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art+soul

Series Two

Press kit

Revealing the heritage, politics and imagination in contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art

A three-part documentary series for ABC1 written and presented by Hetti Perkins

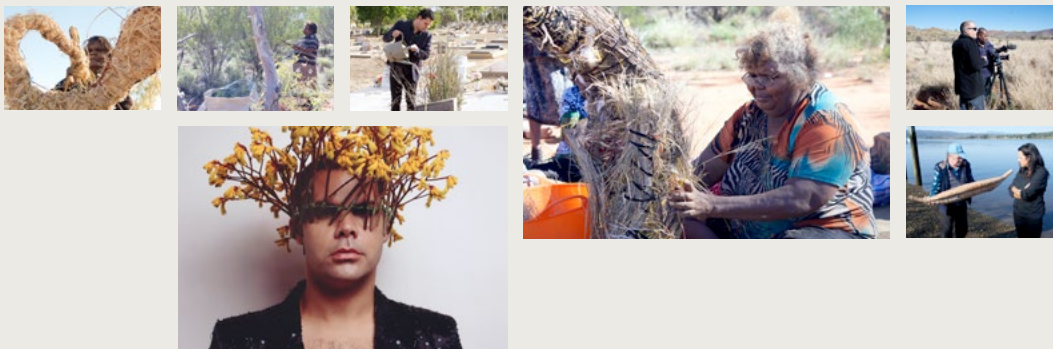
Premiering on
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as part of NAIDOC week

Screening on
July 8, 15 and 22, 2014.

Directed by Steven McGregor

Produced by Bridget Ikin
and Jo-anne McGowan

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art + soul

Series Two



TITLEPAGE: HETTI PERKINS + THE ABORIGINAL MEMORIAL, 1987-8

THIS PAGE (TOP TO BOTTOM): CHRISTIAN THOMPSON, UNTITLED #4 [YELLOW KANGAROO PAW] COLLECTION TITLE: AUSTRALIAN GRAFFITI, 2008; HECTOR BURTON, RAY KEN, MICK WILKILYIYRI, BRENTON KEN, PUNU-NGURU (FROM THE TREES), 2013, COURTESY TJALA ARTS; VERNON AH KEE, AUSTRACISM, 2003. ALL WORKS COLLECTION NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA, UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED

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SUMMARY INFORMATION

Partners

SCREEN AUSTRALIA
and HIBISCUS FILMS
in association with
THE ACT GOVERNMENT,
ScreenACT, SCREEN TERRITORY
and the NATIONAL GALLERY OF
AUSTRALIA

Developed and produced in association
with the AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING
CORPORATION



Key credits

Writer/presenter
HETTI PERKINS

Director
STEVEN MCGREGOR

Producers
BRIDGET IKIN and
JO-ANNE MCGOWAN

Director of Photography
ERIC MURRAY LUI

Sound recordist
DAVID TRANTER

Editors
LINDI HARRISON,
ELLIOTT MAGEN

Sound Design
LIAM EGAN

Composer
GEORGE PAPANICOLAOU

Technical information

Length:	3 x 57minutes
Sound:	Stereo Mix (Dolby LtRt) and 5.1 Dolby Surround Sound
Aspect ratio:	16:9
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A diverse group of outstanding contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists reveal to Hetti Perkins how their art practice is driven by culture and heritage, political and personal preoccupations, dreams and imagination.

One Paragraph Synopsis

A diverse group of outstanding contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists reveal to pre-eminent curator Hetti Perkins how their art practice is driven by culture and heritage, political and personal preoccupations, dreams and imagination. Using the National Gallery of Australia's extraordinary Indigenous collection as the springboard, we travel with Hetti through cities and desert communities, museums and artists' private spaces, to experience the diversity and beauty of the art, and to learn of its genesis.

Extended Synopsis

A diverse group of outstanding contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists reveal to pre-eminent curator Hetti Perkins how their art practice is driven by culture and heritage, political and personal preoccupations, dreams and imagination. With the National Gallery of Australia's extraordinary Indigenous collection as the springboard, wherever we travel with Hetti – from cities to desert communities, museums and artists' private spaces – the threads running through the art are coloured with connection to land and family, and stories of displacement.

