

## Hetti Perkins testimony

The 2017 ICOM Award for outstanding individual achievement recognises Hetti Perkins and her commitment to a national and international profile for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.

The Award acknowledges her significant contribution to Australia's cultural life nationally and internationally including highly acclaimed museum exhibitions, publications, art commissions and broadcast programs.

Hetti Perkins has had a distinguished career in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art over thirty years and, in that context, has made a remarkable contribution to museum practice. Hetti is an ambassador for Indigenous art and artists and her expansive curatorial practice seeks innovative ways to make Indigenous work public in Australia and internationally.

Hetti Perkins (b. 1965) is an Arrernte and Kalkadoon woman and she has been a senior cultural advisor on numerous international arts projects.

Hetti Perkins began profiling Aboriginal art on an international stage in 1988 when she travelled to New York with the *Dreamings: the art of Aboriginal Australia* exhibition. In 1994, as the curator of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative she worked with INIVA, to realise the exhibition *True Colours: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists raise the flag*, at the South London Gallery and subsequent UK tour. She was the Australian curator of *Abstracts: New Aboriginalities*, a partnership between Boomalli and Arnolfini, United Kingdom. The project comprised four site-specific exhibitions and a conference in Bristol, and the exhibitions then toured the United Kingdom.

In 1997, Hetti Perkins co-curated the exhibition *fluent*, selecting Emily Kam Ngwarray, Yvonne Koolmatrie and Judy Watson to represent Australia at the 47th Venice Biennale. She was a member of the International Selection Committee for the 2000 Biennale of Sydney, on the Selection Panel for Australia's representation at the 2003 Venice Biennale and an advisor to the 2008 Biennale of Sydney.

Together with Brenda L. Croft, Hetti Perkins co-curated the Australian Indigenous Art Commission for the new Musée du Quai Branly in Paris (2006), in partnership with the Australia Council and in collaboration with Cracknell & Loneragan Architects and Jean Nouvel. Commissioned works by John Mawurndjul, Gulumbu Yunupingu, Michael Riley, Judy Watson, Tommy Watson, Ningura Napurrula, Paddy Bedford and Lena Nyadbi.

Hetti Perkins was an agent for *dOCUMENTA (13)*, curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev in 2012. She was an adviser to Jenny Holzer for *I STAY (Ngaya ngalawa)*,

2014, curated by Barbara Flynn for 8 Chifley Square, Sydney. She has contributed to numerous international projects and publications, including *Icons of the Desert: early Aboriginal paintings from Papunya*, *Everywhen: The Eternal Present in Indigenous Art from Australia* and *Marking the Infinite*.

In Australia, Hetti Perkins has led a distinguished career in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, starting with the Sydney gallery of Aboriginal Arts Australia and then joining Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative in the 1990s.

Hetti Perkins worked at the Art Gallery of New South Wales between 1989 and 2011, with thirteen years as Senior Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art. During her time at the Gallery she developed a significant collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, curated major exhibitions such as *Half-light: Portraits from Black Australia* (2008); *Crossing Country: The Alchemy of Western Arnhem Land Art* (2004); and *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius* for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Arts Festival. She edited *Tradition Today*, a handbook of the Gallery's collection of Indigenous art, and, with Margaret West, edited the major anthology *One Sun, One Moon: Aboriginal Art in Australia* published in 2007 and initiated the Australian Indigenous Artists Archive, a unique collection including early Papunya Tula materials, the Michael Riley Archive and hundreds of hours of artist and arts worker interviews.

Hetti Perkins wrote and presented *art+soul*, two three-part television series, directed by Warwick Thornton (2010) and Steven McGregor (2014). They were screened nationally on ABC Television and a companion book, published by Melbourne University Press, was released in the same year coinciding with an exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Hetti Perkins joined Bangarra Dance Theatre as an artist-in-residence in 2011 and was the inaugural Artistic Director of Corroboree Sydney. She was a member of the Art Gallery of NSW Sydney Modern Project Jury and the Aboriginal Advisory Board for *barrangal dyara (skin and bones)*, the 32nd Kaldor Public Art Project by Jonathan Jones. She is co-curator of the annual Black Art Market at Carriageworks and has recently curated major exhibitions by Yvonne Koolmatrie, John Mawurndjul, Gulumbu Yunupingu and Christian Thompson. She currently serves on the Cultural Advisory Committee of the TARNANTHI Arts Festival. She is currently Curatorial Advisor to the Eora Journey, the City of Sydney's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public art program, and recently unveiled *Yininmadyemi* – a memorial by Tony Albert to Indigenous servicewomen and men - in Sydney's Hyde Park. She co-Chairs the Interim Scoping Steering Committee for the National Indigenous Art Gallery.

Hetti Perkins is past Chair of the Charlie Perkins Trust for Children and Students, which she founded and a Trustee of the Michael Riley Foundation. She was a member of the Public Art Advisory Panel of the City of Sydney and the Papunya Tula Reference Group of the National Cultural Heritage Committee. She is a past member of the Visual Arts and Craft Board of the Australia Council, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee of Arts NSW, and the Boards of Bangarra Dance Theatre Australia, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory and Museum of Contemporary Art Australia.