

JONATHAN JONES

Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi

Bachelor of Fine Art 1999

Coordinator Aboriginal Programs, Art Gallery of New South Wales

My first exhibition was at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery. After a successful interview leading to my acceptance into College of Fine Arts [COFA], under the Aboriginal entrance program, Peter McKenzie curated my artwork, 'mum look what I found' 1996 in to the exhibition *What is Aboriginal Art?* Thus, initiating my career with artists such as Emily Kame Kngwarreye and Rover Thomas was an experience for which I will always be humbled and never forget. This exhibition opened within the first six months of my starting the BFA and generated a large amount of debate among my peers and lecturers. Most of this discussion was positive, but some led me to conceal the fact that my position within COFA was created through the Aboriginal entrance program, in an attempt to disarm the concept that my art and I were included solely due to my race.

My education record at that point was at best erratic, from dropping out of school with a feeling of low self-esteem toward my academic ability, and now facing this issue along with many others, I found myself looking for support to continue university. Like many Aboriginal university students, being the first in the family to attend university, meant outside support was required. This resulted in my BFA being punctuated with the close relationships that were formed with peers and lecturers, who helped me overcome this issue and instilled confidence in my work. This support network included Ilaria Vanni, Diane Losche, Elizabeth Ashburn and Lynne Roberts-Goodwin, who still hasn't forgiven me for not majoring in photo-media.

My three-year experience at COFA was mixed. Relying on other people in COFA was not the complete solution to completing my degree. Isolation as an Aboriginal student at COFA left me feeling alone and at times misunderstood. Explaining and justifying my identity while drawing on it to create work was challenging. I started working from within my family, with other Aboriginal artists outside of COFA, and relying on my own Indigenous research approach to achieve COFA's stated outcomes. This fluid and sometimes different process to university unfortunately clashed with the formal tertiary structure and in 2002 I was failed from Honours. Associate Professor Michael McDaniel, Director of Warawara at the Department of Indigenous Education Macquarie University, states 'Aboriginal tertiary education is about achieving the same objectives, though sometimes via different pathways, often involving modes of access and support'. By this he means that the process that Aboriginal students adopt to learn may be different from the mainstream, taking into account Aboriginal social issues and the level of educational opportunities past and present, though the objectives are met at a mainstream level.

An Indigenous COFA Presence is part of the Indigenous journey to achieving 'academic objectives' as a community. Responding for the first time in an exhibition, Indigenous graduates comment on the institution through written accounts and concise bodies of artwork. As with all Indigenous art, the work in this exhibition is multi layered, not only reflecting personal issues through individuals' work, but also collectively commenting on the state of Indigenous education. Since 1987, the University of New South Wales recognises the need for and importance of employing Indigenous staff in their 'Indigenous Employment Plan 2000-2005'. Unfortunately after working with the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) in 1993, this still remains an outstanding issue for COFA.

An Indigenous COFA Presence? Considering the Australian art scene is eclipsed by Indigenous art, why is this demographic not reflected in the presence of Indigenous COFA students and staff, or reflected in the acquisition practices of the UNSW collections?

