

BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE



# TERRAIN

STUDY GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Bangarra Dance Theatre pays respect and acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, create, and perform.

We also wish to acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose customs and cultures inspire our work.

# INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY (ICIP)

Bangarra acknowledges the industry standards and protocols set by the Australia Council for the Arts Protocols for Working with Indigenous Artists (2007). Those protocols have been widely adopted in the Australian arts to respect ICIP and to develop practices and processes for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultural heritage. Bangarra incorporates ICIP into the very heart of our projects, from storytelling, to dance, to set design, language and music.

© Bangarra Dance Theatre 2019

Last updated August 2019

## **WARNING**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this Study Guide contains names of and quotes from deceased persons.

## **Photo Credits**

Front Cover: Deborah Brown,  
photo by Greg Barrett

Back Cover: Deborah Brown,  
photo by Greg Barrett

# INTRODUCTION

*Terrain* is Bangarra Dance Theatre's twentieth production and was the first full-length work for the company by Choreographer and Associate Artistic Director, Frances Rings.



Landscape is at the core of our existence and is a fundamental connection between us and the natural world. The power of that connection is immeasurable. It cleanses, it heals, it awakens and it renews. It gives us perspective. It reminds us of something beyond ourselves and it frees us. But more importantly when we are surrounded by nature we begin to understand our place and how we are a very, very small part of a much larger, much bigger picture.

***Terrain* is where spirit and place meet.**

- Frances Rings,  
Choreographer, *Terrain*, 2012

# CONTENTS

03

Introduction

04

Using this Study Guide

05

Contemporary Indigenous Dance Theatre

09

Bangarra Dance Theatre

10

Introduction

12

Creating Terrain

14

The Creative Team

16

Further Reading

# USING THIS STUDY GUIDE

*Within Bangarra, and many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lives, there is a confronting duality: the balance of ancient and contemporary, country and urban, saltwater and freshwater, success and sadness.*

*Our culture and our stories are more important than ever.*

**– Stephen Page, 2016**

The purpose of this Study Guide is to lay the ground for an experience – an experience where inquiry, curiosity, emotion, imagination and response are free to be explored and expressed. In order to experience the dance theatre work *Terrain*, it is important to delve into the broader and deeper context of the work, taking into account what has gone Before, how we sense the Now, and how we use our experience to enrich the Future. The material in this Study Guide aims to lay the groundwork for how teachers and students might approach and discuss the dance work *Terrain*, and immerse themselves in its world.

We hope you enjoy the experience.

*I believe storytellers play one of the most important roles in a society. They hold the history of the clan, the lessons learnt, they provide a vocabulary for change, they can entertain, educate, agitate, celebrate... storytellers excite a society, uniting them despite their differences by providing a single moment in time where you feel part of something bigger.*  
– Wesley Enoch, 'Smell the Air: The Nick Enright Inaugural Speech', National Play Festival 2018

This Study Guide provides:

- Viewpoints, perspectives and background information on contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance theatre
- Information about Bangarra Dance Theatre, its history, and its current work
- Support material for the study of the work *Terrain* (2012, with a focus on the creative processes, and Creative Team involved in the creation of the work
- Additional reading/links to assist teachers and students in their experience and inquiry of the work *Terrain*

## CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITY

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures  
Sustainability

## GENERAL CAPABILITIES

Critical and creative thinking  
Intercultural understanding  
Ethical understanding

## LEARNING AREAS

The Arts (Dance, Music, Visual Arts)  
Humanities and Social Science (History, Civics and Citizenship)  
Science

## TOPICS/THEMES

Indigenous perspectives  
Contemporary Dance  
Design  
Literature  
Music  
Storytelling  
Australian Cultures  
Australian Society  
Environmental Science  
Geography  
History  
Human Rights  
Religion  
Scientific Inquiry



# CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS DANCE THEATRE

## PERSPECTIVES, VOICES AND CULTURES

The concept of contemporary Indigenous dance theatre cannot be understood as a categorised genre or a particular form because it exists as part of a continuum that responds to a diversity of culture and developing perspectives. Any contemporary Indigenous dance production that incorporates music/sound, design and other conventions of the theatre will inevitably have a deep purpose and an essential spirit that is, and will always be, about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. While drawing on traditional stories and cultural ways of being, Indigenous dance theatre provides an important platform for Indigenous people. It gives voice to the experience of living in a modern world that experiences constant change, where the threat to cultural identity is relentlessly present.

