

**STATS AND STORIES - CASE STUDY 3**

**SOCIAL  
INCLUSION**



**DEAKIN**  
UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA  
Worldly

# IN THE SADDLE; ON THE WALL

THE IMPACT OF THE ARTS IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

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## OVERVIEW

### STATS AND STORIES: THE IMPACT OF THE ARTS IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

**Stats and Stories: The Impact of the Arts in Regional Australia** is a ground breaking project funded by Regional Arts Australia and Australia Council for the Arts that calls for new ways to identify and respond to Australia's vast land, diversity and differences, including its challenges and opportunities in regional Australia, using the arts as the vehicle.

The Stats and Stories project covers five themes and five case studies. The five themes were developed from the literature on the regional impact of the arts. One case study is written on each of the five themes.

The five themes are:

1. Community connectedness
2. Economic regeneration
3. Social inclusion
4. Civic pride and community identity
5. Regional development

The five case studies are:

1. Animating Spaces
2. Silver Ball Screening Festival
3. In the Saddle; On the Wall
4. BighArt
5. First Coat

The research project was undertaken by academic staff at Deakin University in the Business School. The project was led by Professor Ruth Rentschler, and Dr Kerrie Bridson at Deakin University, as well as Associate Professor Jody Evans at Melbourne Business School. Research support was provided by Claudia Escobar, Emma Winston and Nick Cooke.

For more information about the project please contact John Oster, Executive Director, Regional Arts Australia [john.oster@regionalarts.com.au](mailto:john.oster@regionalarts.com.au)



Social inclusion: In the Saddle, On the Wall creates a community where all people feel valued, their differences respected, and their basic needs met so they can live with dignity. It is a determinant of mental health and wellbeing.<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

In the Saddle, On the Wall, is an Indigenous community arts project undertaken in the Kimberley Region of far Western Australia.

The project was developed between 2009 and 2014 by five Kimberley Art Centres, with a group of Indigenous artists and their families. It is supported by ABC Open, the Australian Government, Lottery West and the Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA).

In 2009, these Kimberley Art Centres were interested in building an archive about their senior artists documenting the oral and visual history of Kimberley artists recalling the cattle days and their early history. The purpose of this archive was to give young community members experience and direct knowledge of their elders and their shared history.

These artists had once been station people, so their stories were closely linked to the settlement of non-Indigenous people in this region. This aspect was crucial for the development of the project. Through the project, differences rather than similarities in diverse communities were emphasized, where there are large Indigenous communities on traditional lands living side by side with settler peoples.