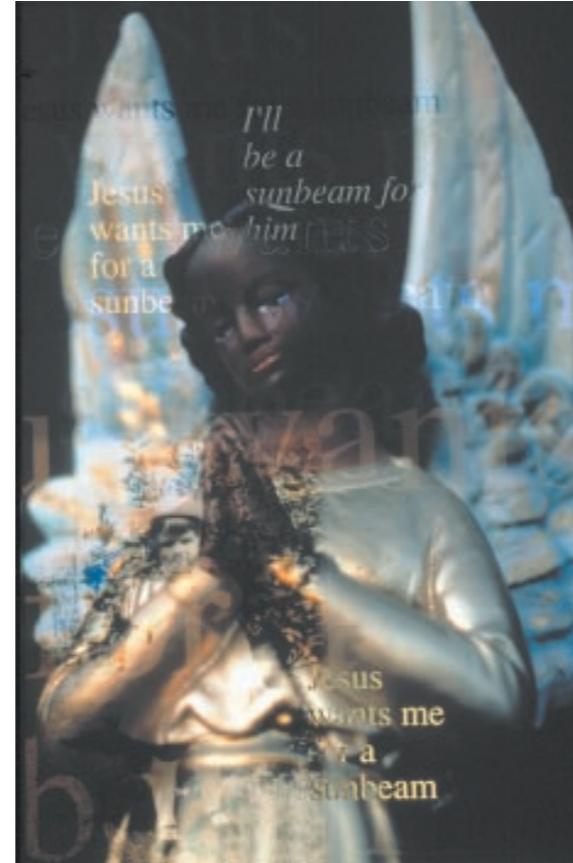


Rea, *RIP Blak Body series III 1995*
Cibachrome digital print. Courtesy the artist

And just as important, why is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art history and theory not included within the Australian art history and theory syllabus for non-Indigenous and Indigenous students alike? This is an essential aspect of Australian art education when realising the depth and influence of Aboriginal art within Australia and the world. It is a process that would relieve Indigenous students of explaining and justifying their own culture, thus enabling them to focus on their studies and empower them within their own institutions and industry.

It is an ironic situation when surveying the strong group of artists included in this exhibition, all of whom have studied at COFA, and are making outstanding contributions to the industry. This is another absence within the Aboriginal education paradigm that this exhibition attempts to rectify by promoting the Indigenous COFA students. The intent is to create a dialogue with future Indigenous COFA students by creating role models. This is leading by example, a primary method of Aboriginal education, and again a way of achieving academic results by providing Indigenous students with first hand experience and real outcomes.

An Indigenous COFA Presence capitalises on the skill within our own community, by re-manifesting that skill into Indigenous education styles to promote and inform Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, in particular COFA, a non-Indigenous institution. By doing so we advocate change to assist the institution, which is intrinsic to our careers and communities.



