

## THE UNIIKUP-COLOURISE FESTIVAL DEVELOPMENT STORY

***The work produced in urban centres is now widely acknowledged as a vital contribution to contemporary art thinking. Like many other hybrid styles of the late twentieth century it is layered with political and cultural commentary, social realism, (and often) wit and satire. Urban based artists are using the latest materials and technology to realize their stories and link their ancestry. Artists will use memory, imagination as well as practical knowledge of their art form to mark their sense of place and tell their story.***

(CEREMONY TO CD-ROM, Indigenous Creative Industries in Brisbane, Report prepared for the Economic Development Branch, Brisbane City Council, Research and Report by Michael Keane and John Hartley, Creative Industries Research and Applications Centre (CIRAC), Queensland University of Technology August 2001)

***The growing visibility of artistic networks and ideological coalitions among Indigenous peoples on a transnational scale urges a fresh look at the mechanisms of cultural entanglement and the particular rights and insights afforded by Indigeneity in that process. Cast as an ethical touchstone in some arenas and a thorny complication in others, Indigeneity now matters in global debates about natural resources, heritage, governance, representation and social justice, to name just some of the contentious issues that continue to stall the unfinished business of decolonisation. Indigenous arts, simultaneously attuned to local voices and global cultural flows, have often been the vanguard in communicating what is at stake in such debates, to international as well as grass-roots audiences. At the same time, the global circulation of Indigenous arts as cultural capital has affected the ways in which Indigeneity is activated and understood across different social and aesthetic platforms.***

In the Balance: Indigeneity, Performance, Globalization Conference promotion, University of London, October 2013. <http://indigeneity.net/>

### **1. DEVELOPMENT**

*... We are no longer in the period when industry was born. We are in a period of monopolies, trusts, multinational corporations.* Sembene "Ousmane, filmmaker, Senegal Africa <sup>1</sup>

It is crucial that development of Australian Indigenous arts praxis is seen within the context of the unfinished business of decolonisation, rather than the benefits of integration, if cultural integrity and independence is to remain in-tact and exercised. Uniikup Productions Ltd. (formerly Murriimage Community Video and Film Service) and consequently Colourise Festival developed within this context, prioritising concern for and resolution of issues relevant to both underdevelopment of Australian Indigenous arts praxis and development without cultural integrity and independence.

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<sup>1</sup> Film and Politics in the Third World, Editor, Downing H.D. 1987, Autonomedia, Brooklyn, USA, p.43.

### **1.1 Where and why it started?**

Uniikup screen culture events date back to 1988. In 1987 Carl Fisher and Christine Peacock, principal members of *Murriimage Community Video and Film Service* (established out of the Community Development initiatives of the Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Service in 1985), were recipients of an Overseas Study Tour Award. The award was financed by the Commonwealth Department of Employment Education and Training, with funding to document the trip on Super 8 film, from the Australian Film Commission and Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council. The purpose of the award was to meet, network, and record the initiatives of other Indigenous people utilising audio visual media in their communities. The tour included Brazil, Cuba, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia, and resulted in the production of a 58 minute documentary *Makin Tracks* and a published report. Work collected during the tour was screened at the inaugural *Murriimage Indigenous Film Festival*, an open air event held during the *Survival Festival* in Musgrave Park, Brisbane 1988.

The research from the study tour established that much of the work produced by Indigenous people in their local communities, and others like Afro-American and Afro-British film-makers, received very limited screenings and audiences. Evidence indicated that this was largely due to the rejection by broadcasters and distributors of production processes and treatment of issues and stories arising from the cultural forms and practices, and political realities of the filmmakers. Murriimage Community Video and Film Service had already begun to experience this rejection (of a specifically Indigenous cultural approach to screen program production), and realised that it was necessary to include film and video exhibition in the services offered by the organisation, creating the opportunity to develop audiences for authentic and relevant work produced with and in the community. Consequently, videos were screened in halls and at various community events, in the following years.

