



3D: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture



Koiki, The Dreaming Festival 2007. Photo: Jason Henry

Under the Plan, there has been significant progress in promoting and increasing support and infrastructure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture. Progress has built on existing programs and investment such as the Indigenous Regional Arts Development Fund (IRADF) and support for the Aboriginal Centre for Performing Arts, as well as beginning to rollout the *Backing Indigenous Arts* initiative from October 2007.

Backing Indigenous Arts (BIA) is a \$10.73 million initiative to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and cultures in communities across Far North Queensland during the four-year period from 2007 to 2010. BIA recognises that arts play a pivotal role in building and sustaining communities through preserving and promoting culture and creating opportunities for communities to shape their own future. It aims to improve social and economic opportunities for Indigenous people by developing networks and skills, improving infrastructure, and supporting cultural engagement.

The four key program elements of BIA include:

- Indigenous Art Centre network and hubs
- Cairns Printmaking Centre
- Cairns Indigenous Art Fair
- Building Skills and Opportunities Program.

In 2007–08, Arts Queensland invested some \$5.2 million³ in support for Indigenous arts and culture. This represents an increase of \$3 million from 2006–07 to 2007–08. This increase is largely attributed to expenditure of \$2.56 million under BIA and \$355 000 towards the Hopevale Cultural Centre.

BIA is delivering significant support and outcomes for Indigenous artists in Far North Queensland. There is a need to leverage additional funding to expand the Building Skills and Opportunities Program to other parts of the state. From March 2009, Arts Queensland and the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation are co-funding an Indigenous Arts Business Development Officer to provide support services to Indigenous artists and arts and cultural organisations in south-west Queensland.

Arts Queensland is working closely with the Commonwealth Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts to explore options for greater alignment and streamlining of state and federal funding and support for Indigenous arts and culture in Queensland. Arts Queensland is also promoting the role of artistic activities and models for arts-led strategies to strengthen the fabric and resilience of Indigenous communities, in partnership with other sectors such as education, training and health.



Fiona Creek painting, Bama Women, Mossman Gorge. Photo: David Campbell

³ Totals include IRADF, ACPA, CIP, s2m, VACS, BIA, IDIs and festivals.

Indigenous Art Centre network

Indigenous Art Centres are cultural focal points in remote communities and play an important creative, social and economic role. Under BIA, this program provides funding support to build strong, sustainable Indigenous Art Centres with a stable economic base that produce and market high quality artworks and deliver excellent cultural and community benefits.

In 2009, the program focuses on the following critical success factors for arts centre development in communities — cultural retention; ownership and governance; management and staffing; artists and the production of art; facilities; business planning; marketing and distribution; and finance and investment.

Professional development and peer-to-peer mentoring and networking is a key focus. Since October 2007, three Indigenous Art Centre workshops have been conducted in Cairns, with some 75 participants, including centre coordinators, artists and industry experts. Workshop topics include financial management systems, business planning processes, market development, establishing network standards for arts products, and information about state and federal funding programs.

Cairns Printmaking Centre

A number of Queensland Indigenous artists — such as Alick Tipoti, Billy Missi, Dennis Nona and Brian Robinson — are pioneering an exciting new movement in fine art printmaking. To support and build on the success of these artists and to generate further economic opportunities, a \$1.6 million printmaking centre is being established in Cairns.

The centre — known as Djumbunji Press — aims to foster excellence in printmaking by providing studio space and commissioning work from new, and already established artists. Established artists will also teach and mentor emerging Indigenous artists. It will give artists a chance to develop new skills and increase the production capacity for printmakers so they can sell their work.

To open in 2009 on the James Cook University campus in Cairns, Djumbunji Press will become a significant economic generator, advancing the art of the region through sales at major events such as the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair. Arts Queensland has entered into a management with KickArts Contemporary Arts to manage and operate the press.

Cairns Indigenous Art Fair

The Cairns Indigenous Art Fair will provide a platform to showcase and sell the work of established and emerging Indigenous artists from Queensland.



Denis Nona working on the mould for the bronze sculpture, *Apu Kaz* at Urban Art Projects, Brisbane. Photo courtesy of the artist and The Australian Art Print Network

This \$1 million investment will create a one-stop destination for Indigenous art from Far North Queensland. It will showcase contemporary and traditional Indigenous art and culture, and encourage industry growth, professional development and ethical practice. A performing arts program featuring Indigenous dance, music and storytelling will complement the Fair, making it a cultural tourism drawcard for Queensland and the Cairns region. Over time, the Fair aims to harness and grow demand for Queensland Indigenous art in Australia and overseas.