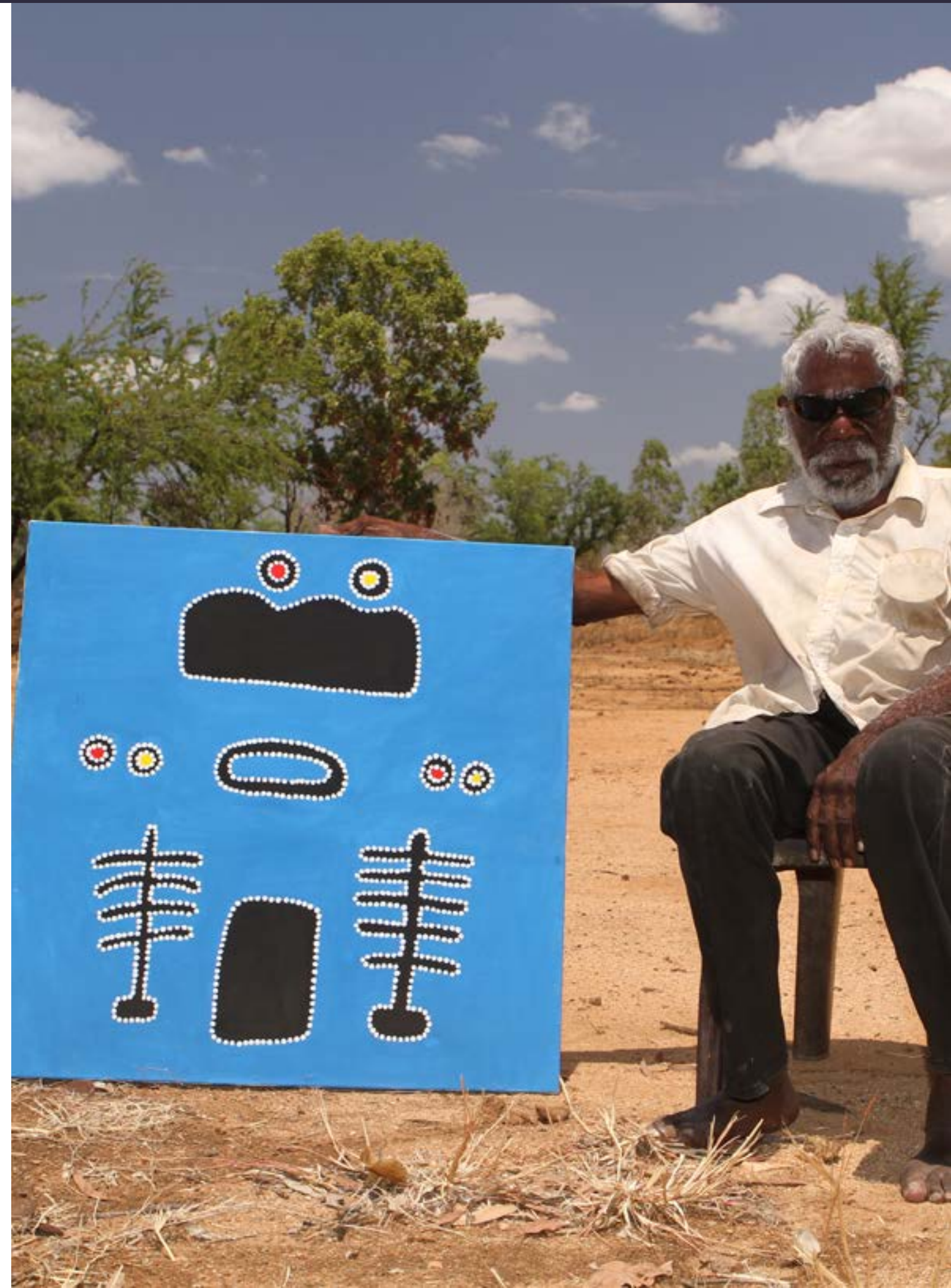
Cathy Cummins, Manager at Waringarri Indigenous Arts explains:

*This is the story of Indigenous people and white people of the Kimberley working together to achieve amazing things. It is about sharing with the younger generations who didn't necessarily know the stories.*

The project increases social inclusion in the region in three ways. First, In the Saddle; On the Wall promotes cooperation between different community members and arts organisations sharing a story about Australian national identity that hadn't been told before.

Second, it promotes awareness of the positive contributions of the Aboriginal people to Australian national identity.

Third, it reduces Indigenous social isolation through the arts. All three means create a shared sense of community pride and identity.



Rammy Ramsey  
Photograph by Matt Fallon





## BACKGROUND

### KIMBERLEY, WA

In 2013 the Kimberley region had a population of 39,980 people, characterised by a unique demographic set including around 44% Indigenous people and a young workforce aiming to capitalise on regional opportunities.<sup>2</sup> Of this population 84% were born in Australia and 16% were born elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

The Kimberley region houses some of Australia's National Parks and its northern fringe includes drowned river valleys. In 1688 William Dampier, British explorer was credited for being the first landing on the Kimberley shore. Portuguese, Dutch and French visits were also recorded in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>5</sup>

The 19<sup>th</sup> century brought Europeans to the grasslands and in 1886 the gold rush brought Europeans and Chinese to Halls Creek. Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Pearl fishing brought Japanese and Malay divers to Broome.

At this time, Indigenous Australians were moved from their traditional areas and missionaries and white administrators brought new cultural practices and beliefs to the district.<sup>6</sup>

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT<sup>7</sup>

The arrival of cattle in the 1800s to the Kimberley region brought conflict between the white cattlemen and Indigenous people.

The Indigenous social system had worked to ensure that there was never any competition for water resources or for food amongst the people, but the existence of thousands of head of cattle changed the eco-system.

Stations were established near water holes and in places of economic importance. The cattle brought new legislation that made it difficult for Indigenous people to continue their traditional hunter and gatherer lifestyle.

These places were of ritual significance to Indigenous people.<sup>8</sup> Frontier tensions brought murders and massacres to the region. Over time Indigenous people adapted to the presence of the cattlemen in their land. Many Indigenous people became skilled stockmen, using the work as a means of staying on their ancestral lands, continuing their cultural obligations and responsibilities as custodians of country. Many became great and valued stockmen.

