarng people.

Jason's work gives an insight into the ways in which Aboriginal art and culture is incorporating modern technology. It is about reclaiming and restating his culture within the dominant frameworks of western health sciences. His artwork is now in a class of its own; reflecting the diversity of Aboriginal culture and the potential for multimedia technologies to become a very powerful voice for his people.

"My work is about being strong for my culture. It is saying that Aboriginal culture can play an equal part with technology in guiding our future; that Aboriginal ways and understandings are equally valid. I want our cultural knowledge to be taken seriously."

Jason strives to represent a more holistic approach to understanding and communicating Aboriginal knowledge by taking scientific structures and integrating them with understandings of spirit, function and survival. This is the basis for his Masters Degree titled *Aboriginal Imagination* - an



Warlpiri Media Association is an independent, non-profit Indigenous broadcasting and production organization managed by local residents and has been in operation for nearly 20 years throughout the Central Western Desert of Australia. It is based in Yuendumu, a remote community some 300 kilometres north west of Alice Springs supporting a fluctuating population of some 900 Warlpiri speaking people and 100 non-Indigenous people. However WMA's service to Indigenous communities is much wider with the daily broadcast of Pintupi-Anmatjerre-

with an archive of over 1000 tapes consisting of broadcasted news readings, recorded ceremonies, sporting and school events, 13 episodes of *Manyu Wana* (a Warlpiri language children's program) many of which have been broadcast nationally including *Night Patrol*, *Marluku Wirliny!* (The Kangaroo Hunters), *Jardiwarnpa* (Fire Ceremony) and the most famous exhibited here, *Bush Mechanics*. The most recent production is *Mangarri* (The Warlpiri Cooking Show).

Completed in 1998, *Bush Mechanics* is a 30 minute documentary first seen on ABC in 1999. For many non-Indigenous Australians this was the first time they had seen anything like this. *Bush Mechanics* takes us on a journey, or

image and sound (though minimal sound at this stage). One of the attractions to this game is its inherent simplicity. The interactivity introduces another dimension to the 'Bush Mechanics' experience. We as the audience become the problem solvers. We are presented with the challenge, and with a variety of solutions to choose from. In doing so, we get an insight into how Indigenous people think and do. Wittingly, the humour is inherent in this piece as well. While playing the game, one can't help feeling the joke is on us.

Jason Davidson is a contemporary Aboriginal artist from the Northern Territory. His family was assimilated by the Australian Government through the process of the 'Stolen Generation', in

interactive DVD that coincides with his thesis. Here Jason is working on developing more culturally appropriate education materials for Aboriginal health education by using art, Aboriginal knowledge and technology.

Jason states that the title *Aboriginal Imagination* came from a jam session with lead singer from WILD WATER band, Djolpa Mckenzie. "We never had all the flash recording studio equipment to record this song it was recorded live with a digital video camera, no microphone for the singer just that camera recording the

music and video footage... Two guitars and a keyboard with the background drum beat and Djolpa singing.”

Jason works with new media technologies in both the conceptual development and production of his art. In these new multimedia pieces, Jason's practice incorporates graphics design, animation, narrative and music to presents us with the opportunity to see view his own culture through his eyes and interpretations.

*The Hunting Stories* documents the skills and knowledges inherent in these important practices. Understanding of the habitat, behaviour and physiology of the respected animal are shown in short video presentations. *Kidney Problems in Aboriginal Australia have now reached Epidemic Proportions* creates a visual package, including animations, that illustrates the appearance, workings and relationships of the kidneys to other body functions.

This physiological knowledge has been the inspiration of much of the Indigenous x-ray style art - including Jason's own earlier works, also shown in *Aboriginal Imagination*.

Jason strongly believes the current health education materials for Aboriginal renal patients are not good as they looked like stick figured

between healing, spirituality, discipline and health through the metaphors and movements of martial arts practice. Indigenous ways of learning are also explored in this piece by acknowledging the role of the leader or elder statesman, and in the careful attention paid to observation, imitation and practice when passing on skills and knowledges.

Jason states that this project was put together to pay tribute to a great teacher and to remind students involved in the project to make time to continue training. “Our teacher sadly passed away during the development of this project and it was a very difficult project for the group to put together... I must state that I have learned a lot through training and the discipline of martial art, it has given me a new found confidence.”

Indigenous new media artists have much to offer in understanding where the boundaries and future capabilities of technology lie - working alongside technology, bending and extending it for their own cultural means, rather than allowing it to control us as a master.

kindergarten images drawn in black and white. “I believe Aboriginal people are being psychologically discriminated against through some of the health education materials being used... It is like saying that Aboriginal people are not clever enough to learn from complicated images... I wanted to prove that hunting stories was the best way to educate Aboriginal on people on the kidney, where it is in the body and what it looks like etc...”

*In Martial Arts and Multimedia, Tribute to Wally Nickels*, Jason explored relationships

Linda Cooper, 2004.

*Linda Cooper is a new media exhibition producer and writer interested in cross cultural initiatives, based in Adelaide Australia.*



## WARLPIRI MEDIA

### **Bush Mechanics 1998**

**30minutes, Video and film**

Acknowledgements: WMA Manager & Producer Tom Kantor, Francis Jupurrurla Kelly and Adrian Jupurrurla Nelson in Yuendumu and Director David Batty.



### **Bush Mechanics-The Game 2002**

**Macromedia Flash**

Acknowledgements for Bush Mechanics Game Concept: Francis Jupurrurla Kelly, Steven Jupurrurla Morton, Kasman Jungarrayi Spencer, Gordon Jangala Robertson, Donovan Jampijinpa Rice, Liam Campbell and Robin Cave.



## JASON DAVIDSON

### **Martial Arts and Multimedia, Tribute to Wally Nickels 2003**

**Mini DV video footage, animation, graphic design.**

Music by Mark Strother. Developed with the support of Grove Studios.

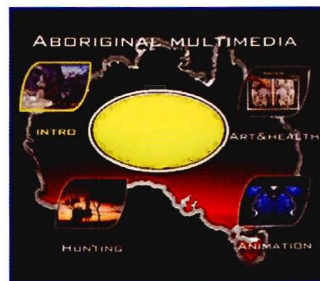


### **Aboriginal Imagination 2003**

**Mini DV video footage, animation, graphic design.**

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Music by Jason Davidson, Liam Kelliher, Djolpa Mckenzie, Noeletta Mckenzie, Gurruwiwi Jeffrey Gurruwiwi, Debbie Hake, Tyrone Lynch. Developed with the support of Grove Studios and Director Mark Strother.



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dLux media arts is a screen, sound and new media arts organisation which develops, exhibits, promotes and advocates for screen, sound and new media arts. dLux media arts is a not for profit member based organisation, if you are interested in becoming a member please email us at [dlux@dlux.org.au](mailto:dlux@dlux.org.au)

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