



TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDING

KATHERINE CLARKE

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<THE RECORDING HAS COMMENCED

INTERVIEWER: Just went on here too, just in case something happens with that. But if you want to start by, like, introducing yourself and your mob.

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KATHERINE CLARKE: Yeah. My name is Katherine Clark. Wotjobaluk woman from the Wimmera. I am an artist, a writer, consultant, as well as a arts facilitator. I think I'm here today to speak about just some of the injustices that are around the arts that I've found throughout my time in my career. And I think it's something that
10 needs to be taken a bit more seriously. There's - we're at risk of at the moment of exploitation. Our people, our cultural practice is not just about art, but it's you know, everything else that comes with that. It's our art is who we are, it's our identity. It's something that has always been a part of the spirit. And so when - I know from growing up and my own teachings as an artist, you - it's your story. And that's your
15 home, and that's your people. And those places are real that you're telling on that canvas, if it's canvas. You know, the words that you write as a writer, is very much the same. You're in those places, you're envisioning and putting yourself in those spaces of home and country, and it's from memory. And those are what's vital to identity. Those memories keep me coming home and the - at the moment what I'm
20 seeing is a world, a creative industry that is taking on First Nations art and culture, and taking it to a point of - there is no Lore around it.

And I mean lore as in L-O-R-E, and that's because lore - there's this exploitation and
25 lore holds close. Lore holds you accountable. And it reminds us as Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people even that we are in - we are, you know, we are here, it's our form of expression. It's that continuation of storytelling from the old to the young, you know? And then the young from the old. And so, I just feel like at the moment, it's at a point where the world is trendsetting in a way to try and grab everything. And there's no okay, that's secret, that's sacred knowledge, that's only
30 knowledge for you and your mob or your family. You know, there's business around certain processes that are men's and women's business in the arts and in cultural practice, and that even has been exploited to where it's now at a point where because of the internet and because of the social media platforms, and you know, yeah - digital graphic, you know, media stuff like that, illustrator and all of those sort of
35 things that can come in and just create something that's from nothing, and have no substance where they're exploiting that.

And then you've got places that are reprinting this on, you know fashion, and they're getting away with that. They're putting it on things that are material items, and
40 they're making a profit out of it. And you've got massive online stores even, that are global, making profit off artists, and not having any substance of knowing who that artist is, where that story comes from. And, you know, whether or not there's a meaning between, there's a difference within that artwork compared to the next Aboriginal artwork that they buy. They don't understand that each country has their
45 own different process. There's none of that understanding that each story is different. And I think what gets me upset is it's undervalued then. They can pay an artist, like you've got, you know, that big prize that all the artists do. I can't think of what that

one is. Is it The Archibald Prize or something? And you know, that's something, their story, it's such a great, you know, thing. And it's like they've got the story and that, they've got the recognition of the people behind it. Not just the artist, but the person that the mural is about. You know, you learn about that.

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That's the kind of respect that we need to have for First Nations artwork, and our writing is no different to that. Our dance, interpretive dance, our theatre, all of that is all one. It's all a part of art. It's all a part of our identity. And it's all an interpretation of who we are as a people. And if that's not respected, then it just becomes something that's a part of the fad. And I feel like, okay, we try to educate when those fads come around, and we try to educate in a way where we hope it's going to change, and it's going to make a difference, and that people are going to look at it and go, yeah, that inspires me to do something different in my own backyard. But a lot of the time it's just because that looks pretty, that's going to be nice on my wall, or that's something that I want to go see, because I think it's going to be a great story, not because of the injustices and where that story comes from and why there has to be a story like that told in the first place. You know, in today's present time. And I feel like that main, you know, it becomes a part where it's no longer relevant to what Lore is. It becomes something that's relevant to what society, and ideological views are. And again, to me, that's a modern term of colonisation, it's a modern day colonisation on our culture, on who we are as a people.