It is thrilling to see the diversity and beauty of the art and learn of its genesis, through the prism of Hetti's knowledge, insight and passion. She and filmmaker Rachel Perkins (*First Australians*, *Bran Nue Dae*), both daughters of activist Charles Perkins, are Eastern Arrernte and Kalkadoon desert women.

HETTI PERKINS WITH
TJANPI WEAVERS



Episode one: pride and prejudice.

Pride in culture overcomes prejudice.

DANIEL BOYD paints Captain Cook as pirate, not explorer, and his large dot paintings ask big questions about past actions of the church. Yolngu man WANYUBI MARIKA's art proudly tells ancient stories of law and land. The past is embedded in the light installations of JONATHAN JONES, proclaiming that Australia's rich Aboriginal past can't be extinguished, even within a metropolis as dominant as Sydney. ESME TIMBERY adapts the shell work traditions started by her great-grandmother, demonstrating cultural resilience.

Episode two: beauty and cruelty.

Beauty prevails over cruelty.

Samson & Delilah writer/director WARWICK THORNTON, from Alice Springs, provokes and challenges with his conceptual art. Tasmanian artist JULIE GOUGH is intent on finding out truths about the past and conveying them by repurposing colonial objects and natural materials. The 2004 Palm Island riots – and those at Cronulla –

inspired Brisbane artist VERNON AH KEE, as have family photographs taken during a genealogy expedition in the 1930s.

Episode three: love and longing.

Love and longing is at the heart of identity.

Remote art centres such as TJALA ARTS maintain culture and community. Torres Strait Islander heritage is very present in the hugely diverse work of BRIAN ROBINSON, as are his other popular and global interests as well. Tasmanian LOLA GREENO is innovating within a long tradition of shell work while her husband REX GREENO has resuscitated the lost art of making elegant bark canoes. CHRISTIAN THOMPSON's own body is the basis of his eclectic art, however he feels the pull of his Queensland homeland strongly. The human form also dominates the work of NICOLE FORESHEW, who infuses her work with elements of the land – bark, ochre and leaves.

Ultimately, *art + soul* conveys the pain and pride of being part of the world's oldest continuous living culture, while simultaneously also being part of modern Australia.

LEFT TO RIGHT:

WANYUBI MARIKA,
YIRRKALA, NT

WARWICK THORNTON,
ALICE SPRINGS, NT

CHRISTIAN THOMPSON,
BARCALDINE, QLD



Episode one: pride and prejudice

Daniel Boyd, Sydney, NSW

Wanyubi Marika,
Yirrkala, NT

Jonathan Jones,
Sydney, NSW

Mickey of Ulladulla

Esme Timbery and Marilyn
Russell, La Perouse, NSW

Episode two: beauty and cruelty

Warwick Thornton, Alice
Springs, NT

Marlene Rubuntja and other
Yarrenyty Arlttere Artists,
Alice Springs, NT

Julie Gough, Hobart, Tas

Vernon Ah Kee, Brisbane, Qld

Episode three: love and longing

Tjala Arts Amata, SA

Warakurna Artists,
Warakurna and Warnan, WA

Tjanpi weavers,
Warakurna, WA

Brian Robinson, Cairns, Qld

Lola and Rex Greeno,
Launceston, Tas

Christian Thompson,
Sydney, NSW

Nicole Foresheew,
Sydney, NSW

WARAKURNA ARTISTS,
WARNAN, WA

Episode one: pride and prejudice

Activist Charlie Perkins told his children that they must use every opportunity to speak up for their people. Hetty Perkins regards art as the voice of her people, so speaks up for the Aboriginal artists who proudly tell ancestral stories, celebrate culture and survival, address past and present prejudice.

The art of the first Australians is honoured in a recently-opened wing of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. The centerpiece is the Aboriginal Memorial, a forest of 200 hollow log coffins by the artists of Ramingining, honouring the lives lost defending land since first contact in 1788.

Spurred on by the freedom fighter Pemulwuy's defiance, Sydney artist DANIEL BOYD challenges the accuracy of colonial history by reworking John Webber's 1782 portrait of Captain James Cook so that it proclaims pirate not explorer.

