NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
I would like to begin by a Welcome to Country and by acknowledging Aboriginal elders, past and present, and future, and acknowledge the land of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation that I am working and living upon today.

Today we are indeed very privileged to be in conversation with Dr Bronwyn Bancroft, an artist and a socially engaged activist. Bronwyn. You are a proud Bundjalung woman you grew up in northern New South Wales in Tenterfield. And you are a custodian of the Bundjalung people, protecting their deep culture and their long history.

You are a very successful artist, with a long impressive history of making art and exhibitions nationally and internationally. Your work is in major collections including the art galleries New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland, and the National Gallery of Australia; as well as Parliament House, the Powerhouse Museum, and significant collections held by Flinders University, Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology;

and the state libraries of New South Wales and Victoria; as well as the New York print library, the Governor of Tokyo's collection, the royal collection of Sharjah and the Centre for the study of Political Geographies in the USA.

And this is only a very, very tiny small selection of what's indeed, been a very – is a very. impressive list of significant institutions that have sought to collect your work.

Bronwyn has expanded her practice to include illustration for many books and has a long history of writing and illustrating children's books that most recent – the most recent being 'Coming Home to Country', which brings indigenous stories to future generations, and has also been translated into Chinese.

Bronwyn is also a deeply committed social activist. Engaging with the political frameworks of power that impact on her as an individual Aboriginal woman, and on her Indigenous community.

And she successfully blends her creativity, her art and her social engagement into a cultural activism that influences and informs her as an Indigenous artist.

So it is no surprise that she has – that she was a founding member of Boomalli Aboriginal Cooperative and that her most recent accomplishments in completing her PhD at Sydney College of the Arts is entitled, *'Passion, Power, Politics of Aboriginal Art: Does Inequality Exist for New South Wales Aboriginal Artists?*'

And I think we certainly will have passion and discussion on politics and power today, in the art of Bronwyn Bancroft. Bronwyn, you have lived many lives – in to the extraordinary life that you are, that you have lived and are living still today.

So let's go back to the beginning. Can you reflect upon growing up in colonial Australia, particularly about your experiences around the colonial frameworks that impacted on you as a young woman, your language group and your culture?

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Thanks, Nick. That was a very lengthy introduction and sounds really weird when you hear it, but the accumulation of that stuff really, it doesn't interest me that much. I'm really glad that people acquire stuff but it's not what I do my work for.

I'd like to acknowledge the Arakwal People. I'm in my studio in Byron Bay. And I'd like to acknowledge the elders past, present, future of the land that I'm working on.

And to answer your question, well, I was born Tenterfield and my father's Aboriginal and my mother's Scottish and Polish. I was the last of seven children. And growing up in a small country town was, incredibly – on one side, it was fantastic because you were in nature.

And on the other side, it was really constricting because you had all of the conservative values of a small country town and predominantly non-Aboriginal people – like, my father and Mr Neville Binge were two of the Aboriginal men that moved into town. So, that was almost unheard of – to have an Aboriginal person living in a house that they bought in town.

So my Scottish grandfather, let dad borrow 150 pounds to buy a house for his – well, I I turned up when they when they got the house, so that's 62 years ago, and it was met with quite a bit of resistance.

But you know, our family played sport. We were involved. And I got out of there at 17. I was determined to. I'd had a policeman pull me over at 15 with blaring lights, and I've been told by an Aboriginal friend of mine, Raymond Jiro that he was out to get me. To rape.

So I was pulled over by a squad car with his lights flashing and he pushed, like, got me off my bike. And he said, I'm going to get you. And when you've got the threat of that, and you're living in a small country town, I mean, I didn't do anything wrong.

I was just a young girl and to have that intimidation lets you know that you're on the frontier. So I quickly skedaddled out of there. I fell in love with my teacher at high school, and I had an affair with my teacher. And I live with him and I married him and I had two children with him.

So it was, and I have to thank him for that actually, because if it wasn't for Ned, I wouldn't have got out of Tenterfield I don't think, with the security of somebody who really cared for me.

So it was completely not the wrong thing to do, but we ended up being married for a long period of time and that was; it was a great way to get out of Tenterfield.

And I do get back to Tenterfield but, and I don't have any dislike of the town I just; I've always found and struggled with racism in small country, remote, rural areas.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
Did you go directly to enrolling in the Canberra School of Art?

