

real2reel

In this issue

November 2005 Volume 17 Issue 3

New Hothouse Team

Recent Awards and Nominations

Remembering Rain and Pacific Stories Go To Air

Photo by Greg Ford. Courtesy Monash University.



Going to extremes

It's not for the faint-hearted. It's a head-first, face-down, full-throttle slide down a winding, icy track, with brutal consequences if things go wrong.

It's the rediscovered sport of skeleton. And, for four young women from Australia's beaches, it's their unexpected chance at Olympic glory.

Back in 2004 at the Australian Institute of Sport, a sports physiologist handpicked these elite athletes—sprinters, surfers, a gymnast—for a bold trial in a brand-new discipline. Now science is pushing them to new extremes.

Although they suffered a bumbling beginning, in just months one of them has already won a world championship qualifier. Olympic gold seems to be within reach but, after all the effort, the odds predict only one contender will make it through the selection trials to compete.

An exhilarating new Film Australia documentary will follow the fate of the team—the athletes, manager coach and doctor—as they hurtle towards the 2006 Torino Winter Games, tracking both the scientific juggernaut and the all-too-human drama.

Slated to screen on ABC TV, this will be a nail-biting ride, both on the track and off, as we wait to see if, in the end, their combination of cutting-edge technology and red-hot competitive hunger is enough to create a champion.

The one-hour program is being directed by Andrea Ulbrick and produced by Sally Regan, with Penny Robins as executive producer.

It is one of the latest in a slate of productions commissioned under the National Interest Program, which focuses on the key areas of science, history, art and contemporary life.

For more details of new projects in production, see page 2.

Film Australia sets an agenda for growth

Film Australia outlined a program for growth in its 2004–2005 Annual Report, delivered to Federal Parliament last month.

CEO Daryl Karp, delivering her second annual report, flagged a five-year plan to lead Australia's documentary sector into a greater era of production by utilising Film Australia's many assets and achievements to increase production and create new opportunities for Australia's documentary filmmakers.

She pointed to the increased funding Film Australia won from the Federal Budget during the past year for a history series as a sign of confidence in the sector and recognition of the valuable cultural role documentary plays for all Australians.

"With the ongoing support of government to improve our infrastructure and services and its commitment to additional production funding from 2005-2006, Film Australia is in a unique position to increase its production output," said Daryl Karp.

"We will do this by building on our strengths, capitalising on both our existing resources and operations as well as production expertise and editorial capability.

"It will require us to attract third-party finance for some of our projects, and target increased returns on both our facilities and program sales."

Ms Karp recognised that a strategy for growth is ambitious but points to the achievements outlined in Film Australia's Annual Report 2004–2005.

In addition to delivery of 20 National Interest Program productions and 12 programs in progress by June 2005, Film Australia ended the year ahead of budget, with production funding boosted by an additional \$0.48 million made available through internal efficiencies.

"These are achievable goals for a company with such an outstanding track record. I am confident we can do it with our valuable partnerships with the independent sector and broadcasters."

Film Australia is committed to supporting a healthy documentary sector, and adding value to the industry through both production and services.

"Our strategies for growth will encompass all our operations and continue our vision to deliver distinctive content, value and appeal, expertise and leadership in the sector and legacy for all Australians," she said.

A PDF copy of the report is available on the Publications page of the Film Australia website www.filmaust.com.au/about

For a printed copy of the report,
phone 02 9413 8723
email web@filmaust.com.au

Vérité or voyeurism?

SSBP panel discussion

Programs such as **Desperately Seeking Sheila**, **Outback House** and **Jamie Oliver's School Dinners** have attracted viewers, changed opinions, provided insight into social issues and even resulted in social change.

These documentary filmmakers have embraced the success of the reality television format, adopting its styles and codes to reach new audiences and gain broadcaster support.

But what does this evolution mean for social issue and observational documentary making? In striking a balance between vérité and voyeurism, have they crossed a line? Is there still room in the market for more traditional approaches? Or are audiences and broadcasters now only interested in this new reality-observational hybrid?

At the Small Screen Big Picture conference, Film Australia will present a panel discussion and **masterclass on observational documentaries in reality form**, chaired by Film Australia's Head of Production Mark Hamlyn.

This is one in a series of masterclasses and workshops presented by Film Australia in 2005.