Daniel's version of traditional dot paintings incorporates photographs, including of his own family. He overlays dots, as a 'veil' or prism, which masks some of the image, so as to throw back questions about the destructive past actions of the church and about assimilation. "I chose art to ... put forward ideas for other people to engage with and hopefully change people's perspectives," he tells Hetty.

The artworks of Yolngu man WANYUBI MARIKA, from North East Arnhem Land, explain how the Djankawu Sisters arrived at Yalangbara by canoe, established clans, and laid down the laws that still apply. His bark paintings demonstrate connection between the people and the land, with each colour representing blood or bone, sand or rivers. His art is as political as the anti-mining Bark Petition presented to Parliament in 1963 by his people and now on display alongside the Australian Constitution: the Dhuwa and



Yirritja clan designs on the bark frame of this petition prove title to country under Yolngu law.

HETTY PERKINS WITH
DANIEL BOYD

The past is embedded in the light installations of Sydney artist JONATHAN JONES, who says Australia's rich Aboriginal past can't be extinguished, even by a metropolis as dominant as Sydney. His massive Star City Casino work celebrates the Eora people's connection with water; his designs incorporate the patterns he finds on confiscated artefacts in museums; he depicts painful episodes from Australia's colonial history such as the mass removal of culturally important carved trees.

"You can't be in the world's oldest living culture and stay standing still," Jonathan says. "Our people have always had to change and work around new conditions, and come up with new ideas constantly."

ESME TIMBERY and her daughter MARILYN RUSSELL use the shells they collect at Sydney's La Perouse, near where the First Fleet landed, to adorn boxes, delicate slippers, even Sydney Harbour Bridges. This tradition started with Esme's great-grandmother, Queen Emma Timbery. Born in the 1840s, she could never have included representations of the Sydney Opera House in her work as Esme does. It's another example of adaptation and cultural resilience.

Episode two: beauty and cruelty

Hetti Perkins regards the desert landscape of Central Australia as beautiful but has understood its cruelty from an early age, in part from the stories of hardship told by her Nanna, who lived in and around Mbantwe (Alice Springs).

This dichotomy is starkly expressed in *Samson & Delilah*, the hit film from WARWICK THORNTON, who also lives in this frontier town. “Tragedy happens in paradise,” he tells Hetti. Warwick uses himself as the subject of many of his works – for instance he placed himself on a cross to interrogate Christian lore in *Stranded*, a 3D installation with a desert setting, and, in his photographic series *Debil Debil*, he uses the tropes of gothic painting to proclaim the ambiguity of the arrival and presence of pastoralists, policemen and priests.

Warwick’s intention is always to start conversations and he certainly did with *Mother Courage*, an installation featuring an Aboriginal woman making dot paintings in the back of a van. The work was commissioned for Germany’s international art event, DOCUMENTA in 2012; some read it as a portrait of displacement, others of empowerment.

Still in Alice Springs, MARLENE RUBUNTJA and other Yarrenyty Arltene Art Centre artists use natural dyes, cast-off items, fabric and wool to make soft sculptures – and short animated films – that speak of daily life and offer cautionary tales to the young folk.

Hetti next travels to Hobart to meet with JULIE GOUGH who uses archival objects, colonial furniture and natural materials as the basis of her art. She is driven by a desire to “figure out what the hell happened” in the past but has to use investigative techniques because the records offer only one side of the story.

“I try and get people to see history from different points of view and to feel history.” Sometimes it’s personal for Julie: some of her people were impounded on Flinders Island when the human chain known as the Black Line swept across parts of the state in 1830 in an attempt to purge the land of Aboriginal people.

In his major video installation, *The Tall Man*, Brisbane artist VERNON AH KEE paints activist Lex Wotton as a hero for his part in the 2004 Palm Island riots that followed the death in custody of Mulrunji Doomadgee, while the work he did for the Venice Biennale in 2009 was sparked by the Cronulla riots.

Vernon argues through his art that white people can only see Aboriginal people as fully human if the context is western. He has stripped away any romantic notions of the noble savage in his series of large-scale portraits of family members based on photographs taken as part of Norman Tindale’s genealogy expeditions in the 1930s. He first saw these photographs, in miniature, in his grandmother’s purse. Like his drawings, they capture what Vernon describes as “the gaze”, a steely look full of emotion, persistence, endurance and protest.

