

# STYLEUP

FASHION, BEAUTY & LIFESTYLE

Picture: Tracey Hayes

**Fowler  
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# Carrying the message on

K2 The B performs BARUNGA and, left, CJR.



## JOSEPH GUENZLER

Marranungu hip-hop artists J-MILLA and Yung Milla have joined forces with rising Northern Territory talent K2 the B and CJR to create BARUNGA, a modern interpretation of the Barunga Statement told through a youth lens.

The collaboration was developed under a community wellbeing program using music to promote cultural pride and connection. It brings together established and emerging

voices to carry the message of the Barunga Statement into a new generation. J-MILLA said the project was about more than creating a song.

"Working with the Barunga community on this project was powerful. It wasn't just about making music, it was about carrying forward the strength of the Barunga Statement in a way that speaks to the next generation," he said.

Yung Milla said performing the song was a highlight. "Performing alongside Kia and Cyril and watching them shine

on stage was a huge highlight of the Barunga Festival for me," he said. "Through culture and creativity, we're showing our youth their voices matter, their stories matter, and that together we can build something strong for the future."

K2 the B, whose real name is Kia Bush-Gordon, is 14 and from Wugularr (Beswick).

She recently returned home from school in Darwin and hopes to pursue a music career.

CJR, or Cyril Joshua Rankin, is 20 and from Barunga,

balancing his love of music with playing Aussie rules for the Arnhem Crows.

The project was supported by Bagala Aboriginal Corporation, which earlier this year invited the Milla brothers to contribute to a project design conference in Darwin. The event focused on developing a \$4.4 million Men's Wellness Centres program to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men in Barunga and Wugularr (Beswick). One of the first outcomes of the program was the song BARUNGA, written in

collaboration with community members and inspired by the original Barunga Statement. The track was performed live at the 2025 Barunga Festival with local artists K2 the B and CJR.

Bagala Aboriginal Corporation CEO Steve Smith said the project connects the original message of the Barunga Statement with today's generation. "The Barunga Statement has always carried the voices of our Elders, and its message is just as vital for young people today," he said.

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# Blak Out set to be dazzling

JOSEPH GUENZLER

Blak Out is set to return as the centrepiece of Sydney Festival's 50th anniversary program, marking the final curation by Aboriginal Creative Artist in Residence Jacob Nash.

Running from January 8-25, the Indigenous-led program will showcase a powerful line-up of First Nations artists across dance, music, and visual art, celebrating culture, identity, and connection.

Among the highlights is Garabari, a new large-scale participatory dance work by acclaimed Wiradjuri choreographer Joel Bray.

Performed under the stars on the Northern Broadwalk of the Sydney Opera House, the piece transforms the space into a dance floor, inviting families, friends and patrons to move together.

Created with Wiradjuri Elders and community in Wagga Wagga and the Riverina, the work shares the Story of the Making of the Murrumbidgee, gifted by the late Uncle James Ingram.

With ethereal costumes by Wiradjuri designer Denni Francisco of Ngali, music by Byron Scullin and projections by Katie Sfetkidis, Garabari blends ceremony and celebration in a joyful, inclusive performance.

At Barangaroo, Yuwaalaraay Wirringgaa artist Lucy Simpson will unveil HELD, a series of sculptural vessels honouring Country — earth, fire, sky and sea.

The installation will provide the setting for Vigil: Belong, the festival's closing ceremony on 25 January.

Led by musician and writer Nardi Simpson, with Uncle Matthew Doyle tending the fires, the event will bring



Garabari by Joel Bray will be among many powerful works in the Blak Out program.

generations together through song and sacred smoke in a reflection on belonging and ancestry.

The world premiere of Garrigarrang Badu by Jannawi Dance Clan will also feature at the Opera House.

Directed by Peta Strachan and performed by an all-female ensemble, the work celebrates Dharug Country and the role of women in carrying culture, continuing the company's legacy of cultural storytelling through movement.

Blak Out's musical program

includes Take Me to the River, a soulful performance by Emma Donovan at City Recital Hall, reimagining the classics that shaped her voice and career.

Also performing is Gooniyandi, Walmatjarri and Bunuba Elder Ms Kankawa Nagarra, known as the "Queen of the Bandaral Ngadu Delta".

