

# BIG EYE

ABORIGINAL ANIMATIONS

**Rennae Hopkins** is a Malawali Karuwalli and Pitta Pitta Aboriginal woman from Boulia, North West Queensland. Rennae is currently in her third year at Queensland University of Technology studying in Communication Design.

*'I am excited at the endless possibilities made available in regards to cutting edge technology and animation ... what is most exciting is how these new mediums can reflect a very sophisticated contemporary understanding of our own personal experience as Indigenous peoples in ways that previously were only visions of fantasy and romantic mystery.'*

**Jenny Fraser** is a 'digital native' working within a fluid screen-based practice, also partly defined through a strong commitment to Artist / Curating as an act of sovereignty and emancipation, founding cyberTribe online gallery in 1999. A Murri, she was born in Mareeba, Far North Queensland in 1971 and her old people originally hailed from Yugambah Country in the Gold Coast Hinterland on the South East Queensland / Northern New South Wales border.

**An email conversation between Rennae Hopkins and Jenny Fraser**

**Rennae:**

Animation has the capacity to move across the boundaries of imagination representing a visual connection to the traditional Aboriginal kinship structures of both moiety and totemism ... a visual experience that identifies the non-Indigenous audience with both the mystical and the unknown.

**Jenny:**

The ancient design styles from both countries lend themselves to the animation artform. When we really look at customary material culture we can almost see objects like bark paintings or totem poles come alive in our minds eye, even without an understanding of their stories. They have such a strong visual literacy all of their own.

**Rennae:**

Exactly, it's so important that we retain intellectually, more than just a collection of short animations ... this exhibition is vital as a contemporary sharing of Indigenous cultural heritage and ongoing cultural maintenance.

**Jenny:**

True. In the mainstream Australian Arts industries, there is a very big divide between film-making and media arts arenas. Apparently the two entities shall never meet, and sadly the Aboriginal sub-sections of those industries have followed suit. However, in other countries, like Canada, the artsworld is big-hearted enough to embrace and support both, simultaneously. On a curatorial level, animation was chosen as a screen-based genre that crosses that divide with ease, along with the other divides, like age, education and socio-economic status.

**Rennae:**

It's typical and unfortunate that Blackfellas in a position of education and access continually conform to mainstream conservatism and boundary construction. Instead we need to draw on our similarities as Aboriginal peoples, not just as Blackfellas but worldwide and globally ... I do know that the mythology of First Nation Peoples of both Canada and Australia are very similar ... both hold a common belief that human consciousness developed from a form of totemic connection. It is this mutual understanding of a collective consciousness between both parties that we see evidenced within the animations ... ideas of belonging – nature – and creation.

**Jenny:**

*The Dreaming Stories* by Aboriginal Nations in Australia and *Raven Tales* from Canada are great examples of Creation Stories from an animist perspective in action. Generally animals are a great mirror for our own behaviours. This is in reflection of the true essence of our identity. Everything else comes after the beginning...

**Rennae:**

Ahh Deadly sista... In *Big Eye*, the Canadian and Australian Aboriginal artists expression is centred on a fusion between traditional and urban – contemporary and ancient. This is where we now find ourselves as Indigenous peoples globally. Each generates an almost visual poetry as a narrative connected to the subconscious and the unknown. Two words - 'you' and 'us' – register a relationship between atmosphere and earth. This is understood as a time continuum between the past, present and future which then returns us back to the start, never-ending. This is what has always made our world view separate and unique to the West which sees the world as linear – a series of events.

**Jenny:**

Yes, we can only strive to honour the past as our teacher, honour the present as our creation, and honour the future as our inspiration, this is 'Dreaming' in action :) The work *Boy and Moth* is particularly interesting in this regard as it is a contemporary myth, or re-Dreaming from the mind of Writer and Kombumerri Traditional Owner John Graham, simultaneously referencing all realms. Similarly in *Darkness Calls*, the comic book drawn by Steven Keewatin Sanderson, we can see how all is inter-related through the life of Kyle, the main character, his friends, family and ancestors alike.

**Rennae:**

It is no coincidence that we discover such similarity ... it is a living demonstration given the shared colonisation processes of both countries, which were designed to systematically destroy native languages and cultures and assimilate First Nation Peoples into white society ... these animations serve as a product of healing and adjustment to the reinvention of Aboriginal identity for a new age.

**Jenny:**

Trans-Generational Trauma has manifested in many ways, in most Aboriginal families. Again the reason why so many of our people conform as a sign of success ... It is important to note that before the official Apology by Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the Canadian Government had handed over \$350 million compensation to Residential School Abuse sufferers and this was invested into culturally significant initiatives; such as talking circles, language revitalisation and digital storytelling projects. This is a good model for Australia to follow; in proactively addressing the impact of the wrongs of the past on an individual and collective level and move forward with a healthier mindset.

**Rennae:**

About time and long overdue ... any strategy that encourages the nurturing of Indigenous First Nation Peoples own separate and viable intellectual property outside of the relationship of an ongoing oppression through colonisation is vital.

**Jenny:**

There are currently very few avenues for Aboriginal voices to be heard. Animation is one of the artforms acceptable to mainstream non-Indigneous audiences. Unlike other Aboriginal content, they're even screened on main-stream prime time TV!

**Rennae:**

Unfortunately this becomes our two edged sword ... in fitting in within avenues of mainstream audience the true authenticity of ceremony and practice within our own inherent system of storytelling has become lost. For instance the idea that through parable, the development of human consciousness and mythology is established as a direct link to a faith in God (Biami) or a higher being as a final stage of human evolution ... is not really considered beyond the aesthetic forms of the animation.

**Jenny:**

Agreed... but if we keep involved in creative acts, we maintain connection to the essence of our ancestral roots and become at one with Biarni, or Jabreen in that very moment. As Luis Riel, an important Metis Leader prophesised in 1885 "My people will sleep for one hundred years, when they awake it will be the artists who give them their spirit back".

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**Aboriginal Australian artists**

Jenny Fraser  
Aroha Groves  
The Gunbalanya Community & Gozer Media  
Frank McLeod & Aboriginal Nations  
Christine Peacock, Rebekah Pitt & John Graham

**Aboriginal Canadian artists**

Dark Thunder Productions  
Raven Tales  
Skawennati Tricia Fragnito  
Rabbit and Bear Paws  
The Healthy Aboriginal Network

CURATED BY

Jenny Fraser  
Lubi Thomas

ASSISTANT CURATORS

Rennae Hopkins  
Maggie McDade

PRESENTED BY



**QUT** creative industries  
precinct

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Cover: Gunbalanya Community & Gozer Media, *Orphan Boy*, 2003. Courtesy of the artists.



Frank McLeod, *Two Willy Willies*, 1994, 2D Animation, 04:31. Courtesy the artist and Aboriginal Nations.



Aroha Groves, *What is a Blakfulla doing in a virtual realm?* 2007, Machinima, 08:15. Courtesy the artist and Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative.



Dennis and Melanie Jackson, *Wapos Bay: The Series*, 2009, Claymation, 24:00. Courtesy of Wapos Bay Productions.



Gunbalanya Community & Gozer Media, *The Echidna and the Turtle*, 2004, Claymation, 06:00. Courtesy of the artists.



Skawennati Tricia Fragnito, *TimeTraveller™* 2008, Machinima (production still), *TimeTraveller™* is being produced with the support of Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace [www.AbTeC.org]. Special thanks to Research Assistant and set builder, Bea Parsons. Graphic Design, Lysanne Bellemare.



Christine Peacock, Rebekah Pitt & John Graham, *Boy & Moth*, 2005, Animation, 03:36.