



art + soul



3 x 1 hour documentary series
screening, from thursday,
october 7 at 8.30pm on ABC1



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a personal journey into the world of aboriginal art

art + soul is a 3 x 1 hr documentary series made by Warwick Thornton & Hetti Perkins.

art + soul is the powerful and emotionally engaging television series about contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, and the artists that create it.

Hetti Perkins, the writer and presenter of **art + soul**, is an Eastern Arrernte and Kalkadoon desert woman, Senior Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), daughter of political activist Charles Perkins and sister of filmmaker Rachel Perkins (*First Australians*, *Bran Nue Dae*).



With great generosity she shares her extraordinary knowledge of Aboriginal art, visiting the homes and studios of artists in remote desert communities, the tropical top end, and in urban environments. She also brings personal anecdotes to the fore, recalling her family's own story, and her father's legacy.

Hetti Perkins: *"Art for me is a way for our people to share stories and allow a wider community to understand our history and us as a people."*

episode one: home and away

Screening, Thursday October 7 at 8.30pm on ABC1

What does it mean to be 'at home' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? Is it where you live, or the 'country' you are exiled from?

episode two: dreams and nightmares

Screening, Thursday October 14 at 8.30pm on ABC1

From the 'dreaming' to the unsettling nightmare of colonisation, what is the role of memory, dreams and the spirit world in Aboriginal art?

episode three: bitter and sweet

Screening, Thursday October 21 at 8.30pm on ABC1

How does the startling beauty – and humour – of Aboriginal art intertwine with reverberations of the past and our present?

episode one: home and away

Screening, Thursday October 7 at 8.30pm on ABC1

Hetti Perkins drives west from Mparntwe (Alice Springs) in Central Australia to Walungurru (Kintore), now home to about 400 people and the newly-built headquarters of the Papunya Tula Artists co-operative, where Chair and artist **BOBBY WEST TJUPURRULA**, takes us into the studio.

We tell the story of the genesis of the influential Western Desert painting movement in the 1970s, borne out of a longing for 'country' by a community dispirited by their forced resettlement far from their homelands.



Women artists, including **NAATA NGUNGURRAYI** (pictured above meticulously applying dots while singing her 'country'), only assumed prominence in the mid-1990s and have invigorated the desert painting movement.

Brisbane-based **JUDY WATSON** incorporates drawings of objects that were once part of the lives of her ancestors into her wonderful paintings; it is her way of repatriating them, of 'bringing them home'.

Ancient stories are passed down to future generations through art. In Arnhem Land mischievous Mimih spirits dwell in rock art galleries and appear in **CRUSOE KURDDAL's** elegant carvings and dances. Mimihs and other beings were centre stage in the early work of the distinguished bark painter **JOHN MAWURNDJUL**, although his paintings have since evolved to the abstract depiction of the beings power.

We meet Flinders Island based photographer **RICKY MAYNARD** whose portraits of his community create an intimate dialogue between photographer and subject.



DESTINY DEACON remembers being briefly homeless as a child, after the family relocated to Melbourne from the Torres Strait. Now her home is the 'stage' for her constructed photographs, using whatever is to hand (including her endless collection of black dolls).

Way west of Alice Springs lies the isolated community of Kiwirrkura, the most remote outpost of Papunya Tula Artists. Here we meet artists **WARLIMPIRRNGA TJAPALTJARRI** and **YUKULTJI NAPANGATI**, two of the family who 'came in' from the desert in 1984 – the so-called 'last of the nomads'.

DOREEN REID NAKAMARRA (pictured above with Hetti) talks about how her art represents her husband's country. She is about to travel to New York, with **YUKULTJI NAPANGATI**, for an exhibition - their first overseas trip.

episode two: dreams and nightmares

Screening, Thursday October 14 at 8.30pm on ABC1

At the AGNSW, about 100 fruit bats hang upside down from a Hills Hoist. It's one of the most popular permanent artworks there. *"It is the only sculpture I have done that doesn't have some degree of anger,"* artist **LIN ONUS** has said of his irreverent sculpture. To Hetti Perkins it speaks of *"a kind of suburban dreaming"* in which the Aboriginal culture that swirls around us all has collided with the Western dream of home ownership.

The non-Indigenous term, the 'dreaming', refers to the creation era in which ancestral spirit beings shaped the land. They still live within the land. Gija

artist **PATRICK MUNG MUNG** (pictured above, standing outside Texas Downs), from Warmun, in the East Kimberley, tells the story of **ROVER THOMAS**, who started painting after Cyclone Tracy in 1974, when he 'received' a ceremony via a series of dreams. In 1990, he was one of the first Aboriginal artists included in the Venice Biennale, the world's most prestigious art event.



YVONNE KOOLMATRIE weaves the past into her sculptural forms – often based on traditional eel traps – evoking the history of her people in the Riverland and Coorong regions of South Australia.