The growth in availability of technical resources, an increasing number of performance venues, and the proliferation of new arts festivals and digital platforms, has greatly supported the development of new Indigenous dance theatre, as well as the careers of the many creative artists involved. As more new work is created, support for the infrastructure and training that underpins these forms has also grown, resulting in a critical mass of professional artists involved in producing high quality productions that increase the demand we currently see from audiences in Australia and internationally. One of the most important outcomes of these developments is the fact that more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are able to see their cultures reflected in this unique

form, and are able to celebrate the resilience of Australia's First Nations people and their ancestors through the sharing of works that depict Indigenous stories, cultures and perspectives.

It is important to consider the language we use when talking and writing about Indigenous cultures in the context of art: when it is made, how it is made and where the source material comes from. The general application and understandings of the terms 'traditional' and 'contemporary' can be problematic when critiquing Indigenous dance theatre. By fixing the term 'contemporary' to the form, it could be argued that we are implying 'post-colonial', 'modern' or 'non-traditional'. Yet with many new works sourcing their inspiration from the Indigenous cultures that have existed since ancient times, what is 'traditional' and what is 'new' can exist simultaneously. This is often expressed by saying Indigenous Australian cultures are the oldest living, and continuous cultures in the world.

## FORM, ACTIVATION AND PROCESS

One way of exploring the development of Indigenous dance theatre over the last three or four decades is to trace the journeys of some of the artists who have been significant contributors to that development. It should be noted that while many opportunities have been opened up for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to develop in their choreographic work and their leadership roles, the true force behind this development has been the commitment and determination of the individual artists themselves.

Choreographer Frances Rings with  
Deborah Brown, photo by Greg Barrett

Artists and leaders like Carole Y. Johnson, Stephen Page, Frances Rings, Raymond Blanco, Vicki van Hout, Gary Lang, and Marilyn Miller, are some who have paved the way. More recently Elma Kris, Deborah Brown, Yolande Brown, Daniel Riley, Mariaa Randall, Sani Townsen, Jacob Boehme, Ghenoa Gela, Thomas E. S. Kelly, Joel Bray, and Amrita Hepi are contributing to the ever-growing critical mass of Indigenous contemporary dance in Australia.

Building a skills base has been both a challenge and a significant contributor to the development of Indigenous contemporary dance and dance theatre. The establishment of training institutions like National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) Dance College in Sydney, and Aboriginal Centre for Performing Arts (ACPA) in Brisbane, have been fundamentally important to increasing technical skills to support the creation of new works. Market development initiatives, the growth of touring networks, and a range of strategic programs to address identified gaps in the infrastructure, have been and continue to be critical to the growth and sustainability of this work.

From the mid-20th Century, contemporary forms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expression emerged across all art forms and began to infiltrate mainstream arts programs that largely drew on western cultures and/or western forms of presentation. By the 1960s, young black theatre makers, playwrights, writers and actors were creating works that reflected their culture in both the pre-colonial and post-settlement worlds. Writers Kevin Gilbert and Jack Davis, and actor/directors Bryan Syron and Bob Maza were among some of the black theatre makers who lay the foundation for the strong Indigenous theatre scene that exists today. Novelist Faith Bandler, and poet/artist/educator Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker) were also strong voices in the new wave of Indigenous writers whose works now form part of Australia's rich and diverse literary landscape. The wave of contemporary Indigenous artists that followed in the wake of the Papunya Tula art movement in the 1970s has seen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander work acquired for major collections around the world, which command impressive prices in auction houses globally. Many, if not all, of these artists also

consider themselves activists, and there is no doubt that their work has had a significant impact on the way non-Indigenous people have learned about Indigenous cultures and the ongoing political struggle of First Nations people in the context of post-settlement life.

The creative processes of any artist tend to emerge through a range of influences, discovery and personal experience. Yet for Indigenous artists, these processes are more complex. Respect for cultural protocols, the need for community engagement, and a strong commitment to enforce care for traditional knowledge that is shared, and/or provided through a process of request, invitation, permission and transmission, are all things that need to be considered and upheld as new expressions are created by Indigenous artists. Navigating all these considerations is complicated and takes time. However, the ongoing development of Indigenous dance (and other contemporary art forms) is dependent on these protocols and practices being observed and implemented to ensure cultural continuity. Stories, songs, dances, and connection to Place are sacred, and are passed on through oral transmission, so there is no central knowledge source, and written information is usually second hand. Indigenous Cultural & Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights are variously enshrined both Australian and international conventions and statements, and are an important safety net that seeks to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures survive and thrive.

## COUNTRY, RELATIONSHIP AND CONNECTION

'Country', as a western construct, is mostly understood as a defined place, marked by borders, (natural and/or imposed), and operating on principles of sovereignty and the governance of the nation by the state. Ethnicity, religion, environment, and histories of colonisation and conflict are signifiers that overlay the identification of a 'country'. As history shows, these factors have often been the cause of conflict between groups who claim their right to a 'land' is justified. Land

ownership and other interests in land have been closely associated with human rights, where groups can show a perpetual connection to the land in order to justify their right to occupy.

