

NIDA receives \$300,000 over 6 years for Indigenous Fellowship in Cultural Leadership and graduate director's studio

The National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) today announced a \$300,000 grant by the Luminis Foundation to assist Indigenous creative professionals undertaking a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Cultural Leadership.

The *Luminis Foundation Indigenous Fellowship for Cultural Leadership* will be awarded annually for 6 years to an Indigenous student undertaking the MFA in Cultural Leadership at NIDA. The fellowship funds 50 per cent of fees for the MFA course so as to financially support Indigenous leaders already playing a pivotal role in shaping Australia's creative and cultural future.

NIDA's landmark MFA (Cultural Leadership) course is available to professionals from a broad range of arts and cultural sectors who wish to develop their entrepreneurial and advocacy skills to drive innovation, inclusion, growth and sustainability across the cultural sectors.

Selected by arts advocates Robyn Archer AO (Chair of MFA Cultural Leadership) and Assoc. Prof. Cheryl Stock AM (Director Graduate Studies and Head of Cultural Leadership), NIDA is pleased to announce glass artist **Mel George** as the inaugural recipient of the *Luminis Foundation Indigenous Fellowship for Cultural Leadership*.

Mel George is passionate about promoting Indigenous crafts and ensuring they become more integrated into Australian arts and craft practices. Of Aboriginal and Greek heritage, Mel has taught at the prestigious Corning Museum in New York and worked successfully in the glass industry both in Australia and the United States. Her full biography is below.

'Although always rumoured amongst some family members, research has unveiled that my paternal grandmother was forced to renounce her Aboriginality and thus, was unable to ever speak about her past and her culture. I see myself as a connector. I want to amplify the visibility of artistic excellence that exists in the most remote and inaccessible areas of our country. I believe that a key part of the long and difficult reconciliation process is through arts and culture. Participating in this course will help develop my knowledge and enable me to better contribute to one of Australia's most important challenges. I feel privileged to have been chosen as the inaugural recipient of the *Luminis Foundation Indigenous Fellowship for Cultural Leadership* and sincerely thank the Luminis Foundation for their support and generosity,' said Ms George.

'The *Luminis Foundation Indigenous Fellowship for Cultural Leadership* is a unique opportunity for an Indigenous professional to become a collaborative leader in the arts and cultural sectors and significantly expand and transform their practice,' said Assoc. Prof. Cheryl Stock.

'Building a community of creative practice through networks and partnerships, both locally and worldwide, and in Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts, is central to the Cultural Leadership program. NIDA is proud to be able to provide this initiative, in association with the Luminis Foundation.'

NIDA CEO Kate Cherry is grateful to Luminis for nurturing Australia's brightest talent. 'This generous support embodies investment in merit, excellence and dynamic bridge building. Bravo for the Luminis Foundation's foresight and generosity. NIDA is so proud to be a part of building exciting new cultural pathways,' said Ms Cherry.

The partners of Luminis – Simon Mordant AM, Ron Malek, Jamie Garis and Peter Brownie – have been proud and longstanding supporters of the arts and education, and are thrilled the Luminis Foundation can play an instrumental role in supporting Indigenous cultural leaders.

'We are delighted to not only contribute to the career of a leading indigenous Australian with this outstanding learning opportunity, but also increase the sum total of leadership, knowledge and diversity in the important arts culture and creative sectors through Australia's world class National Institute of Dramatic Art,' said Mr Mordant, co-founder of Luminis Partners and a director of the Luminis Foundation.

In addition to the fellowship, the \$300,000 grant also supports the **Luminis Foundation Director's Studio**, a black box teaching space for NIDA's MFA students in directing.

More about Luminis Partners: www.luminispartners.com

More about Luminis Foundation: www.luminispartners.com/foundation

More about MFA in Cultural Leadership: www.nida.edu.au/courses/graduate/cultural-leadership

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Biography – Mel George – Inaugural recipient of the *Luminis Foundation Indigenous Fellowship for Cultural Leadership*

Mel George is currently the Curator at Craft ACT: Craft and Design Centre, Canberra, part of the network of Australian Craft and Design Centres, a group of peak organisations from all Australian states and territories that represent the professional craft and design sector. She curates innovative exhibitions that integrate, not separate, traditional and contemporary indigenous artists with the aim of giving Australian craft and design a holistic voice.

As an acclaimed glassmaker, Mel also exhibits her work both nationally and internationally, which gives her first-hand experience of the creative process. Throughout her career she has sought to foster artists and the works of excellence they produce as well as broadening the support base for artists, enhancing their career paths and longevity, and making them visible and valued to new audiences. Mel spent eight years co-owning and operating Studio Ramp LLC, an artist atelier in Portland, Oregon, USA and undertook projects from small scale, individual artworks to large-scale architectural commissions. During this time, she developed a deep understanding of how to communicate and work with a diverse range of artists as well as utilising her extensive business and craftsmanship skills.

Prior to her role at Craft ACT, Mel served as the Artistic Programs Manager of the Canberra Glassworks (CGW), Canberra, in which she had significant input in the design, budget, implementation and organisation of numerous successful artistic programs such as the Gallery Program, Artist in Residency Program, Artist Access Program and the Educational Program. She managed staff, teachers, students, interns and artists to successfully deliver workshops led by Australian and international glass makers. During her time at CGW she became a Member of the Advisory Board of the ACT Indigenous Textile Artists Group and orchestrated many projects for the group to engage and learn a new medium for the communication of their stories and cultures.

Mel has had a strong desire to identify with her hidden Aboriginal heritage. Research unveiled that her paternal grandmother was forced to denounce her Aboriginality and was then unable to ever speak about her past and her culture. Recently, after a long journey, Mel is to participate in a Reunion to Country scheduled for April 2017 to visit with Dieri and Dhirari Country.

For the past year and a half Mel has provided gratis consulting for Bula' Bula Arts Centre, Ramingining, NT. She has also spent time with the makers in the arts centre to deepen her personal understanding of the incredible skills and aesthetics of the Yolngu people and she believes that a key part of reconciliation is through arts and culture.

Alongside being offered a place in the Cultural Leadership Masters Course at NIDA, she has also secured a role as the Cultural Facilitator at Bula' Bula Arts Centre where she plans to study and be immersed in the Ramingining community. This future role will enable her to develop deeper understandings of the fusion of contemporary Yolgnu artists engaged in their traditional cultural storytelling. Mel will have the opportunity to amplify the visibility of artistic excellence that exists in inaccessible areas of our country by curating exhibitions, representing artwork at art fairs and festivals, recording cultural storytelling and engaging visitors with first-hand and authentic experiences with the Yolngu artists.