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Well, I luckily I, when I first started high school, I was told that I had a 90IQ because I was Aboriginal, I was in the lowest classes. And when my husband to be arrived with a cohort of very progressive thinkers from out of town. About six or seven teachers came into our high school and my husband to be said, Oh my god, that girl’s really bright. Like, why is she in the bottom classes?

So I got elevated to the B classes and then eventually I got into the A classes and then I eventually, you know, progressed to doing my high school certificate, I progressed to getting early university entrance to the Canberra University, Australian National University, and also Armidale University.

So I was going to get out of Tenterfield, but it was very much a; was being elevated as a kid who was told that she was going to go nowhere ,to ending up being a kid that actually I did pretty well in my high school certificate. And I did apply for Alexander Mackie.

But in the last two years of my teaching, we didn't have we only had two people that were doing advanced or first level art, and so we didn't have a teacher. So we had to work with the correspondence school in Kings Cross and do a couple of designs.

So I did apply for Alexander Mackie, but I was told I was not good enough, which is probably the case even today, COFA I think it's become and I did get into the Canberra School of Art.

So I was super excited about that, but it was a long way from home and yeah, so I pulled up stakes and moved there, it’s 500 miles from Tenterfield, and it was quite an abrupt start to a new life.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
And how did you realise that you wanted to be an artist? What were the things that sort of like, inside you that were wanting to pursue a career as an artist and what did being an artist mean for you at that time?

BRONWYN BANCROFT
And I think it sounds weird, but my mother was very determined that we all went to Sunday school, you know, to make sure that we had manners, clean up our act, be polite, believe in God.

So that's kind of religious stuff was supplanted in my life. And it was very funny because I had a very low self-esteem from incidents that occurred to me when I was a small child, which I won't go into.

But what I did was I had a fantastic Sunday School teacher who was an artist. Her name was Bea Morton, and she took an interest in me. And she got me to start drawing everyday objects and everything. So, for me, art has always been a passport to self-esteem.

It's always been a way of rewarding myself creatively, and making myself feel better, making my family's history come to life, making the history of the struggles and people in my family predominantly the major focus of my art career.

So I think probably at the age of 14 to 15, I kind of realised - I also used to submit stuff to the Tenterfield Show. And you'd get two bucks for first and $1 for second and I used to clean up! So I'd make like $12 and I was like, yeah! You get $12 like, so that kind of piqued my interest. And I was like,

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
I should’ve put that in my introduction as well

BRONWYN BANCROFT
It’s a big thing when you're like 15 and you're getting $12 in one go and like our family, our family weren't very, you know, just, we had a veggie garden and not a lot else and seven kids and money was sparce.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
And back then, what was the art, you know, even though it was very early, was it reflecting Aboriginal perspectives, Aboriginal issues, your own culture, your own language group, the things that you, that were in your environment that you are engaging with?

BRONWYN BANCROFT
I think no, but predominantly what I've always focused on his nature and a lot of the information that I bought to light over the decades of my artistic existence, have been extracting information out of my elderly family members.

So luckily our family have, we've always lived on the country. So we've never been moved off. We weren't moved to missions, my English grandfather fought for our Aboriginal family to stay on country. And he married 2 women and had nine children. So I'm always have absolute respect for him.

So I think when you talk about the evolving story around the complicated nature of family oppression, colonialist frameworks, and incidental things that like just have an impact on you for just being you.

That kind of evolving story can only happen with maturation and that's part of the artistic process is to take the beginning kernel of your existence and then over time develop, work on it and create that, like that sophistication around your artistic practice and, and yeah, it's been amazing.

It's been an amazing, you know, journey of reclamation, of invigoration and, you know, delving into history trying to work out why people did that, reacting to that painting, but predominantly, my, my biggest interest as a small, as a young student, was the environment.

Always very big on the environment painting country; painting my impressions of country so subliminally yes, it was always there but not as an active ingredient in my artistic career.

I think I've always said to everyone that I took on being an artist as an apprenticeship to myself, and I tried everything before I was 50. And I, I, I kind of had it in my mind that I turned into a reasonable artist at 50. But I could try everything that I wanted to before then. So I did that.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
But it's interesting that in those formative years that land and country and environment were so foregrounded in your practice, because in a way, when I look at your work, you know, land, country, environment is still an implicit part of your practice.