The 80-year-old singer-songwriter, whose debut album Wirlmarni won the 2024 Australian Music Prize, will perform a solo show on 8 January and appear with American musician Lonnie

Holley on 10 January. Theatre works include Dear Son, adapted by Isaac Drandic and John Harvey from the writings of Kaurareg Aboriginal and Kalkalgal man Thomas Mayo, bringing to life reflections on fatherhood from Indigenous men including Stan Grant and Troy Cassar-Daley.

Other key events include Redfern Renaissance, curated by Wiradjuri Yuin actor Angeline Penrith, which revisits the legacy of the 1970s National Black Theatre through performance readings

and discussions, and The Bogong's Song: A Call to Country by Bangarra Dance Theatre, a children's production celebrating connection and healing.

Closing out the Blak Out program, Burarra artist Ursula Yovich will deliver a tribute to Nina Simone, while A Night of Rock & Roll with Bogan Villea, led by Iwaidja and Malak Malak performer Ben Graetz, will bring a high-energy blend of drag, rock and Blak pride to Sydney Theatre Company's Wharf 1 Theatre.

## Musicians join forces and unite in harmony

REBEKAH RASMUSSEN

An intercultural collaboration featuring Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Samoan, Papua New Guinean and non-Indigenous artists premiered in Magandjin/Brisbane this month.

The Third Space — A Sacred Place brought together musicians from across the Pacific and Australia for a one-night-only performance at The Princess Theatre.

The event was produced by community-driven arts organisation Topology and Indigenous performing arts company Gaba Musik.

Samoan Talking High Chief and performer Taitu'uga Kitchener Wesche told National Indigenous Times that The Third Space — A Sacred Place was a spiritual concept grounded in connection and ancestry.

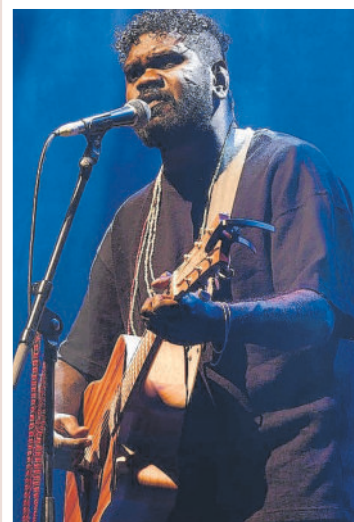
"The Third Space — A Sacred Place is going into that next realm of our ancestors, coming together with our songlines," he said.

The production featured performances by Topology comprising of Christa Powell, John Babbage, Therese Milanovic, Bernard Hoey and Robert Davidson, Deline Briscoe (Yalanji), Jungaji (Yalanji), Kristal West (Murray Island/Zenadth Kes), Yirmal (Yolngu), Airileke (Motu/PNG/Gabagaba), Taitu'uga Kitchener Wesche (Samoa), Kaylah Coghill (Yuggera) and Afour (Samoa), with a Welcome to Country by Yuggera Elder Gaja Kerry Charlton.

The 90-minute performance combined jazz, classical, soul, folk, country and roots with traditional sounds such as Samoan chants and Papua New Guinean log drumming. Gaba Musik co-director Deline Briscoe said the event represented deep cultural collaboration and unity through music.

"The Third Space — A Sacred Place is about bringing together different cultures, learning about each other and going to a third place together," she said.

"It's about trust and connection,



Yirmal. Pictures: Jade Ferguson

and we wanted audiences to feel that sense of belonging that comes from relationships built through creativity."

Topology's creative director Christa Powell said the collaboration had grown from a long-term partnership.

"In Topology we've always done cross-cultural collaboration, and we've talked about going to a third space," she said.

"There's a deeper meaning in First Nations of the third place being a sacred place."



Taitu'uga Kitchener Wesche performs with his sons.

Ms Powell elaborated on the concept of The Third Space — A Sacred Place as about creating something beyond a typical shared stage.

"It's really understanding the artistic and creative language of other artists and then together you go to this other place rather than just putting two bands or two people or two artists on stage, it's more like a double bill," she said.

"Being in that space and jamming and talking musically and culturally and learning about each other and

the long history of stories and then putting it on stage has been fantastic."

Mr Wesche said his involvement reflected his cultural responsibilities and family connections.

"I sit on both worlds, and as a father it's always important for me to make sure my kids walk culturally strong in both worlds," he said.

"I'm just trying to do the best to represent my sons' cultures being proud Samoan and proud Aboriginal."



Fashion photography Tracey Hayes



# Mary's on the ball in inspiring women

## PHOEBE BLOGG

Mary Boio Fowler took to the field in Australia's top soccer league as a 16-year-old and was soon in the spotlight for her talent and drive to succeed.

For club or country, her prophet-like ability to read the play, pinpoint passes, and her gift for finding time and space where neither seem available, have made her a star.

She has represented her country in the Olympics and at the FIFA Women's World Cup, and at age 22 has taken a leap of faith with two new projects.

Fowler was born in Cairns. Nido, her mother, hails from Kira Kira in Papua New Guinea, and her father Kevin is from Dublin, Ireland.

An influential figure on and off the field, Fowler has shown great courage in sharing her challenges and vulnerability in her new book, Bloom.

On her 17th birthday, she signed with French club Montpellier. In Bloom, she

opens up about struggles with mental health, self-harm and suicidal thoughts, and has spoken out about the blatant racism she dealt with early in her career.

Today, Fowler is a star and fan favourite at Manchester City, and a key member of Australia's highly successful Matildas side.

She hopes that by sharing her experiences she can be a part of normalising speaking up, asking for help and seeking support, particularly among young people.

In a celebration of women's empowerment, sisterhood and beauty, this year Fowler also further cemented her position in the fashion sphere, heading to France to make her Paris Fashion Week debut.

Fowler's appearance marked the first professional footballer, and first L'Oreal Paris brand ambassador in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, to walk the Paris Fashion Week runway.

Her presence on the runway was another significant achievement for the Matildas star. Reflecting on her debut, Fowler said she was thrilled to have been provided with the opportunity.

"Stepping onto the runway was an exhilarating experience and different from anything I've experienced on the football pitch," she said. "To walk alongside such inspiring figures, representing L'Oreal Paris, reinforced my belief that beauty is about embracing who we truly are and the confidence that comes with it."

"I hope every young woman watching, especially back home in Australia, felt that sense of empowerment and is inspired to embrace their individuality and walk with pride, knowing they are worth it."

Fowler's role as brand ambassador and her participation on the runway was not only a reflection of greater diversity in the fashion world, but also a recognition of

her standing in sport and beyond.

Not her first fashion foray, Fowler has fronted the cover of Marie Claire magazine's Woman of the Year edition and even had a Barbie doll created in her likeness.

While she is currently recovering from a serious knee injury and is expected back in action in January ahead of the Asian Cup, Fowler's reputation off the field is growing.

She has been named in Forbes Australia 30 under 30 list, and more recently announced as one of CommBank's new brand ambassadors.

By showing that even those seemingly on top of the world can face personal struggles, Mary Fowler is working to create safe spaces for others to speak up and get the support they need. Her energy and dedication on and off the field is an inspiration to all.

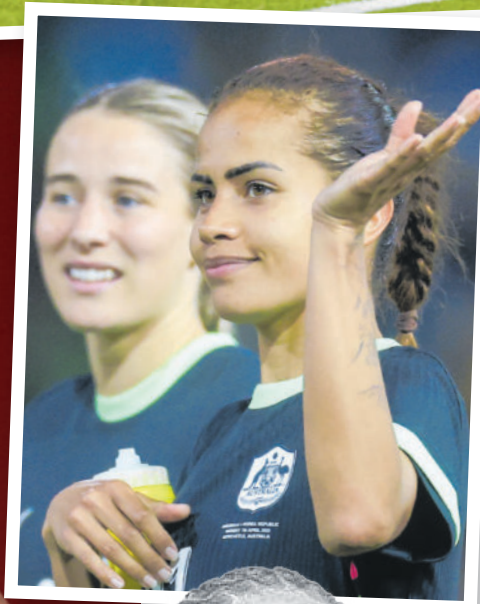
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“  
I hope every young woman watching, especially back home in Australia, felt that sense of empowerment and is inspired to embrace their individuality and walk with pride, knowing they are worth it.

**Mary Fowler**





**Mary Fowler shoots for a goal during the Women's friendly match between Australia and South Korea in Newcastle, and celebrating the victory.**  
Pictures: Mark Evan







Barkaa during the the 2025 ARIA Awards at Hordern Pavilion in Sydney, and right, Thelma Plum makes a speech. Pictures: Sithixay Ditthavong



# First Nations stars rock ARIAS

GIOVANNI TORRE

Indigenous artists Barkaa, Thelma Plum, The Kid Laroi, 3%, and the late Gurrumul were honoured with ARIA awards at Australian music's night of nights last Wednesday.

At the ceremony at Sydney's Hordern Pavilion, Plum's album *I'm Sorry, Now Say It*

Back was named the best pop release of 2025.

Plum, a proud Gamilaraay woman, told the crowd winning the major national music award felt like a "fever dream" after having worked in the industry for more than 13 years.

Barkindji star Barkaa won the award for best hip hop/rap release for *Big Tidda*.

Kamilaroi artist The Kid

Laroi won song of the year with *Girls*, and was a finalist for best solo artist for *How Does It Feel?*, alongside Barkaa with *Big Tidda*.

The best world music album award was won by Gurrumul's *Banbirngu — The Orchestral Sessions*.

The revered Yolngu artist died in 2017, leaving an extraordinary legacy of

powerful work that continues to move listeners around the world.

Hip-hop legends 3% took out the category of best use of an Australian recording in an advertisement.

Six-time ARIA winner and Yolngu artist Baker Boy performed on the night.

Barkaa's *Big Tidda Tour* was a finalist for best Australian

live act, and North-East Arnhem Land's King Stingray were finalists for best rock album with *For The Dreams*.

Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung, Kalkadoon, and Yirendali artist Miss Kaninna's *Soul Has No Tempo* was a finalist in both the best hip hop/rap release and best independent release categories.

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## Teenager's film wins AACTA's attention

JOSEPH GUENZLER

Fifteen-year-old Indigenous filmmaker Charli Fletcher is making waves with her supernatural short *Don't Ignore Me*, which has gained international acclaim.

The film recently won Best Film at the SmartFone Flick Fest (SF3) and has collected multiple awards in Australia and overseas, including at the Inner West Film Festival, Tuesday of Horror Festival (Germany), and the Inner West Youth Film Festival.

It has also earned prizes for Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography and Best Editing and screened at Flickerfest, Peninsula Film Festival, and events in Japan, New York, and San Diego.

Fletcher's work has now reached a new milestone with *Don't Ignore Me* nominated for the 2026 AACTA Awards, where she is one of the youngest directors in the short-film category and the only Indigenous filmmaker represented.

It also marks the first time in the AACTA Awards' 68-year history that a mobile-shot film has been recognised at this level.

"When I got told I was the first in 68 years that a short mobile film was in AACTA, I was like 'you're lying,'" Fletcher said.

"It does not feel real. It's crazy. It's rewarding and feels like I've actually done something — like I've made it somewhere."

Fletcher directed *Don't Ignore Me*, collaborating with a team of young creatives, including her 13-year-old sister Neave Fletcher, who plays Jody.

The film follows a young woman addicted to social media who becomes trapped inside her phone by a supernatural deity.

"The story came from wanting to explore how social media, especially for people our age, can become really encompassing," Charli Fletcher said.

"You can lose yourself in your phone scrolling for hours and hours, so we wanted to showcase that and put a dark twist on it."

She said she chose to shoot the film on an iPhone out of both practicality and creativity.

"As a 15-year-old, buying a big camera and all the attachments just wasn't possible," she said. "Using a phone made it easy and accessible, but it still gave us a similar effect to a real camera."

Voting opens December 6 on the AACTA website. "It'd be really nice if people would give us a vote and give it a watch," Fletcher said.

# Museum adds a new dimension to portraits



The photographic exhibition runs until April. Picture: Louise Reilly

### PHOEBE BLOGG

A groundbreaking First Nations photographic exhibition, *Unfinished Business*, has opened at the Australian Museum.

Sharing first-person experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with disabilities in Australia, *Unfinished Business* features intimate images and stories told by 30 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability from remote, regional, and urban communities.

The exhibition was created by human rights documentary-maker Belinda Mason with Liam Knierim, and developed in collaboration with the First Peoples Disability Network.

*Unfinished Business* brings together 3D lenticular portraits (images that appear to move and shift as viewers walk past them) alongside a documentary film and a new installation to reveal the strength, resilience and diversity of First Nations people with disability.

Australian Museum director and chief executive Kim McKay said the exhibition marks an important milestone in accessibility, inclusion and representation.

"This is a profoundly important exhibition that speaks to inclusion and truth-telling. Each story is told on the participants' own

terms, with each selecting their own words, narrators and imagery, challenging perceptions and sparking conversations about disability, identity and community," she said. "For the first time, we are proud to present this exhibition in a more accessible format, ensuring even more visitors can experience these powerful First Nations stories in meaningful ways."