It's a new form of assimilation, By going okay, we're going to accept you guys now and your art and everything, but we're only going to make it to what we want it to be. We're only going to accept it as far as we want it to be. And oh, by the way, we will pay you half of what you really want. Not we will pay you what we're going to pay the Archibald Prize winner. You know, that exact same amount because of the story, because of the substance and because of the people that represented, or the place represented. You know, and it just becomes - that stuff is priceless, it's invaluable, it's passed down, and only those that know those stories, or know those practices can really tell it. And if you're undervaluing them and not compensating them in a way that - you know, it doesn't even have to be money. We're not about money. You know, the thing is, when it comes to that, it's about compensating in a wealth of a life. You know, what value can you - what benefits can you give to that individual artist, that - in that moment in time, because everyone's in some sort of crisis. So I'm always trying to encourage people to - especially when I'm teaching about it and trying to, you know, have artists find their voice within, and their own value of what their worth, is something that I think is a challenge for a lot of us, because we don't know what our own value and our own worth is. Because throughout history and throughout time, we've done nothing but being told that we were undervalued and that we're not going to (indistinct 00:08:54) to anything, and that - you know, so when you don't have that visual thing from a child into your adulthood, you don't see it. You don't see that glow that you have.

And all that potential that you have, or you don't think, oh, I can be worth, you know, the value of a Nicky Winmar jumper, you know? Because his statement was so big, and that's such a strong statement that that image became a cultural art, you know,

and a form and that sort of thing. But, you know, it's no different to a young little black fella artist who's coming up and going, you know, this is me and who I am, and does the same exact thing. And why couldn't he be paid the same? Or why couldn't he be valued the same as that? Why do you have to be a famous black fella to get the payment that you deserve, or an artist that is well known - recognised artists, who may be Central Desert, who may be somewhere else, you know. And it's not entirely someone from country in the South or, you know, in the West, you know? And it might be something that's not representative of that area, but it will be representative of that, unfortunately. And that gets overlooked, and that gets more valued than any individual who's putting their story up, or who's putting their artwork out there. I've got family members who constantly are doing commissions and, you know, always questioning whether they charged enough, or whether they charge too much because they think they're not worth that much.

And it's like, you shouldn't - why are we, as Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander the people, questioning our own value and worth, when we should know what we want, what we value. We know the cost of our culture, we know what that is. It's a priceless thing, you know, so we should be able to be strong and go, no, that's how much it's going to be, because that's what I expect it to be. And that money is not just going to benefit me, but it's going to benefit a whole community.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

KATHERINE CLARKE: You're not just, you know, profiting - we're not profiting for ourselves, we're profiting for our communities and our families, where most artists are profiting for themselves, you know, if it was any other artist. So why can't that money go to a more better cause? In opening foundations, fundraisers, you know, things that are going to be - trusts, even, that could be put aside for communities, that would then pay for those sort of things, you know, compensate people for that. We're talking about really making changes and closing the gap, then we need to be looking at creating these funds rather than looking at government funding for things. It needs to be somewhere where donations can actually be contributed, where our own mob can contribute to that if we want to, and then we decide as a community where that fund goes. You know, and that's from all of us working and putting it in together. On top of, you know, helping ourselves survive and get through life, because those things come along. But I do feel like a percentage of that could be going towards resupplying and re - you know, revitalising a community in cultural practice so that they're able to do it all, rather than just setting up some sort of cultural centre and going, okay, we're going to have a couple of artists here and we're going to display a display a couple of artists. You know -

INTERVIEWER: You're reinvesting.

KATHERINE CLARKE: Yeah, it's got to be reciprocal. And if you want self-determination, that's how you get self-determination. You create spaces within those places that are on country that mean something to those people, to where they can see what they love, grow and prosper, to where it encourages a whole community to

then build on that. And it encourages our youth to then want to be proud and go, yeah, I want to do that. Rather than having a redirection of a lifestyle that's something that they've seen on social media, or is you know, internalised from, you know, watching, you know, songs or games and things like that. That's an identity
 5 for them, because they're not being shown a true wealth of their own. And we're not getting that opportunity a lot of the time, because we're getting exploited, or we've got our mob working so hard for the rest of the world, running around doing all their things, and the high expectations of society that we have as Aboriginal people to deliver. And because we're damn good at that, and we know we want to deliver, and
 10 we're like - we go above and beyond because like, anyone's going to tell us that we're , you know, we can't do something. But there's that, you know, where we're always giving, but we're never getting anything. And, you know, our mobs miss out then. It's our communities that miss out because our energy is spent giving to the non-Indigenous communities, and educating and working with them, and providing
 15 workshops for them to teach them our culture, when it's something that should be really preserved and sacred and kept. And this is where it's like nothing is sacred anymore.