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Yep, it's been. I mean, I remember when I went to the art school, in Canberra, and they were like, oh, you're Aboriginal like, go like whole thing about people questioning people's identity.

I mean, it's still ongoing, and I'm over, but my dad came down with my mom to visit me in camera and you walked through and they went, Oh my god, you really are Aboriginal and I went do I have to, you know, cart out my family to prove my aboriginality.

But it was… Canberra was quite a weird place in terms of, you know, going there, um, but I made some great friends and I started the water polo competition there and I was offered a job in the photography department.

But I moved to Sydney in 1981 with my husband because he was an actor and want to pursue his acting, so I decided to go with him and start a new life in Sydney.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
Well, that that's a good jumping point into Sydney, because you came to Sydney in 81, as you just mentioned, and, you know, can you talk a little bit about this critical period of your development because, contrary Canberra you know, Sydney was sort of like a milleu of new ideas and political and social engagement.

And there was certainly sort of a distinct feeling of a new history being developed in the Aboriginal, for Aboriginal people, particularly in the urban environment. And it was an intense politically and culturally active environment. How did this environment shape your thinking and inform your art practice?

BRONWYN BANCROFT
It's there, eyah, It's like a time warp isn't it's like what we're currently living. Um, I think, look, I didn't know anyone. I knew absolutely no one in Sydney, and it was huge.

So, I found it, like, you've got to remember I was 17 when I left high school, so I was like 22 and a very naive woman. Girl I actually classify so classify myself as a girl. So when I got to Sydney, I didn't know anyone but I managed to do some waitressing and I got to know, Noonan's tea and coffee cafe in the strand arcade. So that gave me some independent money because I've always earned my own money. I've been working since I was 12.

And I didn't want my husband to be my keeper, which he wasn't anyway. But I was always independent in terms of the way that I wanted to structure my life. So the only way that I need to make people was to get a job.

Then I did apply to Alexander Mackie to do a masters. But to be quite honest, they had the photography studios down in The Rocks at that stage and it was all pretty crummy. And so I pulled out of that. And then I started running restaurants.

And so I did cooking for about three or four years and then and painting all the time during photography, because photography was my major, but I stopped doing photography because I found that the fluids that I had to put down the drain it just frightening me, so I couldn’t cause the environmental damage.

So I stopped my photography, and I'd always been painting all the way through and creating. And then I kind of decided well it was 1997 when I joined Boomalli in that first 10 but in 1995 I started my shop Designer Aboriginals and it was kind of curious because my husband came back and we probably weren't going so great.

Um, and I just had a baby. He was six weeks old. His name is Jack, and my husband moved in and went, ‘oh, I just got a lead role in a movie’. And I went that's great. I said, I've just been up the street and taken a lease on a shop and the baby was six weeks old.

So I used to put the baby in the window of my shop and sew and make garments. And I started with $3,000 in a bank card so and so no government assistance. I just did it off my own back and it lasted for five years and I completed that in 1991. And I left the shop because my marriage had dissolved. So basically, I started, I moved to being a full time painter with two children in 1991

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
Can we just go back on Designer, your commercial enterprise, if I can call it that, Designer Aboriginals, but, it seemed to you know, so seem to suggest a social agenda for generating an income from art, fashion and design whilst critically redressing deep social divisions and cultural inequity, by training Aboriginal women in the art of business, which I found, you know, back then we're talking about groundbreaking.

We're talking about, you know, so like, like rethinking the economic equations for being an Aboriginal women artist or in fashion or design.

And you know, to develop a business and encourage the providing of commercial opportunities for women artists and designers; it was an extraordinary and inspiring initiative of self-determination within your community.

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Yeah, I think, look, if it was something that I always wanted to do, I've always been a person that's been a mentor to other people where I can if I've got skills I like to help assist and to create a greater understanding about what we're here for.

I mean the shop. I, I'm really unsure about how many young women went through there maybe. And this was helped by Elsa Dixon who was an elder who helped me with some employment packages, so that the girls could be subsidised work in my shop.

And they learnt how to deal with public, we painted all of our earrings we hand silk-screened out the back. It made absolutely no money but because I threw everything back into it. But it was, it was an exercise in garnering support from the wider society.

It was in Rozelle, but we got more support than we got criticism. And then on the edge of that we did get criticism because people would walk in and say, well, where are the real Aboriginals? We got that a lot.