### **1.2 Highlights**

Uniikup Productions Ltd., established in 1994, incorporated Murriimage as a trading name and undertook, under the terms of its constitution, promotion of Indigenous screen culture. This led in 1996, to a successful submission to the Brisbane City Council for the *Indigenous Eyes Film Festival*. *Indigenous Eyes* was staged over one week at NAIDOC events in Inala, Zillmere, Woodridge, Wynnum and South Brisbane, where the work of Murriimage and the growing presence and diversity of Indigenous video and film production in the media industry was promoted to the community. Murriimage continued to exhibit the work of Indigenous filmmakers during the annual Brisbane NAIDOC gathering season in July, at the Family Fun Day event in Musgrave Park, which was attracting an ever-increasing audience (recorded attendance 20,000 in 2008). The casual style of exhibiting the work in an environment where people could move around, come and go, meet up and converse with friends, enjoy light refreshments or a meal, created its own appeal. When the Musgrave Park Cultural Centre formally took responsibility for the organisation of the Family Fun Day event, and established its offices at the Jagera Arts Centre in Musgrave Park, an informal partnership with the Centre was created. Funding for some of the Murriimage screen culture events (*Big Black Eye* and *Spontaneous Corroboree*) was provided by State Government NAIDOC week funds, and a successful submission

to the Gaming Community Benefit Fund provided screening equipment - projector, screen, playback vcr/dvd, amplifier and speakers.

In 2001, the Hon Judith Spence, Minister for the Queensland Government Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, supported the *Colourised Film Festival* as an annual event promoting Department services, during the NAIDOC gathering season, at the Metro Arts Centre cinema. The event was organised by DATSIP staff. Staff changes in 2003 made the event difficult to organise, prompting DATSIP to outsource the organisation of their Colourised Film Festival to Uniikup Productions Ltd. Uniikup was at that time in the process of partnering with The Brisbane Powerhouse, for an Indigenous screen culture event, through the Artistic Director Zane Trow. These negotiations continued when Zane Trow moved to Southbank Corporation.

*Colourised Film Festival 2003 - Screen Change*, was staged at South Bank Piazza. The event received considerable in-kind support from Southbank Corporation through the Indigenous Community Liaison Officer Charlie Watson, and developed a strong commitment to the Reconciliation movement. This large, screen-based, multiform cultural event was funded by DATSIP, Brisbane City Council, and Pacific Film and Television Commission.

In 2004, Christine Peacock, a director of Uniikup Productions Ltd., accepted a part-time position as Associate Lecturer, Indigenous Perspectives, with Queensland University of Technology Creative Industries Faculty. A smaller experimental event, *Colourised Film Festival 2004 – ReDiscovery*, was sponsored at the new Creative Industries Precinct, Kelvin Grove. DATSIP provided a small grant for organisational costs, to acknowledge and encourage the support from QUT Creative Industries.

The 2004 experiment led to a much larger media-arts event in 2005. The description “film” was dropped from the festival title, due to Uniikup Productions’ broadened media-arts approach. *Colourised Festival 2005 – Corridors* enjoyed an informal partnership with Queensland University of Technology, Creative Industries Faculty, supported by Assoc Professors Judith McLean and Zane Trow (who had taken up a QUT Associate Professor position); and close collaboration with Indigenous staff at State Library Queensland and Queensland Museum. Major funds for the festival were provided by the Department Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy (with great interest and confidence in the objectives of the event given by the Hon. Liddy Clarke), Brisbane City Council (endorsed by Councilor Helen Abrahams) and Queensland Indigenous Arts Marketing and Export Agency (Department of State Development Trade and Innovation). Further funds were provided by the Australian Film Commission, Pacific Film and Television Commission, with in-kind and cash contributions from Australian Film TV and Radio School. The event was staged during the July NAIDOC gathering season at various venues across South Brisbane, the city, and West End. Details of the Colourised Festival 2005 event can be accessed at <http://colourise.com.au/events/2005-2/>

Colourise Festival partnered with Brisbane International Film Festival from 2007 to 2009, to create the *ColouriseBIFF* program, an initiative of Festival Director, Anne Demi-Geroe. The support provided for programming increased and improved the profile of Colourise Festival,

providing national and international networking. It also increased and improved the profile for local and national Indigenous film-makers and film-making.