“I wanted to portray the Aborigine as sophisticated, technologically (advanced) and modern ... show who we are and who we want to be and who we will be.”

Aboriginal people are producing works of exceptional beauty and meaning, often from stories of great cruelty.

As Hetti says, through the imagination of our Aboriginal artists, a better future can be imagined for the whole country.

Episode three: love and longing

When artists in the tiny WA communities of Warakurna and Warnan, paint the country they long for, they return there – at least in heart and in mind.

Art is also a way of bringing to life ancestral stories for future generations. But, art centre chairman Frank Young tells Hetti Perkins, some “inside” stories are not for general consumption. He is talking for TJALA ARTS in Amata, remote SA. Tjala Arts is one of dozens of remote art centres, located across the country, representing and nurturing artists and playing a vital role in rebuilding culture and community.

Artistic expression comes in many forms. The TJANPI WEAVERS go out bush to make quirky woven sculptures from native grasses. Sometimes the stories embodied in the work are replicated across communities over thousands of kilometres, as is the case with the Seven Sisters Dreaming love story.

Hetti next travels to Cairns to meet BRIAN ROBINSON, who produces large-scale public installations and intricate graphic prints with a strong narrative. His inspiration comes from his childhood on Thursday Island and the ceremonial practices of the region, but also Roman Catholic iconography, which he unexpectedly juxtaposes with superheroes and cartoon figures recognized across the globe.

LOLA GREENO in Launceston is proof that culture is not just quietly persisting but thriving. Her mother used to make and sell shell necklaces to help feed and clothe the family. When Lola was invited to make a work about her people being cruelly exiled to Flinders Island in the 1830s, she used shells, feathers and fur. “I gave the people something to eat and wear,” she says.

Lola’s husband REX GREENO also has work in the National Gallery of Australia.



But he has not so much reinvented a craft, as resuscitated one: the art of making elegant bark canoes.

TJANPI WEAVERS,
DOCKER RIVER, WA

The peripatetic CHRISTIAN THOMPSON also gathers natural materials for his art, using his own body in his intriguing installations and haunting photographs. He has studied in Amsterdam and at Oxford University (where his photographs replaced portraits of prime ministers and cardinals for a time) but he still feels the strong pull to his family home in Barcaldine, Queensland. “My art allows me to hang on to the essence of belonging,” he says.

The human form was also integral to a beautiful public installation created by NICOLE FORESHEW, projected onto the façade of the Australian Museum in Sydney. She filmed 20 friends and family members – all women and including her grandmother – wrapped in cloth she had dyed. She describes the work as “politely political”.

“This country is in our DNA, it is our ancestors, it is our inheritance, its essence is something we carry with us always no matter where our lives lead,” says Hetti.

“art and its wonderfully celebratory nature often seems at odds with history: the colonial attempts to annihilate...”

Hetti Perkins, writer / presenter

**Hetti Perkins, writer/
presenter**

“Art and politics are inextricably entwined for me. I grew up in Canberra in a family that was political, breakfast, lunch and dinner; my mother had a gallery for a time and art was part of our lives too. She wanted the Aboriginal voice to be heard loudly in the national capital. She also wanted us, the Aboriginal children of a non-Aboriginal woman, to grow up with artistic expression of our culture being part of our daily lives.

In all our diversity as the indigenous people of this land, we’ve got a shared history, story and experience. There’s a feeling we’re all from the one family, that there’s unity in the face of diversity. For me, the most defining characteristic of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island art is its dichotomist nature: it’s about past and present; it’s very traditional but very contemporary.



The beauty of much Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and its wonderfully celebratory nature often seems at odds with history: the colonial attempts to annihilate or assimilate, the religious interventions that threatened to engulf Aboriginal faith. It is also at odds with Aboriginal Australia being a third world country when you look at health, education, housing and all the other indicators of well being.

ESME TIMBERY
+ SHELL MAKING

As the series shows, our culture, the world's oldest continuing living culture, continues unabated, surviving because it changes, adapts, is dynamic and tensile.

I'd like to thank the artists for sharing their work and their thoughts on the complex terrain of modern Australian life. No-one expresses more clearly what our artists say about our country and our history.”

*“listen to this mob
because they’ve got
something to say.
There is a lot of
anger, sadness, joy
and celebration in
this art”*

Steven McGregor, Director



Steven McGregor, director

TJALA ARTS,
AMATA, SA

“Have a listen to this mob because they’ve got something to say. There is a lot of anger, sadness, joy and celebration in this art but no one is swinging a sledgehammer. It is persuasive politics and I hope it encourages more respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Coming into this production I knew of most of the artists but not the philosophy behind the art. Sitting down and hearing them talk about their passions, their politics and their identities, revealed what inspires and feeds their art, really made me appreciate it – and to see with different eyes.

There’s a lot of contemporary art in this series and it will broaden people’s concept of Aboriginal art. They are drawing on their past and family to tell their story, but reshaping and reworking it for a modern audience.”

“Through the imagination of our artists we can imagine a better future for our country.”

Hetti Perkins, writer / presenter

Hetti Perkins, writer/presenter

How did you choose the artists to include?

There are thousands of fabulously talented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. Beginning by acknowledging our ancestors is the right thing to do and starting *art + soul* with the Aboriginal Memorial at the National Gallery of Australia is a fitting and moving tribute to those ancestors.

The words “pride and prejudice” were the seeds from which the series grew. The freedom fighter Pemulwuy’s story, and the moment of first contact were also starting points. All the artists in the series are part of that legacy. All have work in the NGA collection. All speak to me very strongly. The work is linked by ideas: some representing those ideas very powerfully. I also wanted to convey a diversity of ages, genders, regions, art forms and interests. Whether people wanted to participate was also a factor. It was a very organic process.

Did you labour over deciding the themes of the episodes?

The artists we feature are just the tip of a very big iceberg and we could keep making series, especially given all the inspiring new artists that are emerging. It is such a privilege to know these artists and be invited into their homes and countries and studios.

Taking phrases that have currency and putting them in a different context is a way to get people’s attention. And it’s playful. “Pride and prejudice” is very relevant to Aboriginal people and was the first episode title that came to mind. People respond to the art so positively but it will often have an undercurrent that is not a beautiful story, hence “beauty and cruelty”. As for “love and longing”, I live in Sydney but my home is and always will be Alice Springs and the country around it. As a contemporary urban Aboriginal I find myself analyzing the sensation of missing something and the melancholy of that. Art helps us reclaim or re-invent things that have been taken away.

Q&As WITH THE CREATIVE TEAM

Given how much you know about the work, how did you avoid losing the outsider sense of what the work is about?

When you know something or someone well, there is a risk that you don't ask the obvious questions. But none of these artists have sated my curiosity or fascination with their work. It helped that Steven (director Steven McGregor), who had to fit the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle together, asked a lot of questions of me because it made me articulate my thoughts about the meaning of the work and the connections between different artists. He enhanced my understanding of the world I've lived in for such a long time.

What was the most challenging thing about being on location? And can you remember any particularly amusing moments?

Language was sometimes a challenge: for one of the artists, English was their seventh language. It was important to allow companionable silence. Not to always feel you had to interrogate people.

I remember one moment when we were filming a group of older ladies painting and they were fascinated by the boom and wouldn't stop following it around with their eyes. Moments like that when we all laughed together were pretty special.

Have you got any advice for people who want to buy Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander art?

A lot of time and money has been put into enabling people to buy ethically. It's not hard. Buy with your mind, eye and pocket and you can't lose: the art will challenge, enthrall, entertain and love you for the rest of your life.

We purposefully don't cover the whole market aspect of art, although we do visit remote art centres in the final episode –because they are playing a big role in rebuilding community life.



Can art change the position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australian society? Or is that overburdening the series with too much responsibility?

HETTI PERKINS WITH REX GREENO

Some artists are actively trying to change the world. For others it's their bread and butter and there's nothing wrong with that. The art we're interested in has the capacity to change the way people think, to realize that if Australians help each other it will benefit everyone. When you've got your heart, ears and eyes open it can fundamentally change the culture of a nation.

“I wanted more emotional content, to spend more time with each artist; not just meet them but get to know them.”

Steven McGregor, director

Steven McGregor, director

How did you prepare yourself before the cameras rolled on this production?