So I do remember one incident where one of the girls who will remain nameless chased someone out of the shop and down the street for being a racist. I'm pretty sure I couldn't get away with that now, but we were very proud of what we were doing and the girls, most of the girls have gone on to midwifery, and running their own art careers or running their own, are artists.

It's really exciting to see. I mean, I'm not saying that I was responsible for that. But we did get a lot of support from each other during that period of time. And I think as we look back on that, we appreciate it more.

There was no support, I took it to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, to say that I could manage it as a business model and the gentleman that I was showing the portfolio to made some comments about the girls, which were of a sexual nature and so I picked up the portfolio and walked out.

So it could become a training institute under my management for a year, but after that, I decided that I didn't want to have anything to do with any government. And I thought, obviously, that that was, anything derogatory towards women and I'm out of the room. So, especially those beautiful women.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
So during this period, would you describe yourself as sort of like a feminist or how did you engage with the feminist movement that was that was around at that time?

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Well, I actually I say I'm a womanist because I believe in women. Um, I think the feminist connotation I've always been a wildly wild feminist, feminine woman, I'm a woman and not you know, I’m a bearer of children. I'm a mother. I'm a sister. I'm an aunt. I'm now a grandmother.

I am fiercely determined to see that women have equal rights across the board. And you know, I grew up with three older sisters and three brothers and I was the last. So basically, I grew up with three boys.

And so my determination as a young girl to be recognised for my skill, my sporting skill, whatever I was good at, was fierce determination. And I think that equality for gender equity has always been paramount in my life, just as much as this as s it's been around getting people to focus on more issues around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this country.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
And how did this impact on your, your, your own practice your own journey?

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Well, I think once I decided to become a full-time artist, I had two kids to look after. So that was, and the marriage had haemorrhaged. So basically, I didn't, I'm just, I'm just a really hard worker. So once I knew that I had to look after my children and care for them and provide for them, my determination became even more extensive, and I was very determined that my children wouldn't be marginalised.

And so that, that hard work really, I pursued everything if I could do it, I’d do it. And I was lucky to get a break with Chandler Coventry from Coventry Gallery who; so funny because I only had a couple of paintings in a cardboard box, and I went to his very fancy, very fancy gallery in Paddington, and I turned up with like, I don't know, a beer carton sort of portfolio case with these paintings, and I just showed him.;

And he said ‘oh yea, you’re alright. That's okay. We'll tell you.’ Um, so that was, that was kind of cool and around 1987 of course Boomalli started. So in Chippendale we were at 18 Meagher Street. So that was exciting, progressive political, and hard work because like, basically, you know, we had to do everything ourselves.

So, yeah, it was intense. Yeah. I can't say that I was in a fantastic place, personally. But the work was flourishing because I had to support my children through my art.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
Before we talk about Boomalli because that's such an intrinsically significant moment, not only in your life, but also in the contemporary history of Aboriginal urban art in Australia. Is that the sort of, what sort of work were you doing just before that Boomalli period?

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Well, I was just paint I was just painting but largely, you know, a lot of the work I was doing is around fashion. So you know, I, when I went to Sydney, I also started doing the markets at Balmain.

And so I used to sell hand painted shirts for $90 and that was almost unheard of to pay that much money for a shirt. But I sold those things. And then obviously in 87, we went to Paris and you know, I did a whole suite of fashion garments, but they were always like hand silkscreen, and hand painted.

So, really, the fashion was the foundation for the painting, which was ongoing, but because of that, I was hand painting garments in huge lengths. And so I was doing really big paintings which were then being cut up put into garments.

That was a great foundation to learn how to just paint and as I've said previously, I, a lot of people like to walk you into a style that they like, and I refused to do that and I'm still, like until I was 50 and I found my the confidence in my mind and what I wanted to use as my storytelling element.

I ignored everyone and they're like, Oh, we liked your old work. And I'm like, well I'm not doing it. You know. And I always think that's a trap for young artists, because suddenly they just do the same thing. And you know, they do it for two decades, and then they don't know how to do anything else. Because they're painting for the market. I don't never want them to really paint for a market. I just wanted to paint for myself.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
And the market evolved around you. So it's the other way around.

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Yeah, I think that's true. I mean, I often say to people, you only have to live long enough as an artist to have success if you're a hard worker, because I don't come from any point of privilege ever. I mean, I left Tenterfield with nothing. I think I had 20 bucks in the bank.

So, I've never been a person that had any kind of privilege whatsoever. I just never knew anyone, never had any money. So, that has been a you know, an incremental part of my journey has been the determination, really, to protect my family, and that is probably the greatest impetus for me doing any of what I've done is to protect look after, cherish and respect my family,

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
You know, and that's, for me that's reflected that level of humanism; that's reflected in your work in relation to community and your concerns for country but, you know, you mentioned, Boomalli by 87, your work is already beginning as an extraordinary journey progressed with another; within an extraordinary milleu of artists and activists such as the extraordinary Michael Riley, Fiona Foley, Euphemia Bostock, Avril Quail, Brenda Croft, Tracy Moffat, that led to, and others; that led to the development of Boomalli, Aboriginal artist cooperative.

They're all from different nations and language groups, a diverse group with a clear intent of redressing the discrimination against Aboriginal artists, and to create a visible presence of critically engaged art, to create change in recognition of Aboriginal artists, and the clearly political objective of social inequity.

And particularly from the perspective of urban artists, as distinct from traditional artists. Can you talk about this this extraordinary time of prevailing optimism; that sense so that political the wind of political change that was so urgent at that time.

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Well, the other people Jeffrey Samuels, Arone Meeks, Avril Quail, Fernanda Martins I think that gets the full cohort of 10. I'm Brenda L Croft. And Michael Riley really was the person who was motivating during, motivating all of us.

But to be quite honest without the activism of Gary Foley and Uncle Chicka Dixon at the Australian Council, where they were respectively; Uncle Chicka was the Chairperson, and Gary was the Manager of the Aboriginal, Director of the Aboriginal arts board.

We wouldn't have got off the ground then we all Michael largely went in and started requesting grants information. So we got rental from the Australia Council, our first year of rental. And we got on top of an old bridal store in Meagher St Chippendale.

And we had our first show. John [unintelliglble], the journalist, made the most rousing speech at the opening night, Charlie Perkins came in and bought a whole lot of paintings to go for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

It was a state of euphoria because we had no idea that we were going to get like 500 people at the opening that we , you couldn't even move. It was kooky.

Um, and then obviously the foundation will lay then with the beginning of that, but then once you start something like this, you've got to keep up the hard work and you know, the administration, the grants, it was boring. No one wanted to do that.

We just wanted to have exhibitions and have fun and we didn't really want to clean up after the after party after the opening. We didn't want to do the prep. So, you know, it ended up migrating into a different world.

You know, there were difficulties within the structure of what Boomalli as it evolved, but without it, I don't think that, and I don't think any of us were sophisticated artist by any way, you know, I, but I think journey has allowed us to be viewed in a different context historically.

Now, a lot of the definitions that occurred around that was awkward, non-Aboriginal categorisation, or how do we put you there? Um, you know, as far as I'm concerned, I'm a traditional Bundjalung artist. So, this is, my tradition is in my country.

And so when people are constantly trying to categorise you to be a specific person without understanding anything of your history, they really need to have a conversation with you, instead of making an assumption.

So there was a lot of this rigour around were you real? Were you authentic? What, you know, what's your story? How do you validate yourself? It's like, no, I don't have to validate myself. I was born. I exist in this space. Actually, I'm pretty happy being me because everybody else has taken.

So I think we had to put up with a lot of ignorance in the initial days. And I'm hoping that that's better. But I'm not sure that it is. I mean, you know, I'm not sure what our direction is. It's like it's, there's so much going on at any given point. And yeah, I hope we made an impact but I just I hope we made an impact for the, for a better price for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people in this country.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
It's really interesting now, the debates on Black Lives Matter and on the deaths in custody and land rights that have never stopped. And they still exist today. But at that time I remember, you know, going to Boomalli and remember, you know, sort of clearly, you know, the demand for change was so ever present it was in your face.

And it sort of struck me at that time that I was witnessing, not only this politically charged environment, but also the development of a contemporary urban Aboriginal art practice.

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Yeah, I think that, you know, definitively some of the artists have been, I mean, I think existing as a state of political you know, being. As an Aboriginal person, you are political. No matter what.

There is this pursuit around politicising of your artwork to you know, uplifting and highlight, disadvantage. Some people do it; some artists do it some don't.