At a community level, the concept of public, private, individual, or collective ownership of property (e.g. land, a house, a business) has developed over just a few thousand years. The right to own property that has a capital value, possesses certain features and resources, can be bought and sold for profit, and the protection of these interests and capacities by law, is the enduring assurance of the western capitalist system.

The concept of Country and Land for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is extremely different.

The spiritual dimension of Country cannot be detached from the physical. Country can mean a person's Land where they were born, as well as the sea, sky, rivers, sacred sites, seasons, plants and animals. It can also be a place of heritage, belonging, and spirituality that is inseparable from the land. Hence, the impact of displacement from Country, and the disruption to that sense of belonging to one's Country, can be catastrophic for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultural and economic wellbeing. Story, song, dance, and ancestral lineage provide the foundation for an existence on this earth, and a passage to and from the worlds beyond life on earth - and those stories and songs all link to Country as a home for Culture.

For Indigenous people, these complex relationships are like threads in a tapestry of exploration that has no beginning and no end, yet is founded on, and maintained through, specific information that is transmitted by 'walking on Country', oral transference and a range of other traditional practices.

When artists draw from the concept of Country, they are the bearers of Culture, illustrated and made meaningful in many ways to many different people. In this way, the dance theatre worlds within *Terrain* provide the opportunity to delve into the concept of Country and all it holds in the way of knowledge, spirituality and cultural meaning.



Daniel Riley in 'Salt', a section of *Terrain*,  
photo by Greg Barrett

## CULTURAL INHERITANCE AND TRANSFERAL OF KNOWLEDGE

Storytelling in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life is the means by which cultural systems, values, and identity are preserved and transferred. Telling stories through song, music and dance, in order to connect people to land, and teach them about their culture and the traditions of their ancestors is the way knowledge is passed from generation to generation. Knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander totemic systems, the histories of peoples, clans and tribal associations, language, land, and concepts and connections of kinship, are maintained through these stories.

Many of Bangarra's productions are based on or include stories from the Dreaming, which are allegorical representations of contemporary existence and the future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and people. Expressing and maintaining culture through contemporary interpretations and rich theatrical realisations enables the world of Australian Indigenous culture to be shared with the full diversity of today's audiences.

## THE DREAMING

Indigenous spirituality exists in the concept of the 'Dreaming'. Dreaming connects Indigenous people to the past, creates relevance to the present, and guides them for the future. Dreaming stories can illustrate the phenomena of creation, transformation, natural forces, and life principles. They are specifically related to landforms, places, creatures and communities. The ancestral beings that populate the stories form the spiritual essence of the stories. Bangarra's portrayal of stories of the Dreaming through the contemporary dance theatre form requires a diligent process of connecting and building a relationship with the traditional custodians of those stories so that the integrity and authenticity is respected.

## CONSULTATION AND OBSERVANCE OF PROTOCOLS

For all of its productions, the Bangarra Creative Team researches and explores the stories of Indigenous cultures in close consultation and collaboration with their traditional custodians, before embarking on the process of creating the production. Each year, Bangarra spends time in specific Indigenous communities, meeting with Elders and traditional owners and living with the people of that community - learning about the stories that connect the people, the land, the language, and the creatures of the land. Everyone who works at Bangarra feels very strongly about their role in the company's work. They make sure that the stories they tell are true to the traditional owners of those stories and uphold the integrity of the stories' meanings.

## EXPERIENCING DANCE IN A THEATRICAL CONTEXT

It is important to note that dance theatre works are essentially artistic invention, and are created to express a broad range of ideas and thoughts. While some information is provided in the program notes of each production, the viewer is free to interpret the work according to their individual perspectives, emotional responses, and level of experience in the viewing of performing arts. Repeated viewing of the work, along with the cumulative process of learning about the themes, source material, cross-referencing of the range of subject matter and creative processes involved in the making of the work, contributes to personal and critical responses to the work. Bangarra invites its audiences to share, learn, and appreciate the critical importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in order to understand their own relationship with the cultures and the people of Australia's First Nations.

## RESOURCES



Burridge, Stephanie & Dyson, Julie (ed.). **'Shaping the Landscape: celebrating dance in Australia'**. Routledge, New Delhi, India & Abingdon, UK, 2012.

Dunbar-Hall, Peter & Gibson, Chris. **'Deadly Sounds, deadly places: Contemporary Aboriginal Music in Australia'**. UNSW Press, Sydney, 2004.

Thompson, Liz (Compiler). **'Aboriginal Voices: Contemporary Aboriginal artists, writers and performers'**. Simon & Schuster Australia, Sydney 1990.



