

## NATIONAL INDIGENOUS SCHOOL IN NEW MEDIA ART

Whilst many Indigenous artists have now achieved international acclaim for their work, Indigenous artists with an interest in new media technologies often feel locked out of this developing area. This is in part due to the difficulties (both perceived and real) of either accessing or obtaining the equipment required to learn these new skills. This initiative expanded opportunities for Indigenous artists in the area of art and technology, through providing access to appropriate training, computer equipment and software for the development of digital arts practice

The inaugural school designed specifically for Indigenous artists took place from 3 - 24 July, 1999 at Northern Territory University in Darwin. The Indigenous National School was project managed by Indigenous artist, curator, writer, lecturer and consultant, Brenda L Croft (Gurindji). Although other annual ANAT Summer Schools have hosted Aboriginal participants, this was the first School that catered solely for Indigenous artists. Tutors proficient in new media and technology taught master classes during a three-week intensive period.

Whilst the artists focused on the development of skills, the sharing of knowledge, and their own artwork, a key aspect of this project was that artists were also profoundly influenced by their surroundings. The Top End hosts some of the most spectacular Indigenous rock art galleries and landscape in the country, for example, Kakadu National Park, Litchfield National Park, and Nitmuluk Gorge. The school provided a context for the participants to consider using technology to bring artistic perspectives to these locations, using the internet and other communications mechanisms to recontextualise the surroundings of the school.

Fourteen artists were selected to participate in this project. They were:

Kathleen Arbon, Arabunna, lives Darwin, NT  
Sandy Carter, Ngarrindjeri, lives Renmark, SA  
Jason Davidson, Gurindji, lives Darwin, NT  
Jenny Fraser, Bundjalung, lives Brisbane, Qld  
Fiona Giles, Ngarrindjeri, lives Renmark, SA  
Lindsay Haji Ali, Yawuru, lives Broome, WA

Joanne Hamilton, Wiradjuri, lives Sydney, NSW  
Gordon Hookey, Waanyi, lives Sydney, NSW  
Clara Inkamala, Western Arrernte, lives Hermannsburg, NT  
Keith Munro, Kamileroi, lives Sydney, NSW  
Carol Panangka Rontji, Western Arrernte, lives Hermannsburg, NT  
John Smith Gumbula, Wakka Wakka/ Gurang Gurang, lives Brisbane, Qld  
Karl Telfer, Nurrangga/Kurna, lives Adelaide, SA  
Christian Bumbarra Thompson, Bidjara, lives Melbourne, VIC

The tutors for this inaugural project included a number of Indigenous artists. Rea (Gamileroi/ Wailwan), an internationally recognised artist who specialises in developing digital media, and who also participated in the 1999 ANAT National Summer School in Science and Art; Cameron Goold, a highly regarded artist and musician who runs Indignet, an Aboriginal web design company were key tutors at the school. For this first initiative, ANAT also invited Skawennati Tricia Fragnito (Mohawk First Nations, Canada), an artist and curator who has developed web projects for Nation-to-Nation, a First Nations Artists collective, and has specialised in developing innovative multiuser online environments using Palace softwares. Trevor van Weeren from QANTM-NT Multimedia Centre also provided key technical support and tutelage.

The three week project went extremely well, with all of the participants - participating artists, tutors and project staff alike - learning from each other as much as from the teaching aspects of the school. Many people in the Indigenous and arts/cultural communities in Darwin warmly welcomed the participants, and ended up participating in many of the activities as well as looking after and entertaining the group throughout the three weeks.

*"The workshops allowed for interaction between students which strengthened our class and living relationships. The school offered a strong creative base that is important for Indigenous people. All in all, NISNMA gave me the knowledge to comfortably venture into the exciting world of new media."*

Everyone who came through the school during the period remarked upon the terrific 'vibe' that the project created in the Fine Arts School of NTU. The participants skill level varied considerably, so whilst some were getting a 'crash course' in new software applications, others were getting a 'crash course' in simply using a computer to access telecommunications networks and generate and manipulate images and generally getting a feel for where they might be able to use these skills in the future. The project was unique in the incredible sense of sharing and community it developed and input from tutors and students alike was incredibly enthusiastic and enriching.

The 1999 ANAT National Indigenous School was developed in partnership with the School of Fine Arts, Northern Territory University, Darwin, with enthusiastic support from Chris White.



Following the School, Skawennati toured to Adelaide and Sydney to present her work. On Monday 26 August, Skawennati presented on Nation to Nation, a First Nations artists collective at the Media Resource Centre in Adelaide. Whilst the attendance was small, the event was also broadcast via audio and video on the ANAT web site. When in Adelaide Skawennati also visited Tandanya with Karl Telfer, who attended the NISNMA and is also a board member of Tandanya. Anne Robertson also took Skawennati to see Doppio Parallelo's current project 'States of Kinship', a performance incorporating the use of interactive video, sound and multimedia. The performance was in part developed with assistance of the Broken Spaces research ANAT has been undertaking in collaboration with Doppio Parallelo and the Media Resource Centre over the last few months.

In Sydney, Skawennati presented the CyberPowWow project at Metro Screen on the 27th of August. Skawennati also met with the Australia Council, the Australian Film Commission and did radio interviews with the Away program on ABC Radio National and on 3RES.

The presentations were particularly interesting for these organisations and their constituents in light of the work they have both been doing in providing training and professional development opportunities for Indigenous Australian artists within their own communities. Vicki Sowry, Director of the MRC says 'it was a great opportunity to be able to develop a dialogue between Skawennati and local artists about [the] different cultural initiatives Indigenous artists in Australia and Canada are employing in the new media area. It was also a chance to explore how Indigenous people in different countries are using new media to develop appropriate means for networking and community building, as well as to develop their art practice.'

*ANAT's National Indigenous School in new media art aimed to expand opportunities for Indigenous artists in the area of art and technology, through providing access to appropriate training, computer equipment and software for the development of digital arts practice.*