



A Chinese artist in Aboriginal Australia

27½ minute documentary

Nirvana Films Pty Ltd

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## SYNOPSIS (SHORT)

**Ochre and Ink** tells the extraordinary story of artist Zhou Xiaoping and his inspiring 23 year collaboration with Aboriginal artists in outback Australia.



## SYNOPSIS (LONG)

**Ochre and Ink** tells the extraordinary story of artist Zhou Xiaoping and his inspiring 23 year collaboration with Aboriginal artists in outback Australia.

Trained as a traditional Chinese brush painter in Anhui Province, Xiaoping arrived in Australia in 1988 knowing almost nothing about the country. On a whim, he traveled to the heart of the outback, where he was surprised to see Aboriginal people for the first time. He became fascinated by their art and culture, and they welcomed him into their communities where the artists showed him their techniques of painting with ochre on bark.

Now Xiaoping is visiting the famous artist Johnny Bulunbulun and his family, working on paintings for a major exhibition to be held in Beijing, on the theme of the 300 year trade in Trepang (sea cucumber) from the Aboriginal people of northern Australia via Macassan traders to China.

Johnny is keen to travel to China for the exhibition; but tragically, he dies before he can make the journey. Instead, Johnny's wife and son attend the exhibition opening at the imposing Capital Museum in Beijing and perform an emotional ceremony in his honour.

Later Xiaoping shows his Aboriginal friends some of the fascinating sights of Beijing.

## EPG PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The fascinating story of Chinese-Australian artist Zhou Xiaoping and his inspiring but sometimes controversial 23 year collaboration with Aboriginal artists in remote Arnhem Land, culminating in an extraordinary exhibition in Beijing.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION & 'MAKING OF' NOTES**

### **A meeting of old friends.**

The **Ochre and Ink** project originated at a meeting of old friends who hadn't seen each other for over 30 years.

James Bradley and John Fitzgerald had been good friends at school and university, and when they met at lunch with a few other old mates in 2008, they had a lot of catching up to do. While James had become a well-known film editor specialising in documentaries on Australian Indigenous stories, John had studied Chinese language, culture and history and was now Professor of Asian Studies at La Trobe University in Melbourne.

After a few beers, John reckoned he had a great story for a documentary. He knew an artist named Zhou Xiaoping who had come to Australia in 1988, become fascinated with Aboriginal people and culture and, although he now lived in Melbourne, spent months every year working with Aboriginal artists in Arnhem Land. James immediately saw the potential in this story, and arranged to meet Xiaoping at his studio in Melbourne. John Fitzgerald had been right - Xiaoping was a fascinating character, and his art was an amazing fusion of Chinese tradition with Aboriginal influence and subject matter. James shot some test footage with Xiaoping, and on a handshake they agreed to collaborate on a documentary about this unique story.

### **Bogged at Boucaut Bay.**

During the first shoot in Arnhem Land, Producer/Director James Bradley and Cinematographer Murray Lui drove Johnny, Laurie and six other people from Wurdeja outstation to the remote beach at Boucaut Bay to film a fishing scene. Their 4WD vehicle got bogged in the sand, then the clutch burnt out, so they were well and truly stuck.

Everyone was keen to catch some fish, so James and Murray left the vehicle where it was bogged and filmed Johnny, Laurie and Xiaoping and some kids catching and cooking fish. Then Xiaoping showed Johnny photographs of their collaborative paintings that he had recently finished in Melbourne. Eventually, Johnny decided to use the crew's sat-phone to call Jacob back at the community and ask him to come and tow the 4WD off the beach, as the tide was coming in.

A few hours later, Jacob arrived, and everyone got involved in a major operation that involved digging a track through the sand, covering it with some stray sheets of

roofing iron and branches cut from shrubs, and as night fell, slowly towing the vehicle back to the community.

It took another 4 days for a new clutch to be flown from Darwin, and for a trailer to be sent out to Wurdeja to carry the broken-down vehicle back to the Maningrida workshop.

### **The Funeral.**

James Bradley and Murray Lui traveled with Zhou Xiaoping to the community of Wulkabimirri near Ramingining for the very sad occasion of Johnny Bulunbulun's funeral. Johnny's family gave permission for filming straight away, but several days passed and it seemed that the funeral was going to be postponed for weeks.