**The Deep Archive: Wesley Enoch on Contemporary Indigenous Arts Practice**. Real Time Arts, 2017. <https://www.realtime.org.au/the-deep-archive-wesley-enoch-on-contemporary-indigenous-arts-practice/>

**Johnson, Carole Y. (1940-)**. National Library of Australia <https://trove.nla.gov.au/people/1491391?c=people>



**Carole Johnson — Delving into Dance with Ausdance Victoria** (2017) <https://www.delvingintodance.com/podcast/carole-johnson?rq=carole%20johnson>



**Bangarra Dance Theatre YouTube Channel** - interviews with Artistic Director Stephen Page and other Bangarra Creatives. <https://www.youtube.com/user/bangarradancetheatre>

# BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE



Frances Rings, Djakapurra Munyarryun, and Marilyn Miller, photo by Greg Barrett



Bangarra Dancers, photo by James Morgan



Carole Y Johnson, Matthew Doyle, and Phillip Lanley, photographer unknown



Bangarra Dancers and Crew, photo by Tiffany Parker

## BANGARRA'S BEGINNINGS

Bangarra Dance Theatre was founded due to the efforts of an American woman, Carole Y. Johnson, who toured to Australia in the early 1970s with the Eleo Pomare Dance Company from New York.

Johnson had experienced the full impact of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, and been a part of the proliferation of new modern dance exponents across America, who were focused on freeing dance from its institutionalised bases and using dance to make commentary on the contemporary world. She studied at the prestigious Juilliard School in New York and was awarded scholarships to work with communities in Africa. Johnson knew the power of dance as a practice, and as a communication platform.

During her time in Australia in 1972, she was asked to conduct dance workshops. These were very successful and resulted in a Johnson's new dance production that depicted Australia's own civil rights actions. *The Challenge - Embassy Dance* was about the Moratorium for Black Rights initiated by workers' unions in 1972, and the challenge to uphold the presence of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy.

Johnson quickly realised that there was a lack of contemporary dance expression in the Australian sociocultural environment, and decided that she would do something about it. On the back of her workshops, she established the Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Scheme in 1976, which was to later become the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association - known today as NAISDA Dance College. At the same time, black theatre makers, playwrights, writers, and actors were creating works that reflected their

culture in both its pre-colonial and post-settlement states (see Form, Activation and Process, p. 5)

By the 1980s, NAISDA had developed a performance arm called the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre, which showcased the development of students into professional Dancers and also gave opportunities for these Dancers to develop as Choreographers. Raymond Blanco, Marilyn Miller and Dujon Nuie were some of the artists who took on the role of Choreographer and paved the way for many more to come.

In 1989, Johnson founded a new company, Bangarra Dance Theatre. Bangarra is a Wiradjuri word meaning 'to make fire'. In 1991, the artistic directorship was handed to Stephen Page and he premiered his first work, *Up Until Now* for the company in October of the same year.

## BANGARRA TODAY

Today, Bangarra is one of Australia's leading performing arts companies, widely acclaimed nationally and around the world for its powerful dancing, distinctive theatrical voice and utterly unique soundscapes, music and design. The company is recognised globally for critically-acclaimed theatre productions that combine the spirituality of traditional cultures with contemporary forms of storytelling through dance. Bangarra is supported with funding through the Australia Council for the Arts (the federal Government's arts funding and advisory body), Create NSW (NSW arts policy and funding body) and a number of private philanthropic organisations and donors. The company also derives earnings from performance seasons, special events and touring.

Based in Sydney, Bangarra presents performance seasons in Australian capital cities, regional towns and remote areas, and has also taken its productions to many places around the world including Europe, Asia and the USA.

Bangarra provides the opportunity for people of all cultural backgrounds to share knowledge about, and have a contemporary experience of, the world's oldest living cultures. Bangarra has nurtured the careers of hundreds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professional artists, including Dancers, Choreographers, Composers and Designers.

Since 1989, Bangarra has produced dozens of original works for its repertoire, collaborated on the creation of new productions with other Australian performing arts companies such as The Australian Ballet and the Sydney Theatre Company, and played an integral role in opening ceremonies of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games and the 2018 Commonwealth Games. In 2016, Bangarra created its first feature film, *SPEAR*.

Bangarra's Dancers and collaborating artists come from all over Australia, including the major groups in relation to location, for example: Torres Strait Islanders, Queensland (Murri), New South Wales (Koori), Victoria (Koorie), South Australia (Anangu and Nunga), Arnhem Land, Northern Territory (Yolngu), Coast and Midwest Western Australia (Yamatji), Southern Western Australia (Nyoongar), Central Western Australia (Wangai) and Tasmania (Palawah). Some of the Dancers are graduates of NAISDA Dance College (NSW), or Aboriginal College of Performing Arts (QLD), and others are graduates of dance courses delivered by universities around Australia.

# INTRODUCTION



Lake Eyre, SA, photo by Jake Nash

*Terrain* is an homage to Country, inspired by the power of natural forces and the vulnerability of ecosystems within a landscape that has existed and evolved over many millennia.

*Terrain* illustrates the fundamental connection between People and Land - how we treat our land, how we understand its spirit, and how we regard its future. *Terrain* presents the vastness and the diversity of a landscape like no other. It's about the power of natural forces and the vulnerability of ecosystems within a landscape that has existed and evolved as long as the Earth itself - a landscape from which human beings draw life and express meaning to that life. *Terrain* looks at the area of Australia known as Lake Eyre. Lake Eyre is a great salt lake of tectonic origin situated in the remote north west

of South Australia. As a closed inland drainage basin with an area of 1,140,000 km<sup>2</sup>, the Lake Eyre basin is one of the largest areas of internal drainage in the world. It has a vastness and diversity like no other landscape in the world. To the Aboriginal people of this land, it is known as Kati Thanda.

Kati Thanda is the home of the Arabunna people who have lived in the area for many thousands of years, maintaining a deep connection to the area through their cultural inheritance. In Kati Thanda, days are measured by the length of shadows, or when the afternoon clouds roll in; months are measured by the level of salt crust on the surface of the lake; and years are measured by the rise and fall of waters that sweep through ancient river systems, transforming the desert and bringing new life.

## THE ARABUNNA PEOPLE

The Arabunna people have existed and maintained deep connection with the Lake Eyre basin for thousands of years and recently won land rights for Lake Eyre and its surrounds. Their understanding of the landscape, and all the variances of its ever-changing behaviour enables the Arabunna to read the landscape, know its purpose, and be able to share with us; stories of how Kati Thanda survives and thrives through its very dramatic natural cycles of flood, drought, and everything in between. Even more importantly, this knowledge serves to maintain the cultural life and relationships between people and Country that have existed for tens of thousands of years.

*Terrain* is presented as nine interconnected sections or 'states of experiencing' the area known as Lake Eyre. The audience is guided through Lake Eyre's cultural and environmental relevance, as well as the Choreographer's thoughts about the concept of 'place' and the emotional experience that 'place' has for Aboriginal people.

For example:

- How Aboriginal people feel and acknowledge connection to 'place'.
- How we experience the emotion and the power of an untouched landscape.
- How we sense our responsibility to a landscape.
- How we hear and share the stories that emanate through the traditional Dreamings of the Arabunna people.



### RED BRICK

Looking beyond urbanscape to hear an ancestral calling to Country



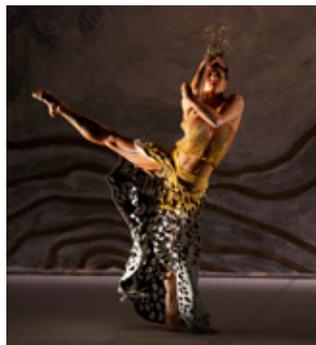
### SHIELDS

Reflecting on the struggle for Land Rights and Recognition that continues to affect Indigenous people today



### REBORN

Land is passed down through the lineage along with knowledge and customs.



### SPINIFEX

Inspired by the trees in and around Lake Eyre that resemble the gatherings of spirit women waiting, suspended in time



### SALT

Beyond the white salt vastness lies an abstract landscape that resonates an ancient power



### SCAR

The impact of man's actions scar and disrupt the delicate balance between man and environment



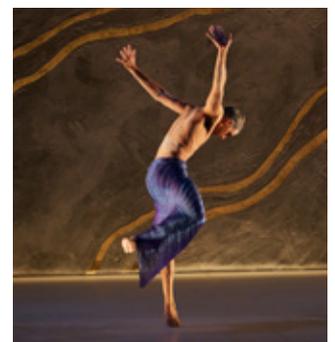
### LANDFORM

Through each evolution, the land regenerates and heals, awakening the cultural ties that connect people to place.



### REFLECT

Traversing the horizon to glimpse the sacred realm where earth and sky meet



### DELUGE

Waters begin their journey towards Lake Eyre bringing with it transformation and ensuring the life cycle continues.

# CREATING *TERRAIN*

Storytelling through dance theatre is one of the most powerful means to communicate cultural, social and political issues. Dance is a visceral and effective way to give a story life, and storytelling is the mainframe of cultural life for Indigenous Australians. Navigating the pathways of the creative process through consultation, being on Country, spending time with Elders and traditional custodians, and absorbing the stories and the environment, are all part of a long and considered process.