“The region covers close to 423,000 square kilometres, and has fewer people per square kilometre than almost any other place in the world.”<sup>4</sup>

The introduction of award wages for workers in the pastoral industry from 1968 onwards forced most Indigenous people off the stations and into town. As a result many people were displaced. This was a traumatic experience. Cummins explains:

*Some of those people became artists and now perform their cultural responsibilities through painting those areas of country.*

In more recent decades some have re-gained possession of ancestral lands by acquiring ownership of cattle leases such as Billiluna, Lake Gregory, Koongie Park, Lamboo, Louisa Downs, Mount Pierre and Bohemia Downs.

Indigenous people once again had opportunities to return to the cattle industry. The cattle industry remains central to the identity of many people in the Kimberley region, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Cummins goes on to say:

*It seemed there was an amazing correlation between people who were really important station workers and who were also quite significant artists.<sup>9</sup>*

“For Indigenous communities living in regional areas, creative and cultural networks provide a means to engage with community members, government, and industry.”<sup>12</sup>

## ORIGIN OF IN THE SADDLE; ON THE WALL

Waringarri Indigenous Arts received a grant of AU\$9,000 in 2009 from The Aboriginal Benefits Foundation to begin the project recording stories to develop community archives.<sup>10</sup> There were 20 artists who met initially who also wanted to have an exhibition of their paintings.

In 2010 the project was presented to ABC Open, an on-line platform by ABC (Australia’s primary public broadcaster) that publishes and broadcasts stories made by regional Australians. ABC immediately supported the project because it aligned with one of their core objectives, connecting to regional Australia. During 2010, ABC Open’s producers recorded a few stories. Cummins says:

*We were thinking back then that it was going to be a few recording of stories but soon we all realised that these stories would be really important for a broad audience to access and we applied for a grant with the Australian Government.*

In 2012, the project gained Government support in the form of a grant for AU\$53,200. The Visions of Australia: Regional Exhibition Touring program grant supports Australian cultural material to reach regional and remote communities across Australia. The grant was obtained to cover the costs of the development of the exhibition involving two coordinators and two curators.

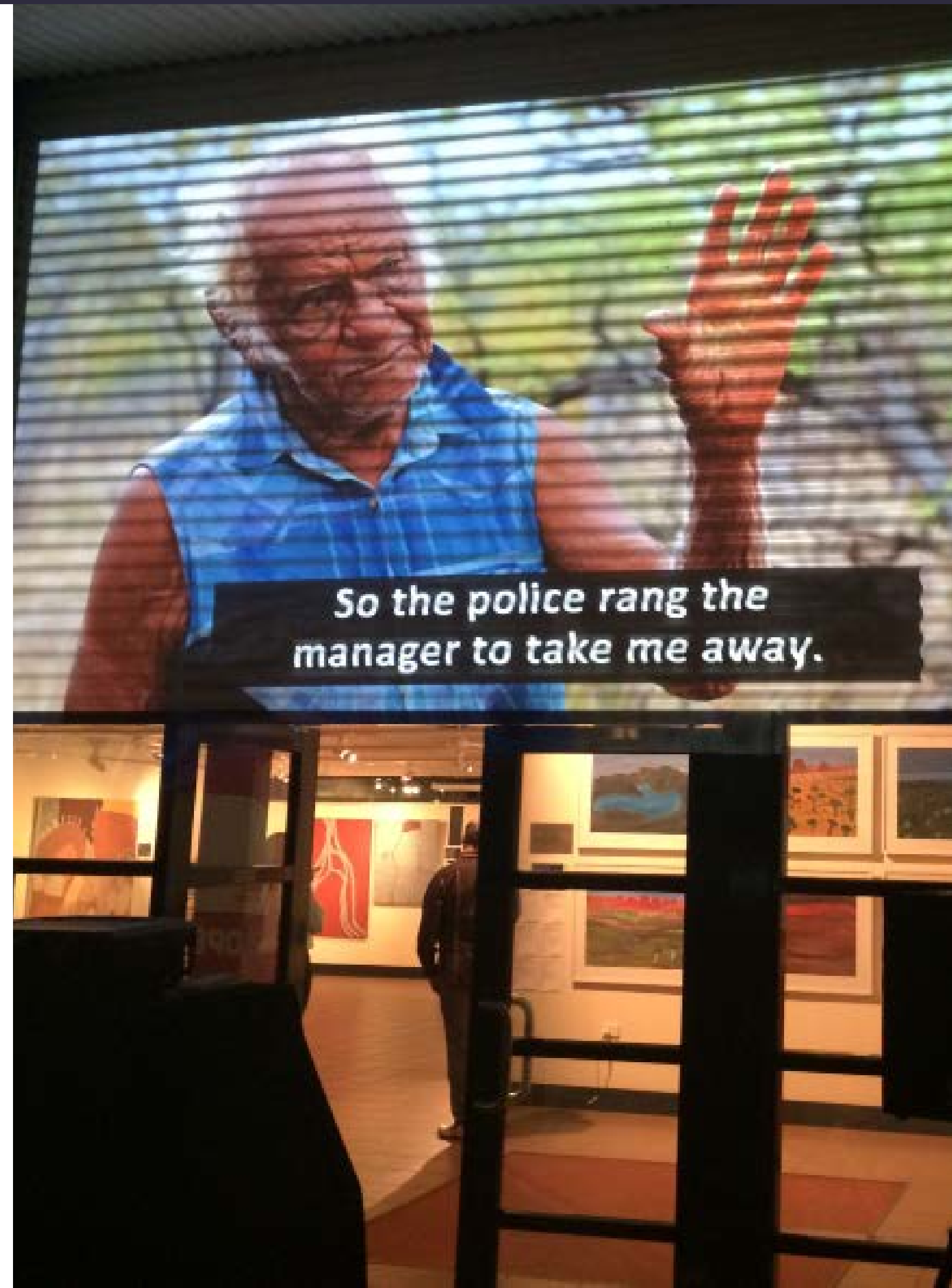
Lottery West supported the project with AU\$30,000 to develop the digital program and the catalogue and the Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA) came on board to support the project.