So, for instance, I think of Euphemia Bostock and she just navigates her artistic practice by thinking about the memories that were made with her all people, you know, into fishing or walking on the beach, she doesn't want to do angry, I hate white people art.

So you know that there's a distinction around, you know, I don't think anyone should be forced to create art to highlight a social injustice. We can and people do.

But at the end of the day, what’s it going to do to get your work collected in a major museum if we still got people dying in custody. You know, I'm interested in real change. I'm interested in societal change that reflects equality throughout the whole of society. I'm interested in engaging with people to make sure that there's a mutual admiration for each other's cultures. And I'll probably die trying. But that's the pursuit that I take.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
Which is, it's really interesting because that that brings us to, you know, your other career if I could call it that, you know, you've got this this this wonderful art practice and your engagement with Boomalli, which you still are so heavily involved with them.

And you know, I tips my hat to you, that's an extraordinary commitment that you've made, you know in relationship with Boomalli. But this other parallel career that, oh, I won't call it a career; life.

You know, you're so heavily involved in in advocating for Aboriginal rights, for others rights, for women's rights and that led you to be acknowledged and invited to the Board of National Gallery under Brian Kennedy.

It also sort of like brought you to the chair of the New South Aboriginal Visual Arts Committee. It also brought you to the NIAA and Copyright, the you know, in Aboriginal advocacy, and also on the advisory committee of the Commonwealth Bank. So, so your practice is complex, and this is what I find remarkable.

You know, and that earlier comment the many lives lived. And you seem to sort of operate on so many different levels, making out being a mother now being a grandmother, involved in in in promoting advocacy for your community, and this political advocacy, you know, I think, would you be able to talk about that a little bit?

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Yeah. Well, I mean, one of the things that I always say to my children is, you get one life, live three. So there's no point getting to your deathbed and having regrets. I mean, you must exploit, explore, and, you know, get into that life you've got.

In terms of advocacy, I think, as I progressed and learnt and matured, it really is something that like, it's not made me a lot of friends in government, which doesn't really faze me. But to not be in the room means that that you there is a voicelessness, there is an invisibility.

So you I think, you're going to take it out to people and ask I, I have to mention this because Betty Churcher was, the when I was on the board of the National Gallery Bundook Marika had been appointed. And then I was appointed as the second Aboriginal person and Brian Kennedy came in as an import and actually was pretty rude.

And I'd given him suggestions for a continuing board membership, an Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander board member. And he, his rebuttal to me was, I'm not going to put an Aboriginal, specific Aboriginal position on this board then I’d have to have a Vietnamese, and a Greek.

I'm like, this is our country, mate. You know, and then he skedaddled off back to Ireland. I felt that was quite damaging because they've not had an Aboriginal board representation. I don't think for quite a while. It's unconfirmed for me now, if they do have an Aboriginal board member on the National Gallery, but I'm not sure.

So with, in terms of advocacy representation, I mean, you don't get paid to do these jobs. You very much, except Copyright Agency was the only place that we get paid.

We do it because you want to advance the rights in a real time, passage of time. I'm not interested in wasting my time for the kudos of being on boards. I've wanted to have an impact. I want to help. And if I can do that, then I will have achieved. I feel like my sense of achievement is okay. Yeah.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
I think that's a great point that you've made that you know, about being in the room because in a way, you know, if you're silenced out of the equation, you don't have a voice.

And what you know, you said just a moment ago is, like seeing yourself in those very seats of art power. And those are art debates where you not only, only demanding to share in that power but you're contributing to the changes that are so vitally necessary in how we recognise Aboriginal women artists in our community, how we recognise Aboriginal artists in our community and their right to express, you know, a vision for Australia. That's not just a white preserve.

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Yeah, I think it's been such an interesting journey. I mean, you know, to complete a PhD at 61 Thank you, Brad Buckley for being my supervisor; is a it's a passage of time. To actually get that that actually finished because I started with Rhonda Craven at Western Sydney but then Western Sydney moved to the Catholic University.

And then I couldn't complete it at the Catholic University because at the same time that they transitioned her department where I was studying; there was a lot of political stuff around the priests hurting children and I just couldn't bring myself to be involved with anything Catholic.

And so luckily, I was able to transfer to SCA and complete the Ph.D, which, you know, 61’s not bad to notch up your fourth degree, you know, when you start studying at 17.

And, you know, I never had enough time to really study I just squeezed it in. So, to complete that Ph.D I wrote every day for six weeks and got up at three o'clock in the morning to fit it in with my career and everything.