Arts Queensland is the lead agency and has established a range of partnerships with government, James Cook University, local businesses and industry to deliver the inaugural Fair in August 2009. Key funding partners include the Queensland Indigenous Arts Marketing and Export Agency, Trade Queensland and the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation.

Building Skills and Opportunities Program

This BIA program provides \$3.43 million over four years to build skills and provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, young people, communities and organisations. It includes all art forms — visual arts, craft, design, dance, music, theatre, writing, new media and community arts and cultural development — both traditional and contemporary. Support is also available for areas such as arts and cultural administration, business development, curatorial and interpretive services.

In 2007–08, \$0.8 million was allocated to 25 projects and a further 19 projects have received \$317 000 in funding in 2008–09. To date, these projects are delivering a range of artistic, community-building and employment outcomes. Some key achievements include:

- Seven Queensland artists participated in the 10th **Festival of Pacific Arts** in American Samoa in July 2008. The Festival celebrates the Indigenous cultures of the Pacific region in the areas of traditional and contemporary dance, music, theatre, literature, visual arts, craft and new media. The Australia Council for the Arts worked with state agencies, including Arts Queensland which contributed \$30 000 in BIA funding, to coordinate a national delegation of 30 people to represent Australia. The festival attracted artists and delegates from 27 Pacific nations.
- With \$22,500 in BIA funding, **Umbrella Studios** ran printmaking workshops in 2008 for Indigenous artists in the Townsville region. The workshops have led to a major commission for nine Indigenous artists to create 400 works for a newly refurbished Townsville hotel and an accompanying exhibition, both opening in July 2009.
- As part of the 2008 Brisbane Festival, 15 young Indigenous artists from Far North Queensland were mentored by arts professionals in preparation for their role in the opening night **Black Arm Band** concert. Performing works from an inspirational songbook of contemporary Aboriginal life, the concert featured a line-up of some of the most respected names in Australian music, including Kev Carmody, Troy Cassar-Daly and Jimmy Little.



Aunty Margaret, Bama Women, Mossman Gorge. Photo: David Campbell

- Artists from Far North Queensland drew on their cultures and personal mental health experiences to create an exhibition that explored their individual journeys of recovery and healing. Three Lockhart River artists — Denise Fruit, Doris Platt and Patrick Butcher — along with Torres Strait Island artist, Billy Missi, joined Indigenous psychiatrist Helen Milroy and Cairns mental health clinician Lee George in depicting their experiences from both sides of the mental health healing process. In September 2008, the *Healing Journeys* exhibition opened at the Tanks Art Centre in Cairns, featuring the artists' work as well as a documentary film with artist interviews about the process and the role of art in their lives.
- The **Indigenous Performance Writing** project is developing an accredited course in Radio Performance Writing course for Indigenous Queenslanders. The project started in 2008 with Brisbane Indigenous Media Association running information sessions on courseware and resource development with appropriate cultural considerations. Kate Rowlands, head of new writing for radio, television and film at the BBC in London, attended as an industry advisor. Future training will be provided through an innovative blended approach incorporating online material and community visits by qualified trainers and industry experts. Other project partners include the Australian Film, Television and Radio School; NIRS, broadcaster to 120 Indigenous radio stations; NITV, broadcast provider to Foxtel channel 180; and Carbon Media (Indigenous TV producers and trainers).
- **Gail Mabo** received \$30 000 to develop a full-length dance production — *Koiki* — inspired by native title campaigner Eddie 'Koiki' Mabo. The work will premiere at the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair in 2009.
- In 2009, the **Australian Red Cross** received \$10 000 in funding towards artist fees and production costs for local Indigenous artists to conduct workshops with Indigenous residents of the Cairns Emergency Medical Accommodation Centre. Workshop participants will learn to create weaving, carving and visual art works for display in the centre.

Support for Indigenous artists

A number of Arts Queensland funding programs provide support for Indigenous artists to undertake innovative projects. These programs include Sector Project Grants, the Indigenous Regional Arts Development Fund (IRADF), Industry Development Initiatives and the Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF). From 2007 to early 2009, some highlights include:

- With \$25 125 in development and presentation funding, the 2007 *Island Time Festival* on Minjerrabah (Stradbroke Island) engaged emerging Indigenous artists and performers as part of its first program of contemporary art, music and dance from Australian Indigenous and Pacific Island cultures. The festival brought national recognition for some of the participating artists, including Clara Durbridge, who has since been approached by ABC Radio to perform live on air.



Indigenous Music Workshop and Showcase. Photo: David Campbell

- Mer Islander **Charles Passi** was awarded a \$43 095 Development and Presentation Grant in 2007 to create the Torres Strait Theatre Musical, *Dancing the Line*. Based on oral histories from Torres Strait communities, the musical features original songs and traditional hymns. The project received further Sector Project Grant funding of \$30 000 in 2008–09 to support the next stage of its development — a public showing of the work in progress for community and industry input.
- Award-winning Indigenous poet, **Samuel Wagan Watson**, performed his *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* cycle in collaboration with chamber music ensemble, the Southern Cross Soloists. Staged at the State Library of Queensland in 2008, Watson read his poems and, between each one, the Soloists performed musical interludes that were commissioned from 23 different Brisbane composers. The Southern Cross Soloists produced this performance as part of their funding under the s2m Program.
- **The Blackout Collective** — a grassroots coalition of artists, activists and educators working to empower communities through the arts — received a \$35 915 Development and Presentation Grant in 2007–08 to tour *the other APT* exhibition to the Tjibaou Cultural Centre in Noumea. The exhibition showcases thirty contemporary visual and new media artists from Indigenous and culturally diverse backgrounds.
- Funds from the Indigenous Regional Arts Development Fund (IRADF) supported Cairns-based Indigenous artist, **Margaret Chatfield**, to deliver painting workshops in Mount Isa and Doomadgee to boost skills and exhibition opportunities for local artists. The paintings of 11 participating artists were exhibited at the *Outback at Isa* Art Gallery during the 2008 NAIDOC week celebrations. Margaret’s residency was particularly effective in Doomadgee, where she worked with new artists who wished to paint their ancestors’ stories. The workshops focused on best practice techniques for using acrylic paints, as well as how to use the internet for research and to make contact with appropriate galleries and organisations to explore options for future exhibitions.
- Under its regional partnership program, the **Queensland Theatre Company (QTC)** has delivered an annual program of artist residencies and workshops with primary and secondary school students at Western Cape College in Weipa since 2004. In 2009, QTC was awarded a Lighthouse Grant from the Department of Education, Training and the Arts to expand this program delivery to other schools with significant Indigenous enrolments.



The Dreaming Festival 2008. Photo: Josh Kelly

- Melbourne hosted the inaugural **Australasian World Music Expo** in 2008. There was strong support for Queensland Indigenous performers who gave showcase performances including Zennith, a reggae band from Kuranda; Georgia Corowa, a young graduate from the Aboriginal Centre for Performing Arts; and the Badu Island Dancers.
- In 2008–09, Indigenous youth performance group, the **Dreamtime Gundoos**, received RADF funding from Mackay Regional Council to employ elder Patricia Brimble to run workshops and share her knowledge of art in country using the traditional rock art method. The Dreamtime Gundoos are the first Indigenous business in the Mackay–Whitsunday area to work across Aboriginal, Torres Strait and South Sea Islander cultures and are focusing their efforts on visual arts, performance and cross-cultural education.
- **Megan Sarmardin**, an emerging Indigenous musician from Mount Isa, was awarded \$17 440 in 2008–09 towards the creative development of a solo musical theatre piece based on the oral histories of four generations of Indigenous women.

The broader arts portfolio also plays an important role in raising awareness about Indigenous cultures and knowledge and showcasing the work of Indigenous artists. In June 2007, *Old Ways, New Ways: The Human Story*, an exhibition highlighting the historic 1967 Referendum that gave citizenship to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, opened at the Queensland Museum South Bank. In November 2007, Cobb+Co Museum opened the redeveloped **Binangar Language Centre**, which showcases the close relationships that local Aboriginal people have with the land. As part of its Memoir series, the Museum published *Gelam's Homeland* in 2008. This is the result of a partnership between the local community on Mua Island in the Torres Strait and a professional, cross-disciplinary research team. The publication includes oral history, archaeology, and history about Mua Island, its people, culture and landscape.



The Dreaming Festival 2008. Photo: Josh Kelly