The stories were recorded and the project culminated in two public exhibitions, the first one at the Ord Valley Muster at Kununurra in May 2014 and the second one at Notre Dame University in Broome in August 2014.

The exhibitions included 13 short biographic films about some of the Kimberley’s most celebrated Indigenous artists along with major art works depicting station life and station stories and corroboree.<sup>11</sup> Artists included Freddy Timms, Alan Griffiths, Rammey Ramsey, Daisy Andrews, Minnie Lumai, Peggy Griffiths, Gordon Barunga, Shirley Purdie, Mabel Juli, Mervyn Street, Peter Newry, Peter Mung Mung, and Stan Brumby.

This project gave the Indigenous community an opportunity to reach a broad audience and to develop cultural networks. It also ignited in young people feelings of pride and respect for their elders. It discusses the significance of these networks for communities living in regional areas, saying:

*Alan Griffiths, Film being screened at Broome opening night  
Notre Dame University  
Photograph by Alex Smee*





“People need to feel they belong and this connects with the need of feeling valued. The arts provide pathways to enable people to feel valued.”<sup>13</sup>

## ACHIEVEMENTS

### FEELING VALUED

The project brought people together providing strong representation of the cultural heritage in the region and creating a meeting place for the different members of the community to learn and develop common knowledge. Cummins told us:

*A really important thing for Aboriginal people is that they are recognised as contributors to Australia’s identity and history. Without receiving attribution to their contribution, Aboriginal people feel disempowered.*

By sharing stories, the project proved that Aboriginal people are hardworking and have contributed to the success of the cattle industry. It also provided an understanding of ‘the other’ and gave an insight into the roots of social tensions, some of which were resolved through the art project.

It tackled negative perceptions in Australia about Aboriginal people being dependant on welfare and changed these perceptions into positive ones. The project created a harmonious meeting place for sharing, learning and discussing alleviating social tensions and means of reconciliation.

Valuing the senior artists’ oral and visual history and their knowledge increased their mental health and wellbeing in an established community context.

Each exhibition attracted over 500 audience members of all ages combining artists, locals, tourists and residents from across the Kimberley region who travelled distances up to 1200 kilometres to see the exhibition.

ABC Open Producer, Alex Smee, spoke at the opening of the exhibition expressing ‘great observations to the crowd about the nature of capturing stories.’<sup>14</sup> Desert River Sea explained in their review:

*She was momentarily overcome reading from an article she wrote while on the road recording with Mr Brumby who has since passed away. The nature of these stories, snippets in time of long histories were poignantly summed up by Alex as an invitation to explore further.*

### RESPECTING DIFFERENCES

The project brought together different social groups, promoting inclusion and respect. The different social groups included Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups, stock riders and station owners. Desert River Sea explained the exhibition was a ‘huge success.’<sup>15</sup> They went on to say:

*The gallery space was pleasantly crowded with genuinely interested visitors, the reactions people had to the videos gave you the feeling that everyone there had been personally touched by connections to the artists in these stories in some way. The clever result of exhibiting the videos and artworks side by side was that the videos inspired in the viewer greater understanding and emotive appreciation of the artworks hanging beside them.*<sup>16</sup>

In the Saddle; On the Wall addressed stigmas linked to systemic discrimination and disadvantage. At the time when the project was created, the Indigenous community was suffering from homelessness, unemployment and high suicide rates.

According to The Human Rights Alliance, the Kimberley, tourist mecca and resource-rich, had the highest rate of homelessness in Australia in 2013, and just about all of the homeless are Indigenous people.<sup>17</sup>

The Kimberley was the region of highest risk of suicide in the early 2010s in the region, peaking at 182 times the rate of the general population.<sup>18</sup> Indigenous people are three times more likely to commit suicide than non-Indigenous people.<sup>19</sup> Jens Korff from Creative Spirits explains:

*The homelessness rate is likely as high as 1,000 per 10,000 and with extended families heavily impacted doing what they can for their folk. That is more than three times the homelessness rate of the NT, 12 times the state average, and 17 times the national average.*<sup>20</sup>

The project educated and connected individuals addressing issues of stigma, thus protecting human rights and moral imperatives. It addressed trauma and worked preventatively, increasing social contact and improving social conditions.

Cummins believes that the benefits of the project for the region and its communities might not be so visible now, but in time they will be visible and increase if Aboriginal people are respected and recognised as contributors.

*Governor General, Waringarri Aboriginal Arts, 2014,  
Artist Shirley Purdie.  
Photograph by Angela Cannon.*



The partnerships built social fabric promoting cooperation, awareness of local issues and reduced social isolation.

### **REMOVING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION**

In the Saddle; On the Wall integrated the Indigenous community in a professional capacity, including them in the cultural workforce, leading into improved employment opportunities.

The project removed barriers, increasing participation for all and providing a space to reconnect and learn from the people that have built the community. It increased their sense of pride and that of their community.

The project also involved the younger generations by including the young members of the families in the interviewing and filming processes. They were responsible for the sound recording and interviewing process and were trained with new media and digital tools. Cummins told us:

*Chris Griffiths, one of Alan Griffiths' sons, learned a lot of skills and he now works as an arts-worker, so that's been really good for him.*

*ISOW at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts.  
Left: Artwork by Freddy Timms  
Right: Artwork by Peggy Griffiths  
Photographs courtesy of Waringarri Aboriginal Arts.*

### **PARTNERSHIPS – WORKING TOGETHER**

The project was successful in creating, building and developing partnerships.

Each stakeholder brought their own vision and skills to a shared vision. The included involvement of the Kimberley five main Indigenous Art Centres that collaborate to promote art and culture; the artists and their families who shared their stories and homes and who were persistent and committed to the project; the support of ABC Open with producing and publishing the films; and the support of the Australian Government through funding.

These partnerships built social fabric promoting cooperation, awareness of local issues and reduced social isolation. Cummins spoke about the importance of the involvement of the ABC in the project. She said:

*ABC were incredibly generous and supportive; they allowed their East Kimberly and West Kimberly producers to work and spend significant hours on this project.*

ABC involvement entailed providing an opportunity to present the stories on television to a wide audience. The project was profiled in a segment in the WA 7:30 Report, ABC TV's national flagship current affairs program allowing a large audience to access the material.





Mervyn Street and June Davis  
Photograph by Alex Smees

## CHALLENGES

The main challenges of the project were logistical, administrative and financial.

Cathy Cummins, Arts & Business Manager at Waringarri Arts in Western Australia mentions some of the challenges in the publication *Belonging – Great Stories from Regional Australia* such as: the rotation in art centre managers; the age and frailty of the artists, with two of original artists passing away since the project began; the floods in the region; and the distance between artists' homes for the gathering of stories.