So I completed the largest passage of writing in a six to seven week period starting at three o'clock every day and finishing at three o'clock in the afternoon. And you know, I've got serious RSI on my hand, because I hand wrote the whole thing and had it typed up.

So I'm really happy I completed it. And I'm really glad I engaged in it because it's actually my story and I put down my story the way that I want it to be. And so that was kind of a good thing to do.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
And then tell me a little bit about AIME, the Australian Indigenous Marketing's Experience.

BRONWYN BANCROFT
So, Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
I apologise, like you I write everything handwrite everything and my handwriting failed me.

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Now in my son, well, I think you know, Jack was lucky enough to get a scholarship to go to Pauls, and he was quite a bright child, which all the three children I have, luckily, have got some intelligence.

And so Jack was offered a scholarship. He had to go for an interview, he was offered a scholarship at Pauls; quite a foreign concept to me. I did go to one event there and quickly scarpered and said to him, I can never; but I think, sitting at the dinner table I was asked by this very, very, very posh lady, ‘darling, where did you go to school?’

I went, oh my God. I said, don't ever invite me into that stuff. So I, he started, he saw that there was a deplorable gap around Aboriginal education, you know, for students to get access.

So he started the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience 16 years ago, and basically we just used, I used to do the art, you know, classes for him and I’d jump in my car and go out to uni’s and I’d provide supply all the paint, I'd supply all the paper.

So we did that for a couple of years and then eventually Governor Marie Bashir, she gave him a space at Sydney University and now we're kind of launching, especially in this COVID period, to a thing called Imagination TV and actually developing a University of Imagination.

So obviously, the setup with the mentoring has been difficult because there's no face to face with the students. So they've actually, and I hate this word, but I'm going to use it, they pivoted. And they created a new world for people to look forward to, that is in the digital space, that is about inspiring people to use their imagination.

So he's just stepped aside as the CEO and they, I'm on the board of AIME as well. And they put in a beautiful woman called Taryn Marks to be the General Manager. And she will take over the management of the organisation and he's going to be an artistic director; to develop, you know, the creative element of AIME so yeah, it's really exciting for him, he's 35.

He's put in a lot of grunt work; he's had a lot of serious opposition and flak. And I'm always gonna say it, you know, if you're going to criticise someone for doing something, then I don't want to hear it.

You know, if you're putting in the equal amount that that person's putting in, and often for nothing, you know, actually, I should rephrase that. When people say they do it for nothing. They do it for everything. So if I don't get paid, I'm doing it for nothing. But no, I'm not doing it for nothing. I'm doing it for everything.

So with critics and people like that, that try to pull people back who have a sense of purpose and passion; I largely ignore them, but I also would like them to pull themselves up and acknowledge the damage that they create by just being critical for the sake of criticism. It's boring.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
Well, you certainly are a proud, proud mother and apple doesn't fall far from the tree. So you've done something really, really well in that that regard, but, you know, just before we finish I'd like and open up to questions I'd like to perhaps shift our discussion to your work in writing it and illustrating children's books.

And that it not only, you know, brings your art and intersects into another world, but it would seem to me that in these books, you are bringing your art practice and your cultural knowledge together as an investment for the for the knowledge of the future.

And you do it with a great degree of optimism that through education, knowledge, and as a custodian of your people, your safeguarding stories, the knowledge and the histories of your culture, and by transmitting them to children; hopefully it guarantees a different future.

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Yeah, I think it was an awkward segue to become a children's book illustrator because I've never really had enough time in my artistic practice to take time out to focus just on the book illustration.

But, you know, I've illustrated for over 40 books like I'm not sure of the count. And you know, it's almost to a year because I started in 1991. But one of the one of the reasons I really wanted to do it because I did a book called The Fat And Juicy Place with Diana Kidd who's unfortunately passed away.

But it was, it was about this Birdman and this little Aboriginal kid struggling with his identity in the city, and I thought I might do that, I only had to do a couple of little drawings. But then I was offered a portfolio, a suite of three stories that were collected by the anthropologist Roland Robinson.

And I quickly realised that I needed to assert the role of the Aboriginal custodial storyteller in that, so what I did was I told him I didn't want the contract, unless we found the custodial person that could, you know, get an attribution.