Thursday 24 November 2pm to 3.30pm
Small Screen Big Picture, Fremantle WA

The Fabric of a Dream

A new one-hour documentary from director Dennis Smith and Academy Award winning producer Melanie Coombs is set to tell the story of how a shellshocked World War One veteran, who'd left school at 12, ended up creating a national icon.

An inspiring man with bold and imaginative ideas, Fletcher Jones was influenced by Japanese reformer Toyohiko Kagawa, one of the most remarkable social activists of his time.

Jones established his clothing design, retail and manufacturing business with an emphasis on quality, service and innovation. But his primary concern was for people—both his customers and his workers—and they, in turn, were intensely loyal.

The program will be a celebration of the man and his dream—of a model working environment based on values other than simple profit—set against the backdrop of 20th century history.

Produced in association with Melodrama Pictures and SBS Independent and with the assistance of Film Victoria, it will screen on SBS TV. Penny Robins is executive producing for Film Australia.

Policing the Pacific

It will be edge-of-your-seat, real-life drama when a team of Australian and Pacific cops joins a multinational force working to end lawlessness in the Solomon Islands.

A new series for SBS TV will follow a group of volunteers through their intensive training and deployment in the Solomons, which is experiencing a crisis in law and order. In the process, it will pose some challenging questions. Can people from different backgrounds work effectively together? How much of an impact can this kind of assistance have? And how much responsibility does the region bear for the issues the Solomons face?

Produced by Chris Hilton and directed by Alan Erson and Andrew Merrifield, the project is being made in association with SBS Independent. Penny Robins is executive producing for Film Australia.

Downunder Grads

Film Australia is joining with the Pacific Film and Television Commission (PFTC), SBS Independent and Big Island Pictures in a new funding initiative that will assist Queensland documentary filmmakers get their ideas on screen.

The Downunder Grads Documentary Initiative will provide development and production investment for a new four-part documentary series about students at Australian universities to be screened on the Inside Australia program on SBS TV.

Film Australia will executive produce the series and provide equity investment with PFTC, SBSi will provide a presale and Big Island Pictures will coordinate and co-executive produce the series with writers, producers and directors from Queensland's independent sector.

"The series will explore the contemporary experience of going to university with a major focus on the perspectives of multicultural Australian and international students," said Mark Hamlyn, Film Australia Head of Production.

Betty Churcher returns to the National Gallery for Film Australia

A rare glimpse of the National Gallery of Australia's hidden gems will be the subject of a new documentary series, featuring a commentary by former gallery director Betty Churcher.

Art Brief, a 15-part series of five-minute "micro-docs", will give Australians the opportunity to view works seldom seen by the public in a behind-the-scenes tour of storerooms and preservation.

Betty Churcher has been granted access all areas by the NGA and will contribute her expert knowledge of the intriguing stories behind how the artworks were acquired and their importance as part of the national collection.

Art Brief will be directed by John Hughes, written and presented by Betty Churcher, and produced by Film Australia in association with Early Works. This partnership also produced **The Art of War**, which won Churcher the top prize for scriptwriting in this year's NSW Premier's Literary Awards.

Produced under Film Australia's National Interest Program, the series will air nationally on the ABC next year, in the new Sunday Arts program.

Also in production

Air Australia

Filming is underway for this three-part series which will revisit Australia's grand but turbulent aviation history. Produced in association with Vue DC and with the assistance of ScreenWest, Lotterywest and the ABC, it is being produced by Helen Clucas and writer/director Alan Lindsay. Tony Virgo is associate producer.
Executive Producer: Anna Grieve

Growing Up in Australia

Director Catherine Marciniak has started filming interviews with families in the first installment of a landmark series, which aims to track the lives of a group of children for seven years. The project is based on a major study in which 10,000 Australian children are placed under a sociological and scientific microscope. Produced by Jennifer Cummins, it will screen on ABC TV.
Executive Producer: Penny Robins

The Safe House

Lee Whitmore is using an unusual technique in the production of her animation for SBS TV, involving a mixture of paint and oil on glass plates which she then digitally photographs. Produced by Denise Haslem, the half-hour program is inspired by the infamous Petrov Affair of the 1950s.
Executive Producer: Anna Grieve

To great acclaim

Film Australia productions have recently received a plethora of awards and nominations.

At the AFI (Australian Film Institute) Awards, which will be held on 25 November, **Abortion, Corruption and Cops—The Bertram Wainer Story** is a finalist for Best Achievement in Direction in a Documentary (John Moore) and Cinematography in a Non-Feature Film (Jenni Meaney); **Mr Patterns** for Editing in a Non-Feature Film (James Bradley); and **Vietnam Symphony** for Sound in a Non-Feature Film (Leo Sullivan, Tony Vaccher, Danny Longhurst).