Soon after Bridget Ikin approached me to direct *art + soul* we went to the National Gallery of Australia to see *undisclosed*, the second National Indigenous Art Triennial. Some of the artists they were planning to include in the series had work in that exhibition including Vernon Ah Kee, Julie Gough, Jonathan Jones and Christian Thompson. I got to meet the artists and sit in on some talks.

When pre-production began about a year later, it was very intense. I spent a week with Hetti, going through her initial treatment, which included maybe 30 artists. I wanted more emotional content, to spend more time with each artist; not just meet them but get to know them. There has to be an emotional core for an audience to connect to, and that meant not including so many artists.

We dissected each artist and their work and looked at the treatment page by page, line by line, word by word. Why are we featuring this artist? What can we get them to talk about? How can we illustrate that? Won't this other artist have expressed this already? Why this piece of art? What is it about? My questions were the ones an audience would ask. I did a bit of reading online and Bridget gave me a lot of materials, including catalogues from exhibitions, but I principally depended on Hetti's knowledge of the artists and the art.

***art + soul* clearly demonstrates how the Aboriginality of the artists deeply affects their art. How did your Aboriginality affect how you directed the series?**

I wanted to give the audience time to breathe. That's about letting moments sit. Getting that right is instinctual. If it's wall-to-wall 'blah blah blah' you get lost. An audience wants to exhale with the landscape, the art, the music.

Director of Photography Murray Lui, who worked on my previous film *Big Name No Blanket*, is from the Torres Strait, and sound

recordist David Tranter, with whom I worked at CAAMA in Alice Springs, is Aboriginal (from north of Utopia). When the artists saw that, it meant trust was already set up. It was evident whenever we turned up. It enabled the artists to feel comfortable. We all come from the same place. All of us have or had parents who spent time on a mission.

What artistic and stylistic decisions did you make? And what impact did the first series have on these? Were their particular challenges?

Murray and I decided that all the interviews would be informal and the formality would come out through the art. We shot the interviews hand-held, over the shoulder, loose; but we anchored things down for the art by using a tripod or tracking shots.

Hetti doesn't talk to camera as she did in the first series and we didn't do any travelling shots. But we have kept the sense of truth that's in the first series and have remained very respectful to the artists, their art and their voice.

Jumping on planes with gear is always a pain and there's always trepidation as to whether you can get what you need in the time available. We had to think on our feet. We had to walk into the space, meet the artist, quickly case the joint, then Murray and I would have a whispered discussion while getting the gear. We always looked for the same thing: where the light was coming from. Murray has a great eye, a great sense of composition.

It was pretty special that the National Gallery of Australia closed down whole galleries for us.



Is there anything you can tell us about Hetti that we won't know from watching *art + soul*?

STEVEN MCGREGOR,
DIRECTOR

She always checks for spiders. I don't like them either but she's worse than me.

Without Hetti, we quite simply wouldn't have this series. Her knowledge and enthusiasm can't be quantified. I was in awe sometimes. Her enthusiasm is genuine, not token. The artists were very generous with their time but sometimes it's hard to get them to talk. That they did is a credit to Hetti and how she put them at ease. She generates respect wherever she goes.

I have never done a project as long as three hours and it has been a long journey. At the same time I have felt proud and privileged to be part of this series, to work with Hetti and Bridget and the team, to be able to travel everywhere and meet artists.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Hetti Perkins considers herself privileged to have had the experiences she has had as a curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art over many years. Her way of sharing her good fortune was to team up with producer Bridget Ikin and a small creative team and make *art + soul*, for ABC TV in 2009-10.

Like the original, *art + soul* is an epic and moving journey into Aboriginal culture and heritage in all its diversity and complexity, and also a revelatory look at art practice.

But *art + soul* also goes much deeper, allows more engagement with the themes and is much more political. In part, that's because it predominantly focuses on living artists, spends more time with fewer artists, and includes many city-based practitioners embedded in modern society in the line-up.

To some extent, all the work celebrates survival and acts as a window into the pain and pride of being part of the world's oldest continuous living culture and part of modern Australia.

Cameras rolled on *art + soul* in June 2013. The crew was on the road for three blocks of travel, spread over 12 weeks.

"The whole approach was artist-lead," says writer/presenter Hetti Perkins. But she's being modest in the extreme because her deep knowledge of the subject matter underpins every aspect of the series from the choice of artists to the questions she puts to them to how she contextualizes the art.

That said, when Brisbane-based Vernon Ah Kee wanted to go to Cairns and sit down on camera with his mum and dad, the *art + soul* team did so.

"Suddenly you could see where his conviction came from and the pride in their eyes when they talked about all their children," says director Steven McGregor. He describes Ah Kee's art as being persuasive politics that sends a



powerful message without causing offence. "He's not shy to say what he feels ... but he's not standing on a pulpit slamming the table."

STEVEN MCGREGOR,
DIRECTOR, AND MURRAY
LUI, DIRECTOR OF
PHOTOGRAPHY

Hetti often found herself thrilled by small jewels of information, such as when Launceston artist Lola Greeno told her that the black shells that she uses in her work are called Truganini's tears. (Truganini is generally regarded as the last full-blood indigenous person in Tasmania.)

For Steven McGregor, directing the series was like doing an MA in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. From Darwin, he has been quietly making a name for himself as a filmmaker and jumped at the chance to be involved in a series on this topic and on a scale he'd not tackled before.



“Steven read the scripts, looked at the work and met a lot of the artists in advance,” says Hetti. “He’s really interested in people and what makes them tick. He created an environment that made people feel supported and made them feel that their work was going to be valued – but in a subtle way. The whole crew was part of the conversation.”

She sings the praises of the small team that were on the road with her. The others included DOP Murray Lui and sound recordist David Tranter, who also worked on the first series; Bridget Ikin and production manager Jodie Passmore.

“It was great to have a small crew who understood the cultural protocols, who knew that if someone had died in a community we were planning to visit, you could no longer go there because that is a bigger thing than getting the documentary made.”

An interesting aspect of the production was that Warwick Thornton, who directed the original series is a featured artist in

art + soul. His film *Samson & Delilah* was a critical hit across the world and between the two series his career as a conceptual artist has blossomed.

A month-long break after filming gave the team time to recharge their batteries before post-production began. Being back in Sydney meant being back with producer Jo-anne McGowan and being joined by editors Lindi Harrison and Elliott Magen, sound designer Liam Egan and composer George Papanicolaou.

Archival footage is used extensively to bring the past to life, and to colour the story being told. Jo-anne McGowan did most of this footwork, just as she did in the first series. “The archive in this series is by turns confronting and revelatory. It’s a powerful reminder of the difficulties of our shared history.”

A range of anthemic Australian songs have been incorporated into the series from the likes of Paul Kelly – his *Little Kings* song is on the soundtrack – Kev Carmody and Archie Roach.

VERNON AH KEE WITH
HETTI PERKINS

BACKGROUND TO THE KEY CREATORS

Hetti Perkins, writer/ presenter

Hetti Perkins is a member of the Eastern Arrernte and Kalkadoon Aboriginal communities. She is resident curator at Bangarra Dance Theatre, creative director of the *Corroboree Sydney* festival, and curatorial advisor to the City of Sydney on the *Eora Journey: Recognition in the Public Domain* project.

Hetti was an advisor to the 2008 Biennale of Sydney, on the selection panel for Australia's representation at the 2003 Venice Biennale and a member of the international selection committee for the 2000 Biennale of Sydney.

She wrote and presented the three-part documentary series *art + soul* (ABC Television, 2010), directed by Warwick Thornton, and in 2014 has completed this follow-up series, directed by Steven McGregor.

She was an agent for dOCUMENTA (13) in 2012, manages the Collectors + Curators program for the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair and is currently an advisor on a major public art commission by Jenny Holzer for Mirvac.

Hetti has worked in Indigenous visual art for 25 years, initially at the Aboriginal Arts Australia and Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative, and most recently at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) in the role of senior curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Major exhibitions presented at AGNSW during her time there included *Half Light: Portraits from Black Australia* (2008); *Crossing Country: The Alchemy of Western Arnhem Land Art* (2004); and *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius* for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Arts Festival. She also co-curated, with Brenda L. Croft and Philippe Peltier, the Australian Indigenous Art Commission for the Musée du quai Branly in Paris (2006). She has edited a number of publications including *Tradition*

Today: Indigenous Art in Australia (2004) and *One Sun, One Moon: Aboriginal Art in Australia* (2007).