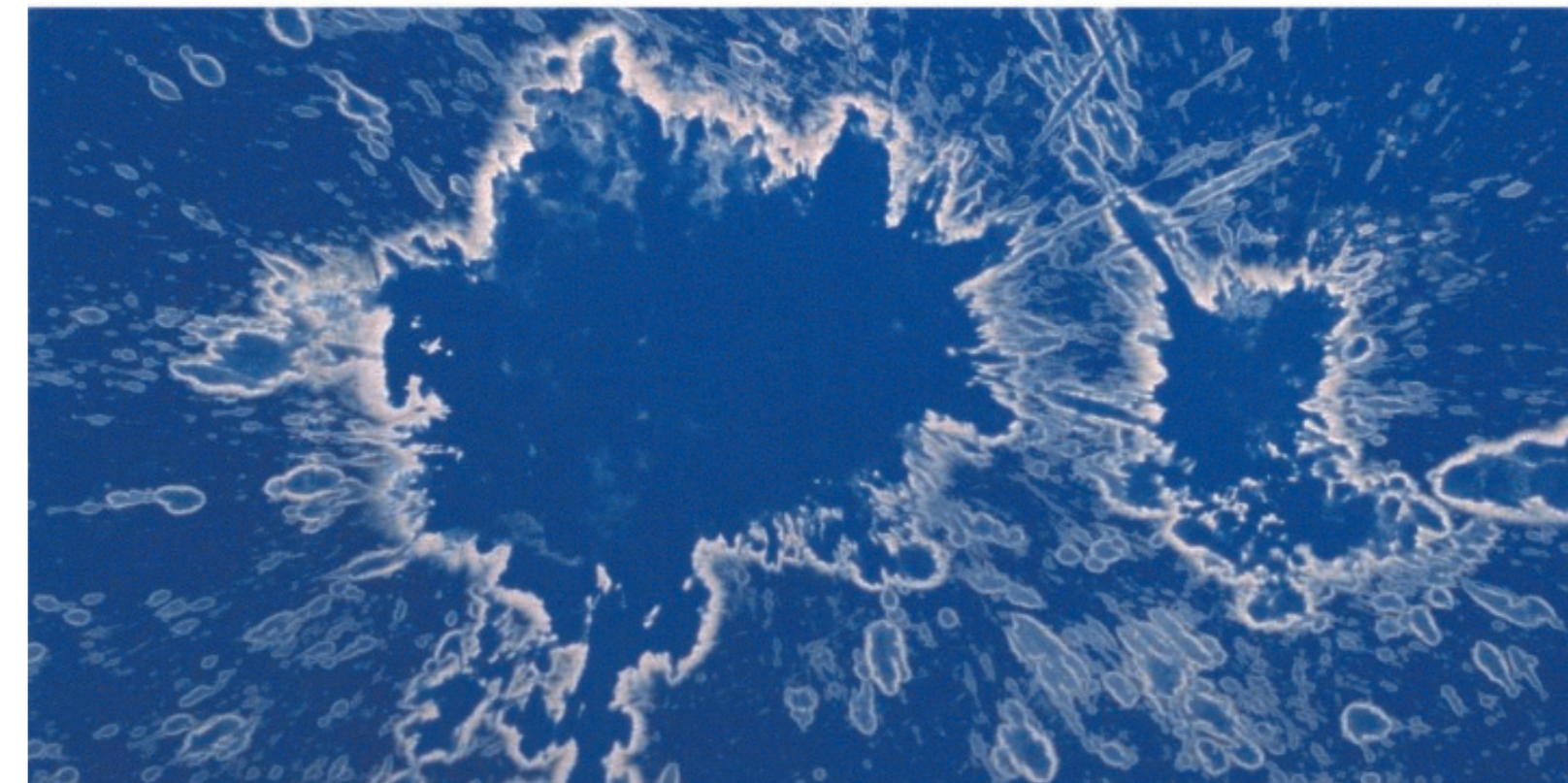
Brenda L. Croft, *Jesus wants me for a sunbeam*, from the series *All(a)red Angels 1998*. Ilfachrome
© Brenda L. Croft 1998/Licensed by VISCOPY, Sydney 2003



Clinton Nain, *Mission Walk off 2001*
Acrylic house paint on canvas. Courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney



AN INDIGENOUS COFA PRESENCE



An Indigenous COFA Presence is a tribute to the success and possibilities of Indigenous communities. I would like to gratefully acknowledge the support of the many individuals and institutions without whose assistance this project could not have been realised, especially the artists Brenda L. Croft, Peter McKenzie, Clinton Nain and Rea. Also, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Rilka Oakley, Nick Waterlow, Brook Andrew, Ace Bourke, Wendy Brady, Lisa Corsi, Sherman Galleries, Sandy Edwards, Karen Jackson, Stills Gallery, ATSiC, Christine Evans, Shirley Gilbert, Sue Green, Angelina Hurlie, Sharnie Jones, Barry Keldoulis, Gail Kelly, Michael McDaniel, Hetti Perkins, Vic Simms, Hilarie Mais and mum.

(COVER) Clinton Nain, *Seven Days of Blue 1 2001*
Bleached Indian cotton. Courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney
Clinton Nain, *Seven Days of Blue 2 2001*
Bleached Indian cotton. Private collection