Barbara Chobocky and Jeff Bruer, writers of **Capitalist Drive**, have been nominated for an AWGIE (Australian Writers' Guild) Award in the Documentary, Public Broadcast section and composers Paul Grabowsky (**The Art of War**) and Neil Sutherland (**Colour of War—The Anzacs**) have been nominated for APRA-AGSC Screen Music Awards.

These awards will be held in November, as will the Film Critics Circle of Australia Awards, where **Djungguwan—Speaking to the Future** has been shortlisted for Best Australian Feature-Length Documentary. After screening at the Sydney Indigenous Arts and Film Festival in July, the film was selected for the prestigious Royal Anthropological Institute International Festival of Ethnographic Film in the UK and Italy's International Festival of Archaeological Film.

Directed by Trevor Graham and produced by Denise Haslem, **Djungguwan—Speaking to the Future** is part of **Ceremony—The Djungguwan of Northeast Arnhem Land**, an upcoming DVD release from Film Australia. The two-DVD set will explore the law and religion of the Yolngu people of northeast Arnhem Land through a particular ceremony, the Djungguwan.

At the recent ATOM (Australian Teachers of Media) Awards, **From Wireless to Web** won Best Educational Website and **Film Australia's Immigration** DVD won Best Multimedia.

Other Film Australia programs among the finalists were **Mr Patterns** (Best Documentary, Human Story), **learning@filmaustralia** (Best Educational Website), **Australian Biography Online**, (Best Tertiary Education Resource), **Australians at Work** (Best Secondary Education Resource) and **Film Australia's Wilderness** DVD (Best Multimedia).

Film Australia's Wilderness was voted one of the ten best films at the Tourfilm Festival in the Czech Republic. **From Wireless to Web** received a special commendation in the Best Secondary School Educational Website category at the Australian Awards for Excellence in Educational Publishing and **Australians at Work** was shortlisted.

Troubled Minds—The Lithium Revolution was a finalist for the Australian Museum Eureka Prize in Health and Medical Research Journalism.

In other festival news, **Vietnam Symphony** screened at the Vancouver, Hawaii and Pusan (Korea) International Film Festivals. Simon Smith's cinematography for the film was highly commended at the NSW State ACS (Australian Cinematographers Society) Awards in October.

Mr Patterns also recently screened at the first annual DOCNZ International Documentary Film Festival, held in Wellington and Auckland.

For details see, our festival and award listing: www.filmaust.com.au/programs

Photo by Ian Barry



Mandy Chang's remembering rain

Mandy Chang is a London-based Australian who has been writing, producing and directing documentaries for nearly a decade. Her film *Visions of Space: God's Architect, Antoni Gaudi* won the prestigious Grierson Award for best arts program in the UK in 2003 and was nominated for an International Emmy.

Last year she returned to Australia to make **Remembering Rain** for Film Australia's National Interest Program.

This one-hour documentary introduces the people of one farming community as they attempt to weather the worst drought on record. Beautifully photographed, in turns funny and moving, it is an iconic portrait of a land and a character shaped by drought—one that raises the question of the very viability of farming in the driest inhabited continent on earth.

Here, Mandy explains her reasons for making the film:

"I have been living overseas for 16 years, have made films in many countries, but had never made one in my own. I wanted to explore an Australian topic that was both important and interesting to me personally.

Each year when I returned to Australia I noticed there were more water restrictions. I was also collecting articles about apocalyptic bushfires. I began to wonder why no-one had made a documentary about the human side of the drought. News and current affairs reports showed people standing on the edge of dry dams, but you never got a sense of their lives, their histories, or their emotional responses to the daily struggles.

Australia's rural heritage was a big part of the mythology of this country when I grew up, although it is probably less so for the following generations. It infused my childhood even though I lived in Sydney.

There is a romantic view of the bush. I wanted to know how much the reality matched and how life on small family farms has changed. The truth is that there is nothing romantic about living in the bush and life there is changing dramatically.



The further I got into the project the more I realised that it was not just the drought that was crippling people. There were many other issues at stake, including less-than-favourable terms of trade. The wool price crashed in the 1990s, for example, and has never really recovered, yet costs keep going up. Then there is the question of whether people should be farming in such marginal areas.