## THE COMMISSIONING PROCESS

Over the three decades of Bangarra Dance Theatre's existence, numerous senior artists in the company have been commissioned to create new works for the repertoire, as part of Bangarra's commitment to professional development of the artists and to nurture future generations of storytellers. Frances Rings is one of these artists, and over the course of her career has been commissioned several works for Bangarra.

## RESEARCH AND PREPARATION

Prior to working with the Dancers in the studio, Frances Rings (Choreographer), Jacob Nash (Set Designer) and David Page (Composer) travelled to Lake Eyre to spend time on Country. Here they were introduced to Arabunna Elder Uncle Reginald Dodd, who led the artists onto his Country and shared his knowledge about the land, the resources, and why it is so important to preserve the Lake Region for future generations. The artists experienced the landforms, the colours, the air, the animal life – but most importantly the spiritual presence of ancestors, and the stories that embed the land

with story and cultural meaning. As cultural consultant for *Terrain*, Uncle Reginald is vitally important to the whole development and presentation of the work. He guides and supports the artists, making sure their interpretations reflect his own sense of responsibility to Country.

Frances Rings on the shore of Lake Eyre in 2012, photo by Jake Nash



## IN RINGS' WORDS

*Being with Uncle Reg on his Country and hearing his stories made me think deeply about Indigenous people like myself who live in urban areas and our relationship to Country. I realised that although the location may be different, the connection is the same. We have a profoundly visceral understanding of Country that goes beyond brick walls, concrete and an urbanised lifestyle.*

*The journey of discovery and the creative process involved in the making of Terrain are closely linked, not in a literal sense, but more in the way of emotional responses and processing of ideas.*

## THE CHOREOGRAPHIC PROCESS

Once the initial period of research and discussion is well developed, the Choreographer will start to work with the Dancers and together they will explore the movement language that will tell the story in a way that is evocative and captivating. The whole Creative

Team (Choreographer, Composer, Designers, Dancers) collaborates closely during the entire creative process to enable the dance to reflect the overall focus of the Choreographer's ideas.

As the choreography starts to take shape and order, the Choreographer works with the Rehearsal Director and Dancers to refine the more nuanced elements of the choreography. Getting the right dynamic into a movement, perfecting the technical aspects, building the relationships between the performers – all of these aspects need to be worked on and consolidated.

The music and design elements need to be in sync with the development of the choreography. As all the creative processes come together the Director/Choreographer has to hold onto the essence of the story, the concepts they want to illustrate and communicate, and the way they wish to do this.

## DANCE TECHNIQUE AND PERFORMANCE SKILLS

Using their dance technique, the Dancers work collaboratively to blend and refine the movements to provide clarity, texture and consistency in execution before settling on a final version of the choreography. The Dancers and Choreographers use all the elements of dance at their disposal, not necessarily in a conscious way but as part of the lexicon they know and the new movement language that they create. The Rehearsal Director is present throughout this process in order to be able to guide the Dancers in the rehearsal process, so that the key qualities and details of the choreography, as set by the Choreographer, are retained and remembered as they

progress from section to section. When the production moves closer to its premiere date, the Rehearsal Director will work with the Dancers to make sure the Dancers will perform the work to the highest standard possible. Also during this stage, the technical elements of the costume, set and lighting design start to be incorporated.

## THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

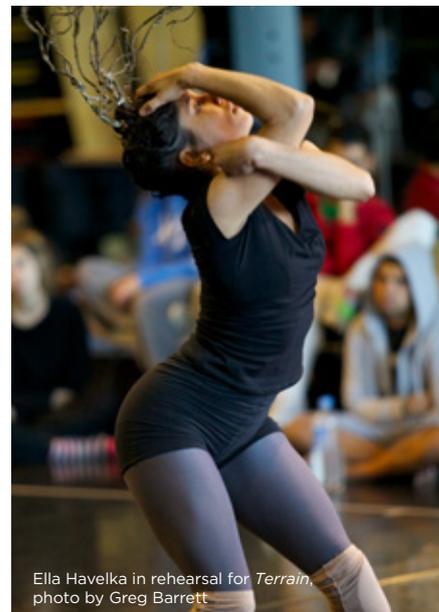
In the week of the premiere, the Dancers, Rehearsal Director, Creative Team and Production Crew move from Bangarra's studios to the theatre where they spend a day or two rigging the set, positioning and programming the lighting, checking the sound levels, and making necessary adjustments to the choreography to fit the space of the stage. This is called the 'bump-in' and the Production Crew is largely responsible for coordinating this stage of the process. Until the night of the premiere, no one has actually seen the finished production. This can be quite stressful but is also extremely exciting.

## EXTENDING THE LIFE OF A DANCE THEATRE WORK

During the lengthy process of creating a new Bangarra production, ideas will change and surprising shifts in the original plans will occur. This is not unusual and probably one of the most exciting things about making a new work. Importantly, the things that do not change are the traditional elements - cultural information must always remain respected and intact. As the dance is performed over time, these stories are passed down from one Dancer to another as new Dancers are taught the choreography, and perform the roles.



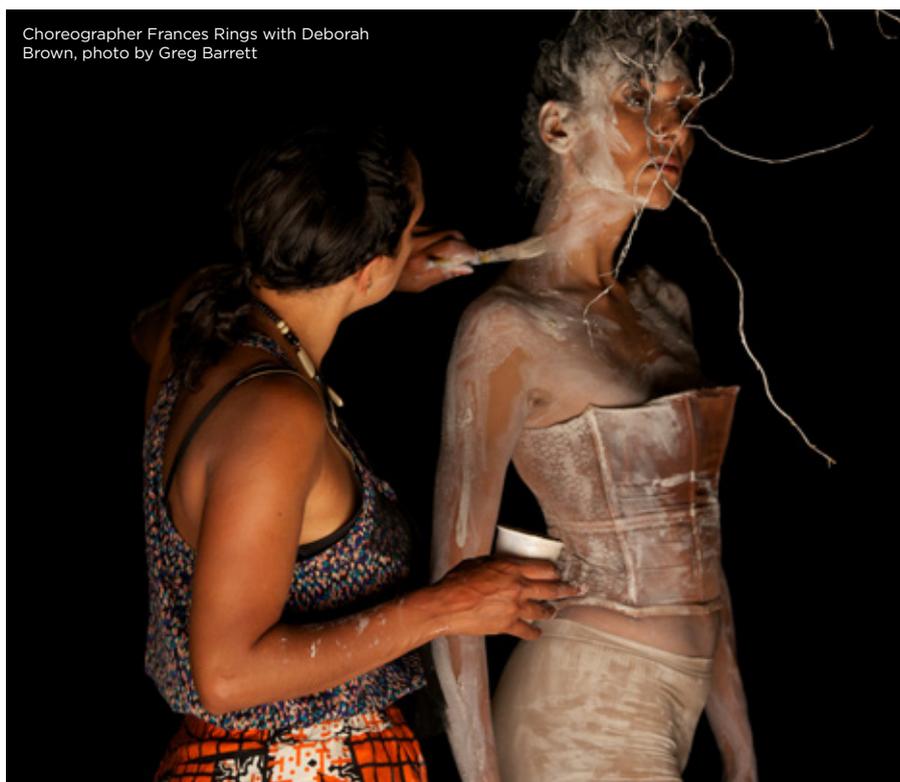
Tara Gower in rehearsal for *Terrain*, photo by Greg Barrett



Ella Havelka in rehearsal for *Terrain*, photo by Greg Barrett



Sets in progress, photo by Jake Nash



Choreographer Frances Rings with Deborah Brown, photo by Greg Barrett

# THE CREATIVE TEAM

## CULTURAL CONSULTANT: UNCLE REGINALD DODD

Uncle Reginald (Reg) Dodd is an Arabunna Elder who was born on Finnis Springs Mission at the southern end of Lake Eyre. After some early years working as a stockman, followed by several decades working on the railways, Uncle Reg has been running tours through the Lake Eyre region. Uncle Reg is also active on the Marree Progress Committee Inc.

Bangarra thanks Uncle Reg for his guidance and generosity in sharing his knowledge of his Country with the Creative Team. *Terrain* is Bangarra's gift back to the Arabunna community. In 2016, Bangarra took the work back to Lake Eyre and the Arabunna community with performances in Marree, South Australia.

## CHOREOGRAPHER: FRANCES RINGS

Adelaide-born Frances Rings is a descendant of the Kokatha Tribe and is also of German descent. Frances joined Bangarra Dance Theatre in 1993 after graduating from NAISDA Dance College.

*Terrain* was Frances' first full-length work for the company, following the success of six other works – *Artefact* (2010), *X300* (2007), *Unaipon* (2004), *Bush* (co-choreographed with Stephen Page, 2003) and *Rations* (as part of *Walkabout* 2002).

Frances choreographed *Sheoak* as part of *Lore* in 2015, and was appointed to the position of Associate Artistic Director in 2019.

## ON TERRAIN

"I believe Country reveals to us the natural laws that govern our existence and that as people, no matter what our background, we all have an innate longing to sink our feet into the sand, for our hands to splash water and to connect with the natural world."