Then they were asked to meet with the traditional owner Jimmy to explain everything again and ask his permission for filming. It seemed that some of the old men were worried that ceremonial leaders from other communities might not approve of filming the coffin or the ceremonial procession. The men decided to discuss it further that night and give their decision to James, Murray and Xiaoping in the morning.

Next morning one of the men came to James and told him that Jimmy had a dream that night in which the deceased came to him and said: 'Why are you stopping them from filming my funeral? I am a famous artist and my funeral should be seen around the world'. After that, the ceremony went ahead and the crucial scenes were filmed.

### **The Great Wall.**

After walking up the Great Wall near Beijing, Paul Pascoe and Dr Joe Gumbula saw some Chinese children being photographed in old costumes rented out from a nearby stall. Deciding to join in, Paul and Joe asked Associate Producer/Translator Cathy Li to help hire some costumes for them.

Soon Dr Joe was dressed as an emperor and Paul as a warrior, and a crowd of Chinese tourists was forming around them, clamoring to be photographed with these amazing-looking Aboriginal men. Dr Joe really got into character and started lecturing Paul in Yolngu language about the roles of warriors and emperors in Chinese history.



## The Yellow Mountains

A few days after the Exhibition opening in Beijing, Producer/Director James Bradley and Associate Producer/Translator Cathy Li flew with Zhou Xiaoping to his home town Hefei in Anhui Province. Then they traveled by taxi, bus and cable car to Red Cloud Peak in the famously misty Yellow Mountains.

After staying the night in the atmospheric but run-down Beihai Hotel, they set off early to walk across the mountains, filming Xiaoping in the landscape as they went. They couldn't see much in the thick mist that enveloped everything, and soon found themselves descending and ascending thousands of stone stairs across the jagged peaks. James was finding it hard, slow work climbing with a small backpack and the camera gear, until a young Chinese man offered to carry the camera, and quickly took on the role of camera assistant, while his girlfriend chatted happily to Cathy about her scientific studies.

By lunchtime they'd all reached the Jade Screen Scenic area and enjoyed a hot meal together, sheltering from the bitter wind in a small restaurant. They took another cable car down to the town in the valley, but returned next morning to find a beautiful clear and sunny day above the clouds.

So they were able to film the best of both misty and clear weather in the mystical Yellow Mountains for the opening and closing scenes of **Ochre and Ink**.



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

**Ochre and Ink** tells a moving story of cross-cultural friendship and artistic collaboration with elements of humour, controversy, and tragedy. We see Zhou Xiaoping develop from an enthusiastic but naive young man into an engaging and passionate character who has established genuine friendships with many Aboriginal people.

Xiaoping's art practice incorporates an inventive fusion of traditional Chinese techniques including painting with black ink on rice paper, designs on blue and white glazed porcelain, and watercolour landscapes. Combining a sensitive interpretation of Aboriginal subjects and culture with his great enthusiasm for collaboration with masterful Aboriginal artists, Xiaoping's work breaks exciting new ground in the field of cross-cultural art, bringing together two ancient cultures in a fresh and quite profound way.

**Ochre and Ink** raises some rarely discussed themes around cross-cultural art practices, including issues of cultural appropriation and the role of sometimes paternalistic arts administration bureaucracies. In commenting on the story of the 'Kangaroo Plate' painting, Marcia Langton expresses her strong opinion that some 'white advisors' are 'a new form of patrol officer'. The other side of the argument is not presented, but it is hoped that Marcia's comments will provoke thought and discussion around this thorny issue.

**Ochre and Ink** is an inspiring story of artistic endeavour that will promote greater appreciation of the power of art to foster cross-cultural understanding, particularly within Australia and China.



## BIOGRAPHIES – TALENT

**Zhou Xiaoping** is a Chinese born and educated Melbourne-based artist. Since arriving in Australia in 1988, he has spent many years living in Aboriginal communities in Arnhem Land and the Kimberley. In 1992 Xiaoping was employed as Artist In Residence at the Maningrida Community School in Arnhem Land. In 1996 his collaboration with the late Jimmy Pike resulted in the first exhibition of Aboriginal art work in China at Jiu Lu Mi Art Museum in Hefei. In January 1999 these two artists had another joint exhibition at the National Gallery of China, Beijing. In 2011 Xiaoping was the principal artist in the exhibition titled: “Trepang, China & the Story of Macassan – Aboriginal Trade” both at the Capital Museum in Beijing and the Melbourne Museum in Australia. This important exhibition includes both his own artwork and collaborative paintings with the late Aboriginal artist Johnny Bulunbulun. Since 1988 Xiaoping has had 36 solo exhibitions all over the world and published two books in China about his experiences living and working in Aboriginal communities. Xiaoping has received Government funding in support of his art projects, including grants from the Australia-China Council and Arts Victoria. He has also worked as Artist In Residence at the Bendigo Golden Dragon Museum and many schools.

**Johnny Bulunbulun** (JBB) was born just after the Second World War near the Arafura Swamp of Central Arnhem Land. JBB was a senior member of the Ganalbingu group and one of the most important singers and ceremonial men in north-central Arnhem Land. Although from the Arafura Swamp he moved west to Gamededi outstation on the Blyth River when he married Nelly [deceased], the sister of painter Jack Wununwun [deceased]. A steady though not prolific painter he began to make his mark in the late 1970's when the Aboriginal art market expanded and the Art & Craft Centre artists cooperative at Maningrida began to be noticed. In 1981 his importance was recognised by a one artist show at the Hogarth Gallery in Sydney. In 1986 he attended the South Pacific Arts Festival in Tahiti. His major composition was often the totem of Gumang, the magpie goose and Guwaynang, the long necked turtle focused around a central sacred waterhole. The Guwaynang is an important creature in Ganalbingu cosmology and was Bulunbulun's personal totem. JBB passed away in May 2010.



## BIOGRAPHIES - CREW

### KEY CREW

Writer/Director	James Bradley
Producers	Rachel Clements & James Bradley
Director of Photography	Murray Lui
Sound Recordist	David Tranter
Editor	Karen Johnson
Sound Designer	Liam Egan
Screen Composer	Caitlin Yeo

### **JAMES BRADLEY** – Producer Writer Director

James Bradley ASE studied filmmaking in the late 1970s at the Tasmanian School Of Art under the inspirational Surrealist painter and filmmaker Dusan Marek.

After making several grant-funded dramas, he began his career as an editor on TV series, music videos, corporate films, documentaries and short dramas.

James shared the 1994 AFI Best Documentary award for **50 Years of Silence** and in 1998 was nominated for the AFI Editing award for the feature film **Radiance**.

James has edited numerous award-winning documentaries, many on Indigenous subjects, including **5 Seasons, Mr Patterns, Dhakiyarr vs The King, In My Fathers Country**, and **art + soul**.

In 2005, James won the AFI Award for Best Non-Feature Editing for **Mr Patterns** and was awarded Australian Screen Editors Guild accreditation.

In 2007, James produced Sonja Dare's wry mockumentary **Destiny In Alice**.

Recently, through his Production Company Nirvana Films, James has been developing several Documentary projects including **Ochre and Ink**.

### **RACHEL CLEMENTS** – Producer

Rachel Clements completed a BA and Post-Graduate Diploma in Business at QUT in Brisbane, then moved to London where she worked for Miramax Films and MTV Europe. She returned to Australia to attend the AFTRS and graduated in 2001 with a Master of Arts in Producing; she was the recipient of the inaugural FFC Creative Producer Award. Short drama films produced by Rachel, including **Joy** by Cate Shortland and **Into the Night**, directed by Tony Krawitz, won many awards.

From 2004 to 2009, Rachel worked at CAAMA, Australia's largest Indigenous multimedia organisation, undertaking a producer/production manager role for 2 years and the executive producer role for 3 years. Rachel was Executive Producer at CAAMA during the development and production of Warwick Thornton's **Samson and**

**Delilah.** She produced award-winning shows including children's drama series **Double Trouble** (Channel 9 and Disney), and numerous television documentaries broadcast in traditional Indigenous languages.

Rachel has produced or executive produced 25 documentary films, 15 short drama films, a children's television drama series, and over 30 hours of television for NITV. She has attended markets and festivals with her projects including Cannes, Sundance and MIPCOM. Her films have won awards at festