



Treasure every moment: Yolŋu filmmaker continues journey at QUT



Two years ago, Siena Stubbs found herself on a bullet train in Japan, reflecting on how her life seemed to also be on a pre-determined path, speeding into adulthood.

She was on a Year 12 school trip, and worried about leaving school, finishing her childhood and potentially moving away from her family and small community of Yirrkala in north-east Arnhem Land.

But this year, after a gap year, the young photographer and filmmaker journeyed from the Northern Territory to Queensland to follow her passion for capturing moments by starting university at QUT.

Siena is now seven months into her new Brisbane life, studying a Bachelor of Fine Arts (majoring in film, screen and new media) and chasing her dream of being a female First Nations director.

Before she had even started university, the 19-year-old Yolŋu woman had published her own photography book, and created an award-winning short film, *Shinkansen*, that captured her feelings about being on the brink of adulthood.

The three-minute film, shot during her school trip with Nhulunbuy High School in 2019, won the multimedia category of the 2020 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards and screened at the 2021 Aspen Shortsfest in Colorado.

Siena says embracing adulthood and moving away from her family and community had been a massive step.

"I knew it was going to be very hard, but



Yolŋu filmmaker Siena Stubbs has embraced change and found her place studying a Bachelor of Fine Arts, majoring in film, at QUT.

I've now transitioned to a great place mentally," Siena said.

"I came back from holidays after my first semester of uni and realised I'm at a stage now where I can say, 'This is my place,

those are my friends, and these are my teachers who care about me'.

"Growing up as Yolŋu, the system of kinship is so important. You know your relationship to everyone in the community

and everyone looks after each other. So, leaving that structure for a place with two million people who are strangers is scary.

"But I'm really lucky to have moved into student accommodation where I have four other flatmates.

"And QUT's Oodgeroo Unit has been really lovely. They understand that feeling of connection.

"I'm so glad I came to uni. It's so much fun. This is definitely something great for young people to do when they leave school."

Siena visited QUT and the Oodgeroo Unit while in Year 12 as part of a Stars Foundation trip to Queensland to explore future opportunities.

She said her parents had always been very supportive of her photography and filmmaking and encouraged her to go to university.

Her dad, Will Stubbs, is a former lawyer who runs Yirrkala's famous Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre and her mum, Merrkiyawuy Ganambarr-Stubbs, is co-principal of Yirrkala School.

Siena originally enrolled to study communication at QUT but switched to film after a gap year working at the art centre on The Mulka Project archives, which reinforced her love of film.

She says she believed in opportunities happening organically, so was open to where her career would go after university.

"I know I'll definitely go home in the end. Maybe I'll create a media company telling the story of my people and helping them tell their stories," she said.

ECU's Aboriginal Performance opens new pathways to higher education



This year, Edith Cowan University (ECU), WA, has 43 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), with 17 completing bachelor's degrees – the most we've ever seen at ECU.

"To have this number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students meet the exceptional standards required to enter these WAAPA programs is a testament to their hard work and application to their studies, their craft and the exceptional teaching and support at ECU," says Professor Braden Hill, pro vice-chancellor (equity and Indigenous) and head of Kurongkurl Katitjin, ECU's Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research.

ECU's Aboriginal Performance course is ideal for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who aspire to work in the performing arts. It can help them take their next step into selected WAAPA courses in a supportive and inclusive environment. This allows students to explore theatre in their own way.

ECU Bachelor of Performing Arts student and Aboriginal Performance graduate Sheyann Walker says she felt represented and accepted while studying at WAAPA.

"It was such an amazing experience to be surrounded by so many different Indigenous people from different parts of the country. I



Shinade Mourambine studied Aboriginal Performance at ECU which she says helped explore her study and career options. Shinade went on to enrol in a Bachelor of Performing Arts.

really hope that the Aboriginal Performance course can keep supplying that sort of experience for future Indigenous students who wish to study acting."

Before completing the Aboriginal Performance course, ECU Bachelor of Performing Arts student Shinade Mourambine says she had no experience in the arts, but knew it was something she was very interested in.

"The course helped me a lot in the fundamentals of theatre and it helped me explore what I wanted to do. It also helped me connect to my culture, being around other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from all over Australia.

"Aboriginal Performance was the biggest stepping-stone for me to move out of my comfort zone and into the Bachelor of Performing Arts," she said.



Before enrolling in ECU's Bachelor of Performing Arts, Sheyann Walker undertook Aboriginal Performance, enjoying the cultural and social experience of studying with other Indigenous students.

As a university that likes to lead the way, we're inspiring others to follow their dreams and make their mark in the world. Just like 2021 Western Australian of the Year Aboriginal Award Winner, Karla Hart. Since graduating with a Bachelor of Contemporary Arts and a Certificate IV in Aboriginal Performance, Karla has worked as an actress, a playwright, a Noongar cultural dancer and

choreographer, a major event curator and more.

So, if you're an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person whose path is leading towards the performing arts, we have a pathway that can lead you into university.

Take the first step toward your future. Learn more at www.ecuworldready.com.au/indigenous