### **1.3 Organisation Structure**

In 1985, after successfully completing Television Producer training and the Television Producers' Course at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in Sydney, Christine Peacock was engaged by the Community Development section of the Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency, to initiate visual media in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community of Brisbane. This initiative required Christine to draw upon video production and management skills, as well as her community theatre practice as a Performer, Director and Producer.

Subsequently, responding to the needs of the Indigenous community in SE Queensland, Murriimage Community Video and Film Service was registered as a trading name in 1986; which was followed by the incorporation of a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, Uniikup Productions Ltd, in 1994. Uniikup's original Board of Directors were community people with film and television industry skills and experience, and later Directors included those who had managed production companies or were experienced in associated areas. The current board and membership consists of people with diverse skills and experience in the media-arts industry. Details at <http://colourise.com.au/about-uniikup-productions-ltd/>

### **1.4 Event Management**

Uniikup/Murriimage screen culture events were originally initiated by securing NAIDOC or Brisbane City Council funding and use of Murriimage/Uniikup surplus funds, to pay for venue hire fees (or tents in the case of the *Indigenous Eyes* event), event management expenses, screening equipment, and film-maker fees. Prior to the much larger 2003 festival, event management consisted of an organiser, with assistance from a screening operator. Event organisation included the selection of work for the screening program and event publicity. In 2003 staff in the marketing section of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, along with events staff at Southbank Corporation, assisted Uniikup Productions Ltd. with event management, publicity and, assessment of work for the screen program.

The level of funds available in 2005 allowed an event management team to be employed for the first time; an Artistic Director, Event Manager, Screen Program Curator, Publicist and Finance Manager/Bookkeeper, as well as volunteer Photographer, Festival Opening Ceremony and Forum Event Organiser. The Australian Film Television and Radio School sponsored the festival by providing space for the event management team at their office in the Judith Wright Centre, Fortitude Valley. A web site [www.colourise.com.au](http://www.colourise.com.au) was also constructed and managed, the purpose of the site to promote the work of Uniikup Productions and render transparency for the functions of the organisation. (Website upgraded in 2015.)

Managed with a subsistence level of funding, succeeding festival events have been organised by the Artistic Director, Event Assistant and/or Publicist. All events are publicised and documented on the website and promoted using Colourise FaceBook page, Twitter and Instagram.

## **1.5 Financial Management**

Company business is dealt by Uniikup Directors, in accordance with the rules of the Constitution. Audits of income and expenditure are presented and endorsed at Annual General Meetings. Operations are kept simple and transparent, and free of financial, structural or organisational crisis.

Over 30 years Uniikup Productions Ltd. has managed operations with limited funding. The organisation remains financially viable (originally by producing video programs for the Brisbane Indigenous community and government organisations) through arts and cultural funding programs. Income pays for Uniikup facility and operational costs, and employment of project/event production staff and artists. Most of the company's operational and organisational work is performed on a freelance voluntary basis. Currently, Uniikup organisational business is conducted both from homes of Administrator/s and a dedicated space in the offices of Black Drum/Nguin Warrup at 1/12 Cordelia Street South Brisbane, which is a significant cost saving.

Government and corporate sponsors and partners have included: QUT Creative Industries, the Queensland Indigenous Arts Marketing and Export Agency, Brisbane City Council, the Dept. of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, the State Library of Queensland, South Bank Corporation, Musgrave Park Cultural Centre, ArtsQ, ScreenQ, BIFF, Australian Film Commission, Queensland Museum, Australian Film Television and Radio School, Multi-Arts Asia Pacific, Gaming Community Benefit Fund and numerous others. Uniikup is a registered not-for-profit charitable entity and is currently seeking Tax Deductible Gift Recipient status.