Past, present and future often merge in contemporary Aboriginal art. When the AGNSW acquired 17 evocative Tutini funeral poles from Melville Island in 1959 it was the first time a gallery, rather than a museum, had exhibited contemporary Aboriginal art. Nearly 40 years later, Hetti vividly recalls the dramatic affect those poles had on Tiwi Islands artist **PEDRO WONAEAMIRRI**. We travel to meet Pedro on Melville Island, where he takes us to remote places, significant for Tiwi culture.

Adelaide-based **BRENDA L CROFT** has drawn upon an intriguing collection of 1950s slides of her father mixing in white society. Such images were rare, yet she knows he suffered from being a member of the Stolen Generations forcibly removed from his family. Joseph Croft was a life-long friend of Hetti's father Charles.



Nightmares play a role in contemporary Aboriginal art. The unique and colourful paintings of **HARRY WEDGE**, from Erambie mission, Cowra in NSW, are fueled by memories from his childhood and his struggles with alcoholism, and sensational current affairs stories.

Linguist **JENNY GREEN** talks about the life of the great **EMILY KAM NGWARRAY** and how her sensuous landscapes of her country around Utopia, Central Australia, illustrated her connection to culture and attracted unprecedented fame. Hetti wonders if, late in

life, the pressure to continue painting was Ngwarray's nightmare. **JACKIE KURLTJUNYINTJA GILES TJAPALTJARRI** (pictured above with Warwick and Hetti in front of his artwork), whose massive work adorns a wall at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School in Sydney, shares his tjukurpa [dreaming].

episode three: bitter and sweet

Screening, Thursday October 21 at 8.30pm on ABC1

TOMMY McRAE's exquisite 1830s drawings chronicle Aboriginal life and the arrival of squatters and gold diggers. He lived on the Murray River in Victoria, and was one of a small cluster of artists who documented with delicate beauty the transformation of his world.

The story of the success of **ALBERT NAMATJIRA** is bitter sweet. Loved for his watercolours of the majestic MacDonnell Ranges, he was caught between two worlds. His legacy lives on in the work of many descendants, who paint in his watercolour style. We meet **IVY PAREROULTA** and **LENIE NAMATJIRA**.



Namatjira inspired South East Arnhem Land's **GINGER RILEY MUNDUWALAWALA** (pictured above) whose richly colourful canvasses are powerful celebrations of country and culture.



So, too, is the work of East Kimberley artist **RUSTY PETERS** (pictured left), including *Waterbrain*, which tells the story of how knowledge is acquired, as told to Rusty by his grandfather. Now in the collection of the AGNSW, only two walls are long enough to display this extraordinary work. Rusty takes us to his country, now home to vast pastoral estates – from which he has lived most of his life in exile.

Photographer **MERVYN BISHOP** has documented, without judgement, many of the changes in the Aboriginal community through his work; he talks about his most famous image – Prime Minister Gough Whitlam symbolically pouring sand into the hand of traditional landowner Vincent Lingiari.

Hetti Perkins points out that she was ineligible to be counted in the census when she was born! Schooled from an early age by her activist father Charles Perkins, she sees Aboriginal art as inextricably linked to politics.

Brisbane artist **RICHARD BELL** refers to the controversy around Telstra's \$40,000 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art prize in 2003. His winning painting carried the text 'Aboriginal Art - It's a White Thing'; Richard recalls the radical black power movement of the 1970s.

MICHAEL RILEY's exquisite photographs explore faith, mythology and Christianity. Hetti, a close friend, talks about his work very intimately.

Senior Yolngu elder **GAWIRRIN GUMANA**, who painted parts of the celebrated panels at Yirrkala's church in East Arnhem Land, grants a rare interview in front of his own panels (which are too revered in the community to be filmed in full).

And finally, Yolngu artist **GULUMBU YUNUPINGU** (on the right is an inset of the artist painting) interprets her portraits of the constellations as a way of connecting all humanity, sending a message of loving harmony – we are all one, like the stars we can see, and those we can't.



filmmaker biographies:



HETTI PERKINS, WRITER AND PRESENTER. Hetti Perkins is "*the absolute Google Earth of Indigenous art*" according to **art + soul** director and cinematographer Warwick Thornton. She is senior curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the AGNSW. Hetti developed her passion for Aboriginal art when she was a teenager. She recalls an exhibition of the Papunya Tula artists at the National Gallery of Victoria which had a profound effect on her. Her passion was partly fed by her mother Eileen. A bureaucrat's wife in Canberra, she set up an Aboriginal art gallery in the family garage for the enjoyment of international visitors. At that time, Aboriginal culture was absent in the national capital. Hetti's father wasn't just any bureaucrat of course: he was Charles Perkins, Australia's best-known Aboriginal activist. The family's life was steeped in politics.

When Hetti relocated to Sydney to study, Redfern was the pulse of black creativity, the focal point for political activism among Aboriginal people. Initiatives were springing up everywhere; alongside services addressing health and housing needs, were visual arts enterprises such as the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, where Hetti worked for a while as curator.