So I didn't want Roland Robinson to get attribution for a story that belonged in an Aboriginal family group or clan group. So when I told him that and it was quite a big contract, when I told him I didn't want the contract until we sourced and got permission, then that was my first baptism of fire around book illustrating.

And you know that to be quite honest, I, well I'm always honest, but the children's books have given me an interface and actually allowed me personally to make inroads into young people's psyches to give them the opportunity to get away from red gum boots and red umbrellas.

Because we very much supplanted the English book illustration style in Australia. And, you know, I'm, I would like to see many more Aboriginal people undertaking to illustrate and write their own stories to fill in the deficit.

Because you got to remember that my father wasn't allowed to go to school, that’s only one generation ago, but he could go to war. And he could risk his life as a non-citizen of this country. And he could become a corporal with no education, and he could leave with the idea that somehow he was not very good.

So that's one generation away. And I think when you’re thinking about getting all of the books that have been developed, and the young people in Australia and internationally that get to read them and, and enjoy the artwork, it's such a reward for me, it's become such a reward.

And now, if I'm lucky, the State Library has become the repository for my whole books that I create. So in years to come, you know, children will be able to go in there and see the whole of the book that I've illustrated, which I'm really glad that I've decided to work with them and make them you know, the repository for my book illustrations.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
And hopefully, they'll be integrated into our education systems and networks. Because if we are to change the society, and invest in the future, then we really got to start rethinking and reimagining the whole education system.

And in saying that you’re indefatigable Bronwyn you, you are extraordinary you; because I'm trying to some very conscious of the time we've only got a few minutes left for some questions.

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Okay, am I talking? [Reads question]: ‘Tenterfield wasn't your only place, there was Lionsville for which you have remembered; I too stayed with Annie Dulcie, can you speak to the magic of that place?’

Well, Lionsville is our traditional area. And we've always gone back there even though we lived in Tenterfield. It was always school holidays. I actually bought my uncle's property off him many, many years ago as a struggling artist and I went and lived there for a year.

The place is really the cornerstone of all of my work. Yes. So Tenterfield is my original place of birth, but Lionsville is where my heart is. And my auntie Dulcie was an amazing woman. They ran the post office, and where my place is now is right next to where my grandmother and grandfather first setup. So extraordinary in history and you're very true men. absolutely spot on.

And it's a very spiritual, beautiful, and I was there for a smoking ceremony early this year. So yeah, extraordinary place. And it is magical. Actually, my uncle who died at 94 in 2015. He used to say it was a secret place. And I agree with him.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
The other question we have is that in the 80s, you know, that Sydney was characterised by an explosion in contemporary art and contemporary music. Where did you, where did you hang out and who were you listening to in that creative, fertile period?

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Oh, God, I used to love all of them. Like I grew up with three older sisters who loved, like all of those rock and roll people I was doing live shows, I was going to live rock and roll things at the Unity you know they’d have full brass bands, jazz bands, I just follow around and go and have a ball.

And there are a lot of Aboriginal well, not a lot of Aboriginal bands, but there were a lot of people starting to emerge in that time, but I had two kids and in, so, you know, 32 years ago, I was sitting outside with my daughter, my second child, and just basically, I didn't have a lot of time creatively,

but I just like all music I'm terribly I mean, these days I listen to a lot of soul music and Lomi Lomi music for massage and when I'm in my studio, so I like a more peaceful, musical you know, ambience, but I pretty well love musicians who create. Except for heavy metal. I reckon that's the only I can't go for that. pretty well. I admire all the artists that that do create. So I'm pretty open to all music.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
And we have another question about inspiration. You know, you talked earlier about the importance of land and country and environment. Can you have at the point where you understand and appreciate land and country and so on? How does that translate into your work?

BRONWYN BANCROFT
Well, I think obviously you have to know who you are, where you come from, while you're here, and what your purpose is, and then after that, your inspiration is endless. I mean, I have multiple ongoing projects happening at any given point and if I don't have projects going on, I make them up.

So I like to be busy and I work every day. But I also foster nice walking in here. out on the beach and working in the gardens and yeah.

NICHOLAS TSOUTAS
Bronwyn. Thank you so much for letting us into your life. Thank you so much for sharing so generously and so intimately about the many lives that you've lived.

And that I find it so encouraging that that that you know that you're still practising, you're still making change, you're still contributing, and that makes life worth living.

ANNA BURNS
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