

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE4722

Johnson, Darlene

Occupation Director, Scriptwriter

Summary

Darlene Johnson is one of Australia's most prominent indigenous filmmakers. Her films and documentaries are centred upon Aboriginal identity and the position of Aboriginals within contemporary Australian society.

Details

Darlene Johnson is from the Dunghutti tribe from the east coast of New South Wales. Johnson graduated with First Class Honours from the University of Technology, Sydney, majoring in Indigenous and Post-Colonial cinema.

In 1996, Johnson wrote and directed *Two Bob Mermaid: A Short Film About Aboriginal Identity*. The short film was set in the summer of 1957, a period of racial tension as government policy shifted its approach towards Aboriginal rights. The film followed the story of a young Koori girl who 'passes for white' at the local swimming pool. *Two Bob Mermaid* won the Australian Film Critics Circle Award for the Best Australian Short Film in 1996. Today the film is used as a teaching resource in primary and secondary schools throughout Australia.

In c.2000, Johnson wrote and directed the documentary *Stolen Generations*. The film employed personal testimony, archival footage and photographs to tell the history of assimilation. The Government policy of assimilation involved the systematic removal of Aboriginal children from their families. The documentary addressed the reasons behind the policy, how it was implemented and maintained, and how it continues to affect Aboriginals. *Stolen Generations* was nominated for an International EMMY as well as an Australian Film Institute award for Best Documentary.

In 2001, Johnson wrote and directed the documentary *Stranger in My Skin* for Film Australia. She also directed the documentary *Following Rabbit Proof Fence* which traced the journey of three young Aboriginal girls from their communities to starring in a Hollywood movie. In 2002, Johnson wrote and directed the documentary *Gulpilil: One Red Blood*, about the Aboriginal actor David Gulpilil. Gulpilil was nominated for a Logie Award, an Australian Film Critics Circle Award and an Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Award.

In 2006, she wrote and directed *Crocodile Dreaming*. *Crocodile Dreaming* tells the story of a traditional Aboriginal community that upsets the spiritual world. As a result, a young man from the tribe is called to fulfil his ancient tribal obligation and find the power of his mother's dreaming. It is his success that will restore peace and harmony to the natural world. The film received a number of international nominations and awards, including an AFI Award for visual effects. It was featured at the Melbourne International Film Festival 2007, and Flickerfest in Sydney 2008. It won the Audience Choice Award at the WOW Film Festival in Sydney and won Best Short Film at the Santa Fe Film Festival in New Mexico 2007.

In 2007, Johnson graduated from the Australian Film, Television and Radio School with a Master of Arts (Hons).

In 2008, she directed the documentary *River of No Return*. The film followed the story of Frances Djulibing, a 42 year old mother of three from the remote Ramingining community in North East Arnhem land. Frances had always dreamt of acting and stardom, despite living a traditional tribal life. Her acting break came with a role in the successful Australian film *Ten Canoes* (2006). The documentary highlighted the difficulties Frances faced in her attempt to reconcile her pursuit of an acting career with the cultural opposition from the ancient life of the Yolgnu.

Published resources

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Showcases, Screen Australia, 2010,
<http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/showcases/8478/bios.asp>

Darlene Johnson, Ronin Films, 2010,
<http://www.roninfilms.com.au/person/136.html>

Article

Lights Up! - Indigenous Filmmakers, Hessey, Ruth, 2008,
<http://www.timeoutsydney.com.au/film/indigenous-filmmakers-28.aspx>

Archival resources

National Film and Sound Archive

[Stolen Generations](#)

[Two Bob Mermaid : A Short Film About Aboriginal Identity](#)

[River of No Return](#)

[Gulpilil : One Red Blood](#)

[Crocodile Dreaming](#)

Author Details

Hollie Aerts

Created 23 December 2010

Last modified 20 November 2018