Emotional attachment is also the farmers' own worst enemy. Even the most tongue-tied cockies suddenly become articulate when talking about the land. They know they shouldn't be sentimental because they are running a business, but they can't help themselves.

Despite the cliché of the slow-talking cockie I found them to be poetic souls. They have an economy with words, a wonderful dry humour, and that ever-essential optimism necessary for survival on the land.

The people I met during this project were extremely likeable. Despite their pride, they generously allowed me to have a window into their lives—and they had the courage to let their vulnerability show. I came to care greatly about them and what happens to them.

I suspect that their way of life will die out, chiefly because the laws of economics are not in their favour, either now or in the foreseeable future."

Remembering Rain was produced with the assistance of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Mandy Chang was director/producer, Megan McMurchy was producer and Penny Robins was executive producer for Film Australia.

Remembering Rain will screen on ABC TV on Thursday 10 November at 9.25pm.

ABC New Media and Film Australia explore Pacific Stories

The first cross-platform co-production between ABC New Media and Digital Services and Film Australia's National Interest Program will be broadcast on free-to-air digital channel ABC2 and online at abc.net.au/pacificstories.

Pacific Stories comprises a curated season of acclaimed titles taken primarily from the Film Australia archive, with each episode for television introduced by Tongan-Australian performers Vika and Linda Bull with original music by David Bridie (*My Friend the Chocolate Cake*).

Included in the **Pacific Stories** collection are **Sugar Slaves** (1995), **My Father, My Country** (1989), **My Valley is Changing** (1970), **Paradise Imperfect** (2000), **A Place of Power in French Polynesia** (1983), **The Marshall Islands—Living With the Bomb** (1983), **Fit for a King** (1994) and **Land of the Morning Star** (2003).

The films, which explore events spanning the past century, trace the remarkable shift in social, cultural and environmental realities for people of the Pacific.

The **Pacific Stories** website extends the experience of each film with new material including production interviews and stills, updates on people and issues, film trailers and supporting graphics, maps, text and audio.

"We are delighted with our first collaboration with Film Australia on **Pacific Stories**, which has revealed a wealth of material that, using cross-platform production, is enriched to provide both historical and contemporary contexts," said Lynley Marshall, Director of ABC New Media and Digital Services.

"Film Australia has one of the largest and most historically significant libraries of archival, documentary and stock footage in the country. **Pacific Stories** is like a having a guided tour of the best our library offers on the subject of the south west Pacific—and then meeting the filmmakers. It's a great opportunity to revisit truly exciting material that shows the changing relationships with our neighbours," said Film Australia Chief Executive Officer, Daryl Karp.

Pacific Stories is online from 1 November and will screen on ABC2 for six weeks from 17 November each Thursday at 7pm and 9.15pm.

www.abc.net.au/pacificstories

Back from Cannes

Last month, Film Australia introduced 12 new programs to international buyers at MIPCOM in Cannes, France. **Vietnam Symphony, Road to Tokyo, The Art of War and Remembering Rain** generated considerable interest as did two new distribution titles, **Crossing the Line and Reef Route 66–The Colour Cycle**, and Gillian Armstrong's latest documentary for Film Australia on the life of designer Florence Broadhurst.

Key genres for broadcasters continue to be science, technology, environment, history, health, mental illness, family/parenting and the arts with a slight decrease in demand for programs on military history and terrorism.

Cross-platform delivery of programs through mobile phone, IPTV and broadband was a hot topic at the market and associated conference, which predicted considerable shifts in broadcast mechanisms over the next few years and highlighted the need to make programs that tell great stories with creative and innovative flair.

Recognising excellence

Film Australia is committed to nurturing creativity and supporting excellence through various activities, including sponsoring awards that recognise Australian documentary and filmmakers working in the genre.

One of these is the Film Australia award for most significant achievement in documentary at the Australian Film Television and Radio School. This year, it was presented to three graduates of the MA course in editing—Vanessa Milton, Leah Donovan and Rowena Crowe.

And in September, the Film Australia script award for a documentary student in the VCA Graduate Diploma in Film and Television was won by Sofija Stefanovic.

The Robin Anderson Student Film Awards will be held at the State Theatre in Sydney on 16 November. Co-sponsored by Film Australia, this free event, which is designed to encourage high school filmmakers, will be hosted by Margaret Pomeranz with Rowan Wood (director of **Little Fish** and **The Boys**) presenting the main prize. For more information, see the Film Australia website www.filmaust.com.au/news

New Hothouse team appointed

Film Australia and the NSW Film and Television Office have announced the appointment of documentary company Iris Pictures to their \$150,000 Hothouse business development pilot scheme.

