

KICKING UP DUST

From Grass Roots to Centre Stage

5 February - 14 March 2010



Photographing the Laura Dance and Cultural Festival – Kerry Trapnell

I have travelled to Cape York Peninsula many times. The journey from Cairns starts with a climb over the rainforest rich mountains of the Wet Tropics, and then continues for hundreds of kilometers, through vast and ever changing savannahs to the tip of Cape York. As the bitumen disappears, and thoughts of urban comfort fade like a dust trail, a sudden and dramatic change occurs – you drive out of the familiar farmlands and into the ancient and imposing landscape of the rugged Laura sandstone escarpments. Now you are in Cape York Peninsula.

Over the years I have often photographed these escarpments and observed the warm glow of early morning light beautifully expose their ochre tinted sandstone. Walking in and around their towering cliffs and broken, weathered rocks has in itself been an extraordinary experience, but it is the time that I have spent there with George Musgrave (now deceased) and Tommy George Snr, both senior Laura (Kuku Thaypan) men that has been by far the most special.

They have shown me some of the ancient Aboriginal rock art galleries and shared stories, in a setting that can only be thought of as sacred. Singing our arrival to the spirits and then gently brushing away our footprints as we depart is as respectful and reverential a ritual as anything I have ever witnessed. These stunning art galleries are numerous, and it is into this traditional Laura country that the dancers come.

The festival grounds are set on the banks of the Laura River and every two years the Laura Dance and Cultural Festival brings together people from across Cape York Peninsula, and beyond. As you pass through the gates you leave barriers and uncertainties behind and soak up a joyful and generous sharing of culture and performance. Songs are sung and through dance stories are told. It is simply a wonderful time.

I have been attending and photographing the Laura Dance and Cultural Festival since the early 1990's. In that time I have seen participation shift, some elders are now gone, and with them songs and dances have also gone, but what has struck me in recent years is the strong and growing presence of young dancers. The energy and enthusiasm of these young dancers is uplifting, and along with the age old sounds of traditional music confirms that another generation is connecting with their culture. This is what I hope to have captured with these images.

Dedication: This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of Dr George Musgrave, and to Dr Tommy George Snr. Each has received an honorary Doctorate from James Cook University in recognition of their expertise in traditional knowledge practices.

Elverina Johnson - Consultant Curator

Elverina Johnson is a descendant of the Kunganji tribe of the Yarrabah Aboriginal Community in far north Queensland. She was the curator for the acclaimed Indigenous Brass Band project Blow 'im: The Yarrabah Brass Band Story. This exhibition, created with the QPAC Museum for the 2002 Brisbane Festival, toured extensively with assistance from The Christensen Fund. Elverina also wrote a performance piece inspired by the Blow 'im exhibition research for the Queensland Arts Council schools program.

For the Queensland Museum, Elverina has been engaged in other research projects, and has recently completed the report Telling It Like It Is on attendance in indigenous community schools. Elverina is also a singer / songwriter, and has released a CD, A New Beginning, about reconciliation.

A Queensland Performing Arts Complex Museum Travelling Exhibition



EXHIBITION LAUNCH

Friday 5 February – 6.30pm

FLOOR TALK

Friday 5 February – 6.00pm

Cairns based photographer Kerry Trapnell will enlighten the audience on the series of works based around Laura and its famous and colourful Dance Festival.

Curator Elverina Johnson will discuss the exhibition

GALLERY OPENING HOURS:

10.00am - 5.00pm Monday – Saturday

1.00pm – 5.00pm Sunday and Public Holidays

Gallery admission: Adults \$5.00

Children up to 16 years are free

Cnr Abbott & Shields Sts, Cairns. Tel 4046 4800

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