



Museums & Art Galleries
of the Northern Territory
Foundation Limited

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Media Release

ERA is deeply saddened by the recent passing of George Chaloupka and our thoughts, prayers and sympathies are with his family and friends at this time.

Chaloupka Fellow to tell the stories of rock art through female eyes

A traditional woman born and raised on country in the Kakadu region will illustrate and communicate in song, sounds and vision the rich history of her local region's rock art from the female perspective after being awarded the ERA-sponsored George Chaloupka Fellowship.

The \$25,000 fellowship, an initiative of the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT) Foundation limited, provides support for research into Indigenous rock art in the Northern Territory with the aim of enhancing the understanding of the art and the role of the MAGNT as a major institution in this field in West Arnhem Land. These sites are a valuable canvas depicting impressions of Indigenous inhabitants of the land during the unfolding social history of the region. There are many undocumented sites.

New fellowship recipient Mandy Muir has already played a significant role in conveying the cultural significance of her home country by sharing the Traditional lifestyle and values she has enjoyed with visitors from all over the world through her tourism enterprise Murdudjurl Cultural Tours.

Mandy grew up at Patonga homestead about 65km south of Jabiru. A descendent of the Murumburr clan, Mandy's mother is Kakadu Traditional Owner and community leader Jessie Alderson.

The physical site on which the work will focus is the Yuwengayay area, known as the Main Gallery of the Deaf Adder Creek, near Nourlangie Rock. Over 300 rock paintings of the descriptive and decorative x-ray styles are depicted over earlier works of art, and pecked hollows on vertical walls represent the Milky Way.

Mandy will be supported by relatives including acclaimed Darwin singer-songwriter Shellie Morris in bringing the stories of the rock art to life in sound recordings, oral histories, research, writing and transcription to be housed and presented at the MAGNT.

Mandy's body of work will draw heavily on the local knowledge Elders have imparted to her during her childhood in the region and through her progression through early adulthood.

These elders also grew up in the region and recall the social evolution of the area during the last generation prior to development. The Elders travelled their country and beyond on foot and horseback, providing them with an unhindered appreciation for the physical ruggedness and transcendent beauty of the landscape.

"In the past all of the information has come from male Traditional Owners," she said.

"The work we're doing will provide a unique chance to gather information from women in a relaxed and familiar setting where painting, stories and song can come together.



“This isn’t about excluding the men – they will still be involved in some way, but we really want to tell the women’s stories.

“A lot of my family are great artists. Our art has been very much a male thing, it has always been men who have painted.

“Women have stored that knowledge, but their views weren’t heard. Over the last few years we’ve had more of our women gaining that knowledge about stories and country and meaning of the art. Behind a lot of those women are a lot of important stories

“This will also provide a unique opportunity for younger members of the group to learn from documenting this information, and respect the great wealth of traditional knowledge of their Elders and their understanding of the art.”

The importance of preserving, promoting and enhancing cultural knowledge to be revered and retold by generations to come has become especially vital in recent times, Ms Muir said, as the group have recently suffered the loss of a Senior Female Elder and the deaths of other prominent group members in recent times.

“With the recent passing of the Senior Elder lady, and other events, we have had a quite a bit of sadness in the region in the last few months,” Mandy said.

“It will be great to get out on country and get our kids and grandkids involved. I can never stress enough to my kids the responsibility they will have when we are gone.

“It’s important to keep the knowledge we have alive and out there. Though there will be some stories we will keep in the family.”

Mandy envisages that work will start on her project in the final months of this year.

This is the third year that ERA has sponsored the George Chaloupka Fellowship, which is part of the company’s ongoing commitment to enhancing cultural opportunities in the Alligator Rivers region which surrounds ERA’s operations at Ranger mine.

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