Hetti has been at the AGNSW since 1998. She manages the permanent collection, makes choices about acquisitions, and stages exhibitions. She is a key player in taking Aboriginal art to international audiences, particularly through Australia's contribution to the 1997 Venice Biennale, *fluent*, and to the recent Musée du quai Branly in Paris, in which the work of eight contemporary Aboriginal artists was incorporated into the walls and ceilings of one of the new buildings. Hetti has produced a number of major publications including the exhibition catalogues for *fluent*, *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius*, *Crossing Country: The Alchemy of WWestern Arnhem Land Art*, and *Half Light: Portraits from Black Australia*, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collection handbook, *Tradition Today: Indigenous Art in Australia*. The major anthology of scholarly essays and artist interviews surveying Indigenous art in Australia, *One Sun, One Moon: Indigenous Art in Australia*, was published in 2007. She has also written the essays for **art + soul** the book.



WARWICK THORNTON, DIRECTOR / CINEMATOGRAPHER.



Nana (2008) won major prizes at the Berlin International Film Festival.

Warwick Thornton's debut feature *Samson & Delilah* won the Camera d'Or at Cannes in May 2009 and kept on winning the attention of judges and audience acclaim across the world. It was one of nine films shortlisted in the category for foreign language films in the Academy Awards in 2010. Warwick started giving audiences fly-on-the-wall access to contemporary Indigenous lives long before *Samson & Delilah*. His first short drama was *Payback* (1996) and he followed it up with *Mimi* (2002). The half-hour *Green Bush* (2005) and



BRIDGET IKIN, PRODUCER. Bridget Ikin's feature film credits include Jane Campion's *An Angel at My Table* (Silver Lion, Venice Film Festival, 1990), Alison Maclean's *Crush* (In Competition, Cannes, 1992), Clara Law's *Floating Life* (Silver Leopard, Locarno, 1996) and two films from Sarah Watt, *Look Both Ways* (AFI Best Film, 2005) and *My Year Without Sex*. She continues to champion new and innovative filmmaking - including the work of Indigenous filmmakers. **art + soul** is her first documentary project. (Bridget Ikin and Warwick pictured left.)

JO-ANNE MCGOWAN, PRODUCER. Australian Film, Television and Radio School graduate Jo-anne McGowan has produced several documentaries and dramas including *small confessions* (1993), starring Geoffrey Rush, and *Troubled Waters* (winner, Dendy Award, Sydney Film Festival, 2002). In 2002 she produced *Kabbarli*, a short feature on the life of anthropologist and writer Daisy Bates, for the Adelaide Festival.

personal perspectives from the creators:

Hetti Perkins. 'I hope **art + soul** gives an intimate view of our culture, in all its diversity and complexity. I want to give viewers access to some of the amazing experiences I've been privileged to have, and to introduce them to the unique personalities behind the work we see on gallery walls.

The series does not attempt to be a survey, or to chart the contemporary art movement by region or chronology or marketplace.

Rather, it explores a world of imagination and ideas, and reflects on how the merging of past and present, tradition and change, is a key aspect of our enduring heritage and its present-day artistic expressions. I feel it's a timely and unique series because we are on the cusp of a fundamental transition in modern Australian society. Within our

lifetime, within this generation, we will lose living memory of what it was like before contact with white people. Many of the artists we meet lived, as young men and women, completely separated from non-Indigenous Australia.

art + soul celebrates a dynamic contemporary art movement that is the legacy of the world's oldest continuous cultural tradition. More broadly it celebrates the phenomenal tenacity of a culture that has helped to sustain us during a period of extraordinarily fast and dramatic transition.'

Warwick Thornton. 'Over 40,000 years of love, life, sorrow and tragedy is contained in **art + soul**, represented through canvas, celluloid, sculpture, carvings, and other mediums used by my people to convey their knowing, knowledge and opinion. It also contains Hetti's opinions. Soon, the opinions of viewers will come into play.

My role was to provide the right time and place for the information and opinions to unfold, and to create a place of comfort for Hetti. Her scripts placed the artists and their art deep in Indigenous life, the very place where opinions were formed, fostered and churned into what we call art. The artists and their surroundings guided my decisions. As an Aboriginal man from Central Australia, the themes of **art + soul** struck a chord in my heart. The real work had already been done before we arrived and was hanging on walls and lying under gum trees and on dry creek beds. That made the pleasure all mine.'



- A lavishly illustrated book, also titled **art + soul**, published by The Miegunyah Press, featuring extending essays by Hetti Perkins, will be available from October 1.
- To coincide with the TV series, the Art Gallery NSW is holding an **art + soul** exhibition in the Yiribana Gallery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, from October 2.
- October 2-4: a free open weekend of events at the AGNSW, featuring workshops, talks and performances with artists included in the **art + soul** series.

art + soul was produced and HIBISCUS FILMS in association with SCREEN AUSTRALIA, SCREEN NSW, the ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES and the AUSTRALIA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS. **art + soul** was developed and produced in association with the AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION (ABC TV). **Amanda Duthie**, Executive Producer for ABC TV.



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