## **2. SUMMARY OF KEY ACHIEVEMENTS**

The achievements listed reflect the prioritisation of cultural integrity and independence.

### **2.1 Uniikup Development**

- The ability to conceptualise, organise and stage significant Indigenous media-art events reflects a consolidated approach derived from the community development program of the Brisbane Aboriginal and Islander Child Care agency in 1985. (Indigenous community Radio 98.9 Murri Country and other initiatives were also supported by this program.)
- The Overseas Study Award in 1987 provided the opportunity to gauge where development was headed, where it could go, and the distinct Indigenous processes and practices pertaining to audio visual/media-art praxis peculiar to place. This experience consolidated a unique way of working relevant to the continuation of Indigenous culture and community development.
- Accumulation of skills and the development of processes and practices, peculiar to Indigenous culture and place, evident in the significant body of work *Uniikup Productions Ltd. Optical Media Collection*. (Available at [http://colourise.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/UNIIKUP\\_OMC1.pdf](http://colourise.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/UNIIKUP_OMC1.pdf))
- Sustaining the operations of Uniikup Productions Ltd. notwithstanding the varying conditions regulating media and arts funding. This includes 30 years of transparent and default free financial

transactions which helped shape good relations with funding bodies and partners and a respected profile within the local Indigenous community.

- Authentic, politically and socially pertinent media-art which, like Aboriginal visual art, has the potential to create international audiences and relations which contribute to an esteemed and strengthened global position for Australian Indigenous society and country/ies.
- Uniikup sustains a moderate membership and continues to attract skilled and knowledgeable local people, who contribute to the cultural capital and unique capabilities of the organisation.
- In 2001 Uniikup Productions Ltd. published and distributed 300 copies of *The History, Life and Times of Robert Anderson*, documenting a prominent community Elder. The book was supported by Arts Queensland and Positive Solutions and launched by the Lord Mayor, Jim Soorley.
- The sustained and continued development of an Indigenous community media-arts organisation over twenty-eight years, dedication to Indigenous customs and values handed down from generation to generation for longevity.
- The continuous cultivation of Uniikup and Colourise work, signals the ability of the Indigenous community to maintain culture, tradition, values and independence, despite the great social turmoil and subsequent depredation and impoverishment caused by colonisation of territory and the suppression of independence, authority governance within Indigenous concepts of sovereignty.

## **2.2 Developing a Hybrid art form**

- Colourise Festival emerges from the recognition that the full potential and scope of Indigenous culture is a unique social and spiritual dimension of experience still largely absent from cosmopolitan and regional Queensland.
- This unique annual festival in Brisbane, initiated from within the Indigenous community and dedicated to the promotion of Indigenous culture, influenced and encouraged larger festival organisers to favourably consider the inclusion of Indigenous content in programming and prompted increased recognition of potential national and international appeal.
- Uniikup Productions received increased contact from organisers of other festivals seeking information or assistance to include Indigenous films in their screening programs, which offered further exposure for Indigenous screen culture.
- The *Colourised* Festival 2005 primarily encouraged, presented and promoted the production of video, film and media-art by Queensland Indigenous filmmakers/artists and sought to include national and international Indigenous filmmakers and their work. In 2003, generous sponsorship was received from Channel 7 for a \$1000 cash prize for the Best Short Film and from the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, for a prize of a short course in filmmaking for the best community production.
- The Indigenous perspective from which the *Colourised* Festival originated presented a unique approach to Festival, through the age old gathering practices and traditions inherent in ceremony and corroboree. This Indigenous practice and approach to Festivals is relatively new, and other attempts to recreated or copy these elements tend to result in a two dimensional, ethnographic rendition of Indigenous culture.
- Colourise Festivals are enhanced, with available financing, by the collaboration and work of various local Indigenous artists - musicians, visual artists, dancers, performers, writers, story

tellers - philosophers and activists, importing the vital contribution of communities and the exciting potential of a hybrid-media-art form.