Film Australia CEO Daryl Karp said the full approval of the selection committee for the filmmakers Jessica Douglas-Henry and Mary-Ellen Mullane had endorsed their clear objectives for the company's strategic growth, their impressive record in domestic production and their positioning for expansion internationally. They replace the previous team, Mint, who withdrew following an intense period of development.

Producer/director Jessica Douglas-Henry has some 25 years experience in the industry and is best known for her award-winning film *Emily's Eyes*. Other credits include the experimental documentary *The Hundredth Room*, and with Mary-Ellen producing she also directed the four-part series *Handle with Care* and the critically acclaimed *Our Brother James*.

Producer Mary-Ellen Mullane has been working in Australian documentary film and video production for close to 20 years. In 1994 she was awarded the World Health Organisation Travelling Fellowship to review public health media production around the world. Following a FTO Fellowship she also produced *Dr Fruit-Loop Goes to East Timor*.

This year the team completed work as co-director and co-producers on the Film Australia documentary series, *Divorce Stories* and have just delivered a one-hour documentary *Maternity Unit*.

"The Iris Pictures team have completed the first phase of the Hothouse, which involves an advanced business planning workshop with UK business strategists Jonathon Olsberg and Richard Miller, and they were able to hone and improve their business model," Film Australia CEO Daryl Karp said.

She said the initial six months of the Hothouse pilot had shown good progress, with the first team of Margie Bryant, Jennifer Cummins and Danielle Roet participating in the business planning process and opting out of the scheme for a different business model.

Iris Pictures have developed a business plan that includes targeting strategic alliances, identifying new revenue streams beyond broadcast-only models, leveraging their track record to develop locally and internationally focused projects and re-branding the company for future growth.

"The selection committee were impressed with this vision as a potential model for other documentary makers, and we have decided to extend the timeframe of the pilot to allow this to come to fruition," Daryl Karp said.

"Sustainable production companies are pivotal to the continued growth and success of the industry. Based on the support offered under the Hothouse Scheme, we believe Iris Pictures will be able to make effective and strategic plans for its future," said Sally Browning, Acting Chief Executive, FTO.

The Hothouse pilot aims to support a team of independent documentary filmmakers to establish a viable business. The scheme provides the filmmakers with \$100,000 as well as on-site production services, facilities, training and advice, with particular emphasis on developing business and marketing skills. Additional support is provided by the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, Holding Redlich and Horwarths (NSW) Pty Ltd Chartered Accountants and Management Consultants.

In brief

- Paul Rudd has joined Film Australia as an executive producer in Sydney for six months from October 2005. Among other projects, he will develop a half-hour series to be produced outside the National Interest Program as part of Film Australia's strategy for growth.

- Film Australia's **Indigenous Studies Update** is now available. This publication features recently released programs with Indigenous Australian and Pacific themes and supplements the Film Australia Indigenous Studies Catalogue. A PDF is available on the Publications page of the Film Australia website or contact Film Australia Sales for a printed copy:

web www.filmaust.com.au/about
email sales@filmaust.com.au
phone 02 9413 8634

- Transcripts from Film Australia's **Making History** workshop, held at the company's Lindfield site in August, are now available on the website. They include presentations from Alex West (Film Australia Executive Producer, History) and historians John Hirst, Richard White and Michelle Arrow as well as notes from the masterclass given by UK producer Liz Hartford. www.filmaust.com.au/production

Film Australia

leading Australian documentary
www.filmaust.com.au

Sydney Office
101 Eton Road
Lindfield NSW 2070
PO Box 46
Lindfield NSW 2070
Tel +61 2 9413 8777
Fax +61 2 9416 5672

Melbourne Office
Level 3, 145 Smith Street,
Fitzroy VIC 3065
PO Box 1220
Collingwood VIC 3066
Tel +61 3 9416 4825
Fax +61 3 9416 4826

An Australian Government-owned company.

© 2005 Film Australia Limited
ABN 19 008 639 316

Real2Reel is published quarterly by Film Australia.

ISSN 1447-1485

Editorial and production queries should be directed to Kirsten Tilgals.

Tel +61 2 9413 8723
Fax +61 2 9416 9401
ktilgals@filmaust.com.au