## COMPOSER: DAVID PAGE

David Page was a descendant of the Nunukul people and the Munaldjali clan of the Yugambah tribe from southeast Queensland. David was born in Brisbane and studied saxophone, voice, composition, and song at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (CASM) at Adelaide University. David has composed music for many of Bangarra's major works: *Praying Mantis Dreaming* (1992), *Ochres* (1995), *Ninni* (1996), *Fish* (1997), *Skin* (2000), *Corroboree* (2001), *Bush* (2003), *Unaipon/Clan* (2004), *Boomerang* (2005), *X300* (2007), *Mathinna* (2008), *of earth and sky* (2010), *Belong* (2011), *Warramuk - in the dark night* (2012), *Terrain* (2012), *Blak* (2013), *Dance Clan 3* (2013), *Patyegarang* (2014), and *Lore* (2015). David was also an actor and the recipient of many awards including 4 Deadlys and the inaugural Sidney Myer Indigenous Artist Award in 2000.

## ON TERRAIN

"Lake Eyre is a place of heritage, mystery, threat and natural beauty and has given me, and the Creative Team the opportunity to explore the vastness of spirit, colour and sound."

**SET DESIGNER:  
JAKE NASH**

Jake is a Murri man who grew up in Brisbane. He graduated from the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) Design Course in 2005, and is Head of Design at Bangarra.

**ON TERRAIN**

“The challenge as the set designer of *Terrain* was to create a design that was not obvious, almost unknown; to create a language that was truthful to the place and the stories that Frances was telling. We wanted to achieve a ‘world’ that is always alive like the lake itself – always within a cycle that will never stop, it is an everlasting continuum.”

**COSTUME DESIGNER:  
JENNIFER IRWIN**

Jennifer Irwin has designed and constructed costumes for drama, opera, film, and in particular for dance and ballet. She has worked with Bangarra since its inception.

**ON TERRAIN**

“Being inspired by so many beautiful images of Lake Eyre I was captured by its surrealism and vastness. I focused on the textural elements of the materials I was working with, abstracting the narrative – the continual changing of the landscape; the cracked salt lake and earth that has avoided human influence.”

**LIGHTING DESIGNER:  
KAREN NORRIS**

Karen Norris has worked extensively as a lighting designer for dance, theatre and music in Australia and Europe. Her lighting designs for Bangarra include *Skin* (2000), *Terrain* (2012) and *Lore* (2015).

**ON TERRAIN**

“On a site visit to Lake Eyre, I was confronted by a vast, immense landscape – places in the middle of nowhere – this pink encrusted jewel: Lake Eyre. Apart from being awesomely emotive in its history – present and past – it was bathed in this undulating, fragmented light.”

# FURTHER READING



Dodd, Reginald.  
**'Arabunna Tours'**  
<http://www.arabunnatours.com.au>

Austin, Luke; Hoelen, Paul; Palacios, Ignacio; & Williams, Adam.  
**'20 Stunning Aerial Photos of Lake Eyre'**, Australian Geographic  
<https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/science-environment/2016/08/20-stunning-aerial-photos-of-lake-eyre/>

Austin, Luke; Hoelen, Paul; Palacios, Ignacio; & Williams, Adam.  
**'Aerial view: the pink hues of Lake Eyre'**, Australian Geographic  
<https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/science-environment/2017/06/aerial-view-the-pink-hues-of-lake-eyre/>

Sheldon, Fran & Kingsford, Richard.  
**'Unknown wonders: Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre'**,  
The Conversation  
<https://theconversation.com/unknown-wonders-kati-thanda-lake-eyre-13523>



Lockyer, Paul.  
**'Lake Eyre: A journey through the heart of the continent'**,  
HarperCollins Publishers,  
Sydney, 2012.



Angus, Michael.  
**'Salt'**,  
Jerrycan Films, 2009.

Bangarra Dance Theatre.  
**'Terrain Playlist'**,  
YouTube.  
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL946F6294A987D0DC>

Lockyer, Paul.  
**'Lake Eyre: a 90 retrospective of Lake Eyre, Australia's outback wonder and Return to Lake Eyre'**,  
ABC DVD, 2012.

**Terrain** is available for purchase on DVD <https://my.bangarra.com.au/dvd/terrain>, as well as via digital streaming on Clickview <https://www.clickview.com.au/curriculum-libraries/video-details/?id=3713730&cat=3708520&library=secondary> and Kanopy <https://www.kanopy.com/product/terrain>.



# bangarra

DANCE THEATRE

**BANGARRA DANCE  
THEATRE AUSTRALIA**

ABN 96 003 814 006

Tower Three, International Towers  
300 Barangaroo Avenue  
Barangaroo NSW 2000

Phone +61 2 9251 5333

Email [education@bangarra.com.au](mailto:education@bangarra.com.au)



@bangarradancetheatre #bangarra



/bangarra



@bangarradance



/bangarradancetheatre