- The Festivals provide employment and promotion for local Indigenous visual and animation artists, performers and writers whose contribution to the Brisbane cultural landscape is still largely undervalued.
- In 2005, an innovative publicity and promotional approach was taken, with lectures and a Forum for debate and critique to build understanding of Indigenous artistic endeavour and an Indigenous cultural perspective on approaches to Festival gatherings.
- *ColouriseBIFF* events in 2007 – 09 introduced an Indigenous community gathering spirit to the glitz and glamour of Brisbane International Film Festival, providing audiences with a more intimate knowledge of local, national and international Indigenous cultures, and the opportunity to interact with local people in specific Indigenous cinematic environments. It was disappointing and short-sighted that this dimension was not considered important or significant, with development curtailed by excluding *ColouriseBIFF* from the 2010 and successive programs.

### **2.3 Community Development**

- The development of *Colourise Festival* made a contribution to the social and emotional well-being of Indigenous society, by also featuring a tribute ceremony paying respect to Elders and other local Indigenous people, which emphasised the importance of family values central to Indigenous traditions.
- The Festival contributed to the evolution of a concentrated Indigenous presence in Brisbane during NAIDOC week, complementing and promoting this significant gathering season.
- Utilising prominent arts venues, community organisations and public spaces creates new environments with the prospect of inspiring the social convergence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and creating new audiences.

### **3. CURRENT SITUATION**

The acceptance and appeal of Indigenous culture and art outside conventional forms presenting what Australian audiences perceive to be Aboriginal, in Brisbane Queensland in particular, presents a problem in the domestic market. Partnerships forged by Uniikup over the years, however, indicate the situation can be addressed, by creating an Indigenous presence in places within the cultural landscape where potentially larger audiences are attracted.

*In the Balance: Indigeneity Performance and Globalisation*, is organised by the international research project *Indigeneity in the Contemporary World: Performance, Politics, Belonging*, and substantially financed by the *European Research Council* and the *Centre for International Theatre and Performance Research*. Such initiatives indicate that Indigenous culture, customs, values, and world views are more widely recognised as offering a significant contribution to what has become an untenable financial and environmental existence for a majority of the world's population. This

view brings with it recognition of, and support for both innovative contemporary Indigenous art forms based on traditional practices and custom, and the transnational circulation of Indigeneity as a highly marketable commodity, particularly in Europe<sup>2</sup>.

Consequently, including Indigenous creative and cultural values in criteria of arts initiatives/programs, is resulting in improved financing by funding agencies and in turn a rise in more sophisticated arts projects. Also increased access to philanthropic and commercial funding furthers the opportunity to invigorate Australian arts industries at large with such contemporary product potent with well-being.

The experiences of the 2003 and 2005, and 2007 – 2009 *Colourise*BIFF events lead Uniikup to believe the pace of change in Brisbane is addressed by adoption of a strategy that brings a specific local Indigenous approach and innovative type of authenticity to the programming of prominent venues, festivals and events. This is evident in recent events like, for example, Cross Stitch at Metro Arts and Clancestry at QPAC in 2013, as well as regular exhibitions and performance at State Library Queensland. Creative collaboration of this type brings regular events and develops more appeal to domestic audiences which can contribute to drawing national and international audiences to Brisbane venues and events.

Important is the consolidation of the skills of staff in these cultural institutions, local Indigenous artists and a cultural catalyst organisation like Uniikup. Creating space to collaborate, plan and execute regular specifically local Indigenous cultural programming, provides the means to target both the Indigenous community and larger mainstream audiences. Supporting new ventures where collaboration between prominent venues, festivals, institutions and local Indigenous artists maintains respect for cultural and conceptual independence and integrity, brings mutual benefit and the way forward.

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<sup>2</sup> Indigeneity in the Contemporary World, [www.indigeneity.net](http://www.indigeneity.net).