Hetti is chair of the Charlie Perkins Trust for Children and Students, which she founded; a trustee of the Michael Riley Foundation; a member of the advisory group of Jarjum College, Redfern; on the Barangaroo Arts & Cultural Panel; and is a board member of the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia.

Steven McGregor, director

Steven McGregor wrote and directed several documentaries and dramas before accepting the invitation to work on *art + soul*, his biggest project to date. His most recent documentary credits include *Croker Island Exodus* about the epic journey of a group of stolen generation children during World War II and *Big Name No Blanket*, a portrait of the Warumpi Band's charismatic front man George Rrurrambu. Both films played in the Sydney and Melbourne International Film Festivals and in the FIFO Film Festival Tahiti.

Steven has also written four episodes of the ABC drama series *Redfern Now: Pretty Boy Blue* won the AACTA Award for best screenplay in television in 2013, and in the following year *Babe in Arms* was nominated in the same category.

Steven started his career behind the camera and as an editor in the news department of Imparja Television. Apart from when he was studying for his MA in drama directing at the Australian Film, Television & Radio School, he has lived and worked in the Northern Territory all his life.

Previous dramas and documentaries directed by Steven include:

Cold Turkey, My Brother Vinnie, Tales from Daly, Intervention: Two Years On, League of their Own, Five Seasons, Willgens Fitzroy.

Bridget Ikin, producer

Bridget has worked with writer/presenter Hetti Perkins, and directors Warwick Thornton and Steven McGregor on two series of *art + soul*.

Bridget Ikin is a passionate champion of new and innovative filmmaking, and has produced many films over many years under her Hibiscus Films banner. She has also had a long and distinguished career as a film executive.

She produced Jane Campion's *An Angel At My Table* (Silver Lion, Venice Film Festival, 1990), Alison Maclean's short *Kitchen Sink* (In Competition, Cannes Film Festival, 1989) and her debut feature *Crush* (In Competition, Cannes, 1992), Clara Law's *Floating Life* (Silver Leopard, Locarno, 1996) and many ground-breaking shorts.

Sarah Watt's debut feature *Look Both Ways* opened the 2005 Adelaide Film Festival, won many AFI Awards including for Best Film, and was screened to much acclaim internationally. *My Year Without Sex*, Bridget and Sarah's next collaboration, also opened the Adelaide Film Festival, 2009.

In early 2014 she went to Nepal to produce *Sherpa: In The Shadow Of The Mountain*, a feature-length theatrical documentary on the Sherpa community and the changes within it since the first Everest ascent in 1953.

From 1996 to 2000, Bridget was Head of SBS Independent. She was subsequently appointed Associate Director, Film for the 2002 Adelaide Festival, where she commissioned and executive produced four new features: *The Tracker*, *Australian Rules*, *Walking On Water* and *Kabbarli*.

During 2005-06 she was a feature film Evaluation Manager at the Film Finance Corporation (now Screen Australia) and, until recently, has been a long-time Board Member of the South Australian Film Corporation. She was the EP on Kim Morduant's recent multi-award-winning film *The Rocket*.

Bridget and her partner John Maynard recently established FELIX MEDIA, a production company working with artists at the intersection of excellence, originality, audience engagement and social conviction. See www.felixmedia.com.au

Through Felix Media, Bridget's executive producer credits include: artist Angelica Mesiti's moving image projects *The Calling*, *The Ear Of The Tyrant* and *Citizen's Band*; William Yang's *My Generation*, *Blood Links* and *Friends Of Dorothy*, all being iconic theatre pieces reworked into film.

Jo-anne McGowan, producer/archival researcher

Jo-anne McGowan has produced both series of *art + soul*. Previous documentaries include the Timor-themed *Troubled Waters* (winner, Dendy Award, Sydney Film Festival, 2002) and *Kabbarli*, a short feature on the life of anthropologist and writer Daisy Bates, commissioned for the Adelaide Festival.

In the last 15 years she has also worked at SBS Independent, at the NSW Film and Television Office, at ABC TV Arts, and as head of producing at the Australian Film, Television & Radio School. She is a graduate of that institution.