Cummins explains:

*The interviews could sometimes take up to eight days, including the long drives, and we'd often stay with the families. The ABC Open producers, Beth Neate in the East Kimberley and Alex Smees in the West Kimberley, worked hard to make sure we had fabulous recordings.*

## FUTURE OUTLOOK FOR ART AND ORGANISATION ACTIVITY

There is still work to be done in terms of social inclusion in the region. Suicide and youth unemployment are key social issues to be addressed by the policies and program strategies.<sup>21</sup>

The project's future outlook is looking to tackle these issues by readdressing the way Aboriginal people are perceived by the wider Australian community and by their own communities, looking at new community settings and community sustainability.





## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Vic Health 2005, *Research Summary 2: Social inclusion as a determinant of mental health & wellbeing*, retrieved 2 November 2014, <[http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ProgramsandProjects/Publications/Attachments/Social\\_Inclusion\\_Final\\_Fact\\_sheet.ashx](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ProgramsandProjects/Publications/Attachments/Social_Inclusion_Final_Fact_sheet.ashx)>.

<sup>2</sup> Government of Western Australia 2014, *Demographics*, retrieved 19 November 2014 <<http://kdc.wa.gov.au/statistics/demographics>>.

<sup>3</sup> Government of Western Australia 2011, *2011 ABS Census of Population and Housing A Kimberley Perspective*, retrieved 19 November 2014 <[http://kdc.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/178\\_2011\\_Census\\_-\\_A\\_Kimberley\\_Perspective1.pdf](http://kdc.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/178_2011_Census_-_A_Kimberley_Perspective1.pdf)>.

<sup>4</sup> Australia's Northwest 2014, *The Kimberley*, retrieved 20 November 2014 <[http://www.australiasnorthwest.com/Destinations/The\\_Kimberley](http://www.australiasnorthwest.com/Destinations/The_Kimberley)>.

<sup>5</sup> Kimberley Foundation Australia 2012, *Kimberley Fast Facts*, retrieved 20 November 2014, <<http://www.kimberleyfoundation.org.au/fast-facts/>>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Halls Creek 2014, *Cattle Industry*, retrieved 19 November 2014, <[http://www.heartofthekimberley.com.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=132&Itemid=17](http://www.heartofthekimberley.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=132&Itemid=17)>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Aboriginal Benefits Foundation Limited 2013, *ABF Grants 2005-2013*, retrieved 20 November 2014, <<http://www.aboriginal.org.au/ABF%20GrantsA%20FINAL.pdf>>.

<sup>11</sup> ABC Open 2014, *In The Saddle On The Wall Exhibition Launch*, retrieved 19 November 2014, <<https://open.abc.net.au/events/3517>>.

<sup>12</sup> Anwar McHenry, J 2009, A Place for the Arts in Rural Revitalisation and the Social Wellbeing of Australian Rural Communities. *Rural Society*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 60-70.

<sup>13</sup> Comunian, Roberta 2009, Questioning creative work as driver of economic development: the case of Newcastle-Gateshead. *Creative Industries Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 57-71.

<sup>14</sup> Desert River Sea 2014, *In The Saddle On the Wall - Broome Exhibition Opening*, Desert River Sea, 7 August, retrieved 3 December 2014, <<http://desertriversea.com.au/blog/in-the-saddle-on-the-wall-broome-exhibition-opening->>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Georgatos, Gerry 2013, *The Kimberley has Australia's worst homelessness rates – 17 times the national average*, retrieved 20 November 2014 <[http://humanrightsalliance.org/?page\\_id=208?>](http://humanrightsalliance.org/?page_id=208?)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Creative Spirits 2013, *Aboriginal suicide rates*, retrieved 20 November 2014, <<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/aboriginal-suicide-rates>>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Georgatos, Gerry 2014, *Kimberley suicide rate, one of the world's highest – Yiriman is the way to go*, The Stringer Independent News, retrieved 25 November 2014, <<http://thestringer.com.au/kimberley-suicide-rate-one-of-the-worlds-highest-yiriman-is-the-way-to-go-8710#.VHPcAfmUe5I>>.

*ISOW at Waringarri Aboriginal Arts.  
Artwork by Minnie Lumai.*

*Photograph courtesy of Waringarri Aboriginal Arts.*



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