Working with Vision Australia and Expression Australia, the Australian Museum has embedded accessibility from the outset. The exhibition features tactile panels, audio descriptions, Auslan interpretation and large-print materials, ensuring people who are blind, have low vision, are deaf or hard of hearing can fully connect with the stories.

The Australian Museum's director, First Nations, Laura McBride, said accessibility was central to the design and presentation.

"It's critical to recognise that ableism and racism compound the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with disabilities. This intersection of oppression remains unfinished business," she said.

The exhibition was originally launched in September 2013 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva by Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, then director general of the United Nations Office in Geneva, and



Belinda Mason and Uncle John Baxter. Picture: Louise Reilly

Peter Woolcott, Australia's ambassador to the UN. Since then it has travelled globally, but this is the first time it has been presented in such an accessible format.

Mason said the exhibition reflects the strength and honesty of its participants.

"*Unfinished Business* amplifies the voices of First Nations people with disability who have too often been unheard. Each portrait and story comes directly from the person pictured," she said.

"The lenticular portraits bring these stories to life, creating a sense of movement and depth that mirrors the complexity of each individual experience."

The exhibition draws attention to one of Australia's most critical social justice issues. Research shows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are nearly two times more likely to live with a disability or a long-term

health condition than non-Indigenous people, yet their stories are rarely seen or heard in mainstream spaces.

Presented with the support of The Balnaves Foundation, the exhibition raises the bar for inclusion and representation in museum practice.

Not Fit for Purpose, a powerful new installation developed for the exhibition by Uncle John Baxter, a respected Latja Latja and Narungga Elder and one of the 30 people featured in the exhibition, confronts visitors with the harsh reality of inadequate disability support systems.

The installation features old and outdated mobility equipment, highlighting the significant difficulty and prohibitive expense associated with obtaining modern equipment.

*Unfinished Business* will be at the Australian Museum until April 19 next year.

## Rising artist honours stories in a modern way

PHOEBE BLOGG

Proud Gumbaynggirr/Bundjalung artist Otis Hope Carey is known for works exploring connection, movement and memory through a deep spiritual relationship with Country.

Carey's art has been exhibited nationally and internationally, and he continues to create powerful works that fuse contemporary expression with cultural continuity. "I've just started

brainstorming for my next solo exhibition, which will open at the end of next year. I want to go all out- create something unexpected, deeply connected, and full of heart," Carey told *Style Up*.

Carey said he is working on public art projects which are due for completion next year.

"My goal is to build a space where people can come together, feel safe, and connect through art and story," he said.

"Most of my inspiration comes from my spiritual

connection to Country. I use traditional symbols — but in a way that feels as if I become the symbols themselves, telling stories through energy and connection. Our culture is kinetic; it moves, flows, and lives in everything. I try to express that movement in a contemporary way that honours the old stories without changing their meaning."

One highlight from 2025 was working with a major international name in fashion.

"Hands down, my favourite

project this year has been my collaboration with Christian Louboutin. I'm still pinching myself," Carey said. "It was such an incredible opportunity to create something beautiful, strong, and timeless."

Carey is also the founder of his family-owned design house, Ngaarlur, launched earlier this month. "Our first project is a collection of seven blankets, made from 95 per cent cotton, 75 per cent is recycled, ethically sourced and loomed, each featuring one of my artworks."



Otis Hope Carey



# Yung Milla a young achiever

JOSEPH GUENZLER

Marranunggu hip-hop artist Yung Milla was named this year's young achiever at the NT Performing Arts Awards this month.

He received the award for his impact in music and his work mentoring young people across the Northern Territory.

Yung Milla told National Indigenous Times the recognition showed the work he put in was landing where it mattered most.

"It's crazy . . . it's a blessing. It reminds me what I'm doing is the right thing, you know, and especially doing it for my people," he said.

"To be where I am today, you know it's a blessing, and . . . being recognised . . . it tells me I'm doing something right so it feels really good."

Much of his influence has come through his on-Country workshops, performances and school visits, mentoring young people through music and cultural pride. Yung Milla



Yung Milla Picture: Zealousyzo.

said connecting with kids across remote communities keeps him grounded.

"When I see these young kids out there, they just remind me of my little brothers, nephews, and so it's just like home for me," he said.

His work as a mentor was central to the creation of Barunga, a track inspired by the Barunga Statement.

Yung Milla and his brother, J-MILLA, travelled to Barunga and Wugularr (Beswick) ahead of this year's Barunga Festival, spending time with young people before selecting emerging artists K2 the B and CJR to collaborate on the track.

He said the process grew

naturally from spending time with the kids. "We just went down there, mingled in with the kids . . . we travelled out to Beswick and we made a dance circle, we got everyone dancing . . . having a laugh," he said.

"This girl named Kia stepped up . . . she sang a song and the first three words that she sang, I mean my brother looked at each other like 'This is the girl we're looking for'."

K2 the B and CJR performed Barunga with the Milla brothers at the festival. Yung Milla said he planned to keep expanding his work across remote communities.

"I just want to keep connecting to as many remote communities as I can, you know, branching out . . . giving them mob hope because it's so overlooked," he said.

He said the young achiever award strengthened his commitment to building pathways for Indigenous youth through culture and creativity.



Guests attending CIAF's 2025 fashion parade. Picture: Blueclick Photography

## Fair play for art tops all

PHOEBE BLOGG

Cairns Indigenous Art Fair 2025 has been hailed a record-breaking success, drawing 14,909 spectators, generating almost \$700,000 in art sales, and stimulating the local economy by \$6.19 million across four vibrant days of art, culture, and connection.

Guided by the powerful theme Pay Attention!, the 16th edition was held at the Tanks Arts Centre, opening to a sell-out crowd and closing to a packed audience at the final ceremony.

After delivering his first CIAF, 2025 artistic director Teho Ropeyarn enjoyed time to reflect. "CIAF is not just a showcase, it is a platform with purpose — where creativity leads to self-determination, truth-telling and cultural pride," he said.

Chair Bianca Beetson said this year's results were a testament to the power of Ropeyarn's artistic vision.

"With record attendance, robust sales, and wide-reaching engagement, CIAF continues to show how culture drives not only creativity and connection, but also tangible outcomes for

artists, communities, and the wider economy," she said.

"It demonstrates that when First Nations voices lead, the results speak for themselves."

Findings from the latest independent IER evaluation reinforce these achievements, confirming CIAF's unique role in generating cultural and economic impact.

The report found 96 per cent of attendees rated the event as a great experience.

Sales from the Art Fair Showcase reached \$414,000, while the Artisans Showcase recorded \$281,602.88, for a combined total of nearly \$700,000. In addition, CIAF directed \$240,228.72 back to artists and performers as part of its program, including art awards. Indigenous businesses engaged through CIAF, including food vendors, received a further \$71,912.35.

Now in its ninth year, the CIAF Art Awards awarded \$60,000 across six categories. The Premier's Award for Excellence went to Bernard Singleton (Yakal Creatives) for his wood carving Offering (2025), while the People's Choice Award went to Dylan Sarra for Native Police Spears.

CIAF's Talks program added

another dimension of engagement, with more than 20 artist talks and guided tours attracting close to 250 attendees. The program connected audiences with stories behind the works, reinforcing CIAF's role as both marketplace and meeting place.

CIAF's digital presence also progressively soared in 2025, with more than 1.8 million views and 30,000 followers across platforms.

The inaugural Ambassador Program, led by cultural content creator Talicia Minniecon, brought roving interviews, behind-the-scenes content, and community voices to a global audience.

CIAF has unveiled its 2026 curatorial theme, reclamation and regeneration, and date, July 9-12 at the Tanks Arts Centre. "Reclamation is a powerful act of cultural resurgence . . . regeneration breathes new life into it — a dynamic force rooted in ancestral knowledge yet reaching boldly into the future," Ropeyarn said.

The First Nations-led art fair and cultural celebration is held annually on Gimuy Walubara Yidinji Country in Gimuy/Cairns, Queensland.



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- Ability to incorporate culturally aware practices and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property into the organisation.
- Strong communication skills.
- Willing to travel within NSW and hold a valid NSW Driver's Licence.

## Applications open for art festival

PHOEBE BLOGG

The Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair returns to Larrakia Country at the Darwin Convention Centre from August 6-9 in 2026, and has announced expressions of interest for next year's public program are officially open.

Established and emerging artists, performers, dancers and

other creatives are encouraged to apply online. Expressions of interest close on December 15, 2025, at 5pm ACST.

The Fair's Public Program is a unique platform designed to share participants' craft, culture and stories.

From artist talks and material demonstrations, to masterclass workshops, children's activities and

cultural performances — there are many ways to take part.

DAAF Foundation executive director, Claire Summers, said that the 2025 fair had a "sense of community in the air".

"There was a joy that our First Nations creatives felt in coming together for this national celebration of culture and art," she said.