INTERVIEWER: It's almost like when you talk about Lore and art and that being
 20 used, that people are using our art without the intent that it's supposed to be used with.

KATHERINE CLARKE: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So when you pass down any type of Lore or tradition custom ceremony, you're supposed to redo that with intent -

KATHERINE CLARKE: Yes -

INTERVIEWER: With the same intent that it's given.

KATHERINE CLARKE: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And a lot of the time it's not -

KATHERINE CLARKE: It's not. And a lot of the time too, it's always, you know, respect is a big thing. It's one of the biggest things in our culture. And it's you know, you respect your elders. Well, where are you respecting your elders if you're going
 40 out and you're delivering this stuff, and then you know, getting caught up, and it's not your fault, as you can get caught up in the lights and the glimmer of it all. And it's that idea that - excuse the sounds -

INTERVIEWER: The baby -

KATHERINE CLARKE: The baby. It's one of those things where you end up
 45 going and finding yourself. Thank you. Another five minutes. It's one of those things where it's like you get to a point where they, you know, you feel like where are you

respecting your own lore? Like, you lose yourself, you lose your identity, you know? And that's what - I say it's modern colonisation and assimilation, but it is. It's that old way, it's a new way of making us conform to what their way is. And it's like, it's not necessarily a bad thing, but where are we using that to our advantage? Where are we
5 benefiting from that? Are we benefiting, or are they really benefiting?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

KATHERINE CLARKE: You know, so who's coming out better. And in my eyes,
10 we're the ones going home, going back to the same shit where they've gone and they've paid for whatever they want. They've got their blackfella education for the day, you know, or whatever, they've had their spiritual day -

INTERVIEWER: They end up going we're doing the right thing -
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KATHERINE CLARKE: Yeah, I'm doing the right thing. And you know, I can go home and sleep well tonight. I don't have any other worries, but then I don't have to wake up with the same problems every day. I don't have to deal with that, what that person has to deal with every day, you know? Or the struggle - the struggle is real
20 when it comes to, you know, an artist trying to make some money just to get by, and pay for food on the table, and also just to keep themselves alive. And it's a survival tactic, and we're natural - as blackfellas we go back into our old instincts of survival when it comes to that. Like we can live on nothing. And if we can, if we live on nothing, then you know, that should be a testament at the willpower of the type of
25 people we are. You know, of what we can survive. So why not - why keep us in a place where you know, why try to keep us in a place where it's around conformity and another system of racism to me where - and missionary mentality, it's a missionary mentality. Or you got to do this, you got to do that, you know, because that's who you are. And it's like, no, I don't have to do that because I'm also a cultural
30 woman. I also have expectations that I do back home. So I'm going to go off and go walkabout for a while and you might not see me.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

KATHERINE CLARKE: You know, so just because you've got a couple of
35 workshops or whatever, doesn't mean I'm going to fit into that, you know, and you can agree as black fellas we can agree to some things, but then, you know, circumstances come up where it's like, sorry business or cultural business, and we have to do that, but we're not compensated for that. We're not looked after for that,
40 you know? And I feel like when it comes to society itself, they are - they can be compensated for that stuff. They can reward themselves and go on cruise ships and, you know, plane trips around the world and whatever and live it up, where in reality they're just taking on, you know, they're just taking, and it's constant taking. Whether it's from us in this country or another country. It feels like, you know, until the cups
45 full, they're not, you know, they're not satisfied a lot of the time. And we get burnt out, we get cultural burnout. We get, you know, NAIDOC week is hell for a lot of our elders, who are constantly expected to go around and open every ceremony, and

do an acknowledgement of every ceremony. And then on top of that, us as artists are booked out to the max to where we don't have any time to go and enjoy any NAIDOC ourselves. We don't - it's meant to be our week to celebrate. It's meant to be our Christmas, you know? And we're out working it. But Christmas comes around and you're allowed to - everyone takes that time off, you know? Where's the respect? Where's that genuine understanding and value of a person's being, identity and way of life? And if we're going to talk about being truth telling self-determination, let's get real and start creating things that are going to build communities and not burn them out.

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