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INTRODUCTION

Ivan Dougherty Gallery has, over the years, foregrounded a considerable number and wide range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists in its exhibitions and related programmes. An early example was a *Charlie Tjungurrayi Retrospective* curated in 1987 by Peter O’Neill then director of Orange Regional Gallery. Fiona Foley was curator of and exhibitor in *Concept of Country* in 1991, organised with Maningrida Arts Centre, also with the work of Terry Gandadila and Dale Yowingbala. *YANADA New Moon* was curated by Hetti Perkins in 1993 highlighting Aboriginal women. The artists were Namiyal Bopiri, Destiny Deacon, Fiona Foley, Yvonne Koolmatrie, and Queenie McKenzie. And, in 1997, Peter McKenzie, then a COFA lecturer, asked the substantial question *What is Aboriginal Art?* as part of the Olympics Festival of the Dreaming. It was answered most effectively by the selected artists, Bri (Josie Haines), Julie Freeman, Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Ricky Maynard, George Milpururu, Alex Mongta, Peter Mongta, Jonathan Morel (Jonathan Jones), Pauline Nakamara, Jade Rose, Rover Thomas and Stan Ward.

A significant group of Indigenous artists has also been included in a great variety of themed and other exhibitions curated at Ivan Dougherty Gallery over its 25 years of existence. They include Banduk Marika, Judy Watson, Maxie Tjampitjinpa, Tracey Moffatt, Karen Casey, Gordon Bennett, Julie Gough, Ginger Riley Munduwalawala, Lucky Kngwarreye, Robert Ambrose Cole, Timothy Cook, Micky Durrng, Kitty Kantilla, John Mawurndjul, Freddie Timms, Conrad Tipungwuti, Anafjari Tjakamarra, Uta Uta Tjangala, Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri, Jimmy Wululu, Brook Andrew, and Gloria Petyarre.

COFA is particularly interested in increasing the number of Indigenous students, as well as reviewing course offerings so that Indigenous art and design issues will become more central to the work of all of our students. Thus this exhibition represents another important episode in *An Indigenous COFA Presence*; highlighting the work of Rea, Clinton Nain, Peter McKenzie and Brenda L. Croft, all graduates of COFA. The curator in charge of the project, also a College graduate, Jonathan Jones, who exhibited in *What is Aboriginal Art?*, sees this as part of a series of events drawing attention to Indigenous achievement and building a broader Indigenous base at the College for the future. We thank him in particular, as well as the artists for their energy and commitment.

Nick Waterlow

Director
Ivan Dougherty Gallery

Ian Howard

Dean
College of Fine Arts, UNSW



Peter McKenzie, *Dressing room of the La Perouse Football Club 1991*
Black and white photograph Courtesy the artist

SUE GREEN

Wiradjuri

Acting Director, Aboriginal Education Program UNSW

Whilst Indigenous graduates and enrolments continue to increase, Indigenous students still remain grossly under represented at COFA and within the University of New South Wales. This picture is reflective of the position of Indigenous Australians within all levels of education and indeed within every aspect of Australian society. Any news items or attention on Indigenous people and issues tends to be bad news stories or those that up hold the negative stereotypes of Indigenous Australia. What we do not do is celebrate the success and the strength of Indigenous people.

An Indigenous COFA Presence is a celebration of that success and strength. Despite all the barriers and pitfalls that are placed in the way of Indigenous people, we are still able to not only survive but to also achieve at very high levels. The four artists included within this exhibition are all examples of Indigenous people who are outstanding achievers, who have not only manoeuvred their way over the barriers and around the pitfalls, but have also cleared a pathway to allow other Indigenous Australians an easier access to their chosen careers and educational pathways, through their position as role models and proving that Indigenous people are not some stereotypical mob who are all underachievers. The Indigenous Australian community has many higher achievers and success stories, many more than the general Australian community. We just do not hear about them or celebrate them and it is way past time that we should be celebrating.

The University of New South Wales and the Aboriginal Education Program are very proud of the role they have had in providing access points and support for Indigenous Australians to access education and to achieving their goals. However, we do recognise that there is a need to improve upon what we have done in the past and to ensure that no Indigenous student feels isolated or does not leave this institution without the experience of success. Celebrating the successes and achievements of our past students and graduates is one way of ensuring that our current students feel like they are in a supportive environment. By continuing to support and take an active interest in what our graduates are doing is another way. The Aboriginal Education Program is planning on having a lot higher profile at COFA to ensure that no Indigenous student feels isolated, and that there is always a friendly Koori face for Indigenous students to go to. The way to ensure the success of Indigenous students is to ensure that there are Indigenous staff who are visible and available to Indigenous students within all our locations.

This exhibition provides us with the opportunity to celebrate our successes and to focus on areas where we could be doing things better. Furthermore this exhibition gives us a chance to work together to achieve the University of New South Wales stated commitment to Indigenous Australians and to the reconciliation process.

BRENDA L. CROFT

Gurindji

Master of Art Administration 1995

Senior Curator Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, National Gallery of Australia
Stills Gallery Sydney

What do I remember about my time at COFA? Well, it was nearly a decade ago, so I’m having to dredge the memory bank somewhat. Let’s see, it was waaaaaaaay back in my Dreamtime, in 1990, the year that I started working at Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative as it’s Co-ordinator. By working, I mean ‘paid’ working, as I had been with the organisation since its early days, being one of 10 founding members in 1987. All of us had worked voluntarily but in 1990 we were able to secure funding from the Department of Education, Employment and Training, under its TAP (Training for Aboriginal People) program to initially create two positions, with a further two positions the following year. In 1990 the two positions were Co-ordinator and Curator and I decided I’d also like to undertake study to accompany the TAP program.

As I hadn’t actually finished my Bachelor of Visual Arts I went to see Nick Waterlow and Ian Howard at COFA to plead my case for my work experience at Boomalli being sufficient to be accepted in the then Graduate Diploma in Gallery Management. Very generously they agreed, and that’s how I started the Grad Dip in 1990, and managed to extend a one year full-time course into a four year part-time course. During this period the Grad Dip was upgraded to a Master of Art Administration, which was great for me, and I finally graduated in 1995.

I really enjoyed my time at COFA, and many of the colleagues I met during those years have remained good friends. The encouragement and support that I received unstintingly from lecturers such as Nick, Ian, and especially John Fitzpatrick and Joanna Mendelsohn, who were so supportive of the Indigenous students at COFA. Their personal encouragement kept me going through some bleak times, particularly in my final year when my younger brother was killed in an accident.

I honestly believe that I would not be doing what I am doing now, or any of my professional development since 1995 were it not for having undertaken the Master of Art Administration.

In 2001 I received one of five Alumni Awards given to graduates by the UNSW, and I think it was the first time that a COFA graduate received one. Nick and Joanna came to the award ceremony and I was so stunned by the company of my fellow Alumni that I was for once in my life speechless and could only trip up the stairs to the stage!



Brenda L. Croft
Irrisable/Irresistible,
from the series *Fever*
(you give me) 2000
Fuji Crystal Archive
prints on Lexan
© Brenda L. Croft
2000/Licensed by
VISOCOPY, Sydney 2003

So, I’d like to use this opportunity to re-state my great appreciation to my former lecturers who have also become my colleagues and close friends and thank them for their encouragement and support over the years.



Peter McKenzie, *Broome 1990*
C type print Courtesy the artist

PETER MCKENZIE

Eora/Sydney

Master of Fine Arts 1994

Director Armidale Region Culture Centre and Keeping Place

“Me and COFA, you had to ask didn’t you?...” My association with COFA has been on several levels, Student, Lecturer and ‘in-house Aboriginal’. My experience as a Student was one which I did enjoy, my advisor Lynne Roberts-Goodwin and other lecturers were very supportive and the freedom I enjoyed to pursue my subject made the effort quite enjoyable. However, being employed by COFA was enjoyable only up to the point until it was assumed that as part of my job I should be dragging blacks off the street to come to COFA and train to be ‘proper’ Artists.

This assumption was no doubt fired by the popular notion at the time that everybody with a suntan must be an artist and the school with the most blacks would be leading the field! ...wrong. COFA considers itself to be an expert on blacks, knowing what’s best instead of having a *realistic* expectation of what Aboriginal people are.

I had no intention of encouraging Aboriginal people to go to *any* Art College (especially COFA, given the experiences discussed by some currently attending Aboriginal students) unless of course they initiated the process themselves. Visiting schools and other places to convince black kids that they could get a degree to assist them for waitressing and taxi-driver jobs or the dole was not my idea of doing any Koorie favour. After all most blacks in Aboriginal art were doing quite well without the bit of paper to make them ‘real artists’.

I was able to prove my point when I got to curate the Olympics Aboriginal Festival of the Arts exhibition *What is Aboriginal Art?* at Ivan Dougherty Gallery. I just got some of my old mates who were seriously unknown to put Artwork in the show and hung a few famous blacks’ works along-side to make up the number. My old mate Djon Mundine wrote a totally unassociated intro for the catalogue, we added a bit of showbiz with some wine labeled for the show, got my two cousins to *undress-up* like ‘real’ blacks and everyone felt warm and fuzzy inside. By the way, the show was quite successful.

I was not COFA material and this probably explains why the Ivan Dougherty Gallery curators never ever invited me to be involved in *any* staff shows in the years I worked at COFA (in spite of 30 years of survival in the real art world). I came to COFA as an experienced artist and photographer, all they needed and perhaps wanted was an ‘in-house Aboriginal’.

I sound like I’m bitter and twisted, maybe I am; COFA did nothing for me personally except give me the opportunity to make some life long friends – all of whom are seriously out of step with the establishment – they know who they are at COFA. Anyway, enjoy my colleagues’ works, they are serious artists and like all artists need to be encouraged and if you can’t understand mine, read the labels!

CLINTON NAIN

Erub/Miriam Mer/Ku Ku

Master of Fine Arts 2002

Sherman Galleries Sydney

I have often been in the past described as a ‘political artist’. I see myself as an artist with something to say. I like to make people think and be confronted with evidence of the past and the present, and especially to think about the future.

When I began this Master of Fine Arts by Research, I knew that I wanted to do two things – to record and commit to paper my mother’s accounts of the family history – and also to somehow, through art and story, re-live those ancient journeys and ancestral wanderings, which in themselves are fascinating history, but also by so doing, to better understand myself, to see myself clearly as a 21st century artist of Australian Indigenous descent, and all that that means.

In a wider sense I also felt the need to give back identity to the ‘unknown’ and to remember with respect what has happened in the past here in Australia and all over the world. The experience of colonisation has played a major part in my family story, and therefore my own identity today. Over centuries my people have been denied and stolen, desecrated, displaced and dispossessed, and that also is why I feel such a need to recover and uncover the past. The voices of forgotten peoples – the ‘other’ – need to be heard from a Blak perspective, and understanding my own history is the start of a Journey that explores this country’s history, which in turn leads to an exploration of its place in world history – a history that has helped shaped our future.

By theorizing and yarning and continuing an oral history, as my folk always have, I learned the language that these stories have come from, so that my people do not lose their identities and become faceless and of no value. I attempt to share these stories and ideas, keeping to the languages in which the stories were originally told. But I also hear the voices of Blak popular consumer culture as an equally strong expression of post-colonial urban Blakness.

With consciousness of the past comes awareness of the future, of the need for change, new ideas, a new language...

How and when this will come about within this society, and the deep cultural and political changes that are needed, is in the future. As an artist, my language is the visual. The artwork is my ‘evidence’ – I explore and express my findings through the art, and through it I speak back and speak ‘Blak’ – and find the syllables and symbols of a new personal language.

First and foremost I owe a great debt of gratitude to Professor Elizabeth Ashburn, who took me on, along with the massive task I had set myself, and has mentored and guided me through two years of research. I would also like to remember, acknowledge and give thanks to the first peoples of this land on which COFA stands. Just like this land, we are here... we always have been and always will be... we, “the other”, are everywhere.

The inspiration of COFA alumni like Brenda L. Croft and Rea has given me the confidence to embark on postgraduate studies here, and hopefully my own experience will provide inspiration to others in their turn.



Clinton Nain,
Walking in the Reign 2001
Red ochre,
umbrellas,
bleached linen
Courtesy the artist
and Sherman
Galleries, Sydney

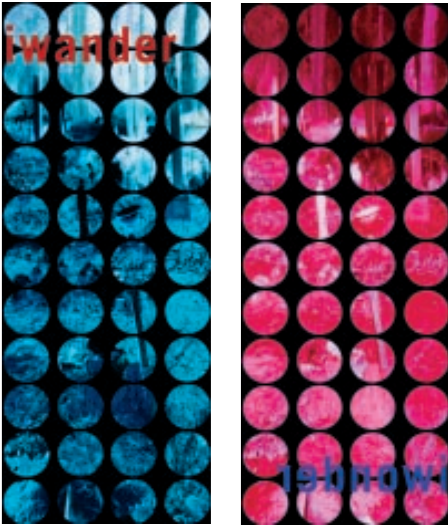
REA

Gamileroi/

Wailwan

Bachelor of Fine

Art 1993



Rea, *urban.com series - iwonder iwonder* 2001
Digital image on paper Courtesy the artist

I, like most kids, dreamt of going to university one day. However, that day seemed to be moving further and further away from my reach. In 1989 I was studying at the Eora Centre located in Regent Street, Redfern when Michael McDaniel (then an Indigenous teacher at the Eora Centre) suggested to me that I might like to think about going to university! I was not sure that I was ready to do this or that I had the confidence to even attempt to do it! I was 27 years old and consumed by a complete lack of self-confidence. But the seed had been planted and I began to sort of think about ‘uni’ for the rest of that year. Michael kept the pressure on me by telling the other teachers that I was really going to university! And they kept asking me which university was I going to go to? And what was I thinking of studying?

So of course the seed grew and I became open to the idea. It was then suggested that I make an appointment at the College of Fine Arts to see John Fitzpatrick, an Irish/Australian who had a strong commitment to Indigenous Art and Culture, and who was a lecturer in Aboriginal Studies in the theory department at COFA. I first met John at the Eora Centre. John would drop in from time to time to offer support to those Indigenous students who wanted to pursue a degree in Fine Arts. He was particularly supportive of those like me, who were terrified of dealing with government bureaucracies, scared of universities and fearful of studying with non-Indigenous people! After a number of meetings with John Fitzpatrick I actually gained enough information and confidence to apply to the undergraduate program in Fine Arts at COFA.

In 1993 I successfully completed my Fine Arts Degree with a major in Photography and Digital Applications and a minor in Sound. During my time at COFA I had some challenging moments and some memorable days and John Fitzpatrick shared in all of them. He became my mentor as well as my friend. John understood that no matter what Indigenous community you came from, that Indigenous students needed to feel like they were still part of a community – even at university. Thankfully, John and his office became our community and our meeting place.

I want to thank Michael and John for caring, and for giving me much more than they were ever expected to give to their students as teachers, because their on-going support and friendship changed my life.

I also think that I was very lucky to have had a fantastic mob of lecturers during my three years of study at COFA. Many of these lecturers who are also practising artists are still in my life today so I want to thank all of you for the passion for art that you encouraged me to find within myself.

In 2003 I have an undergraduate degree in Fine Arts from COFA University of NSW, a Masters by Research in Visual Arts from the Australian National University and a Masters of Science in Digital Imaging and Design from New York University. I also have an on-going visual arts practice, a body of work in digital processes and a passion for learning that continues to be inspired by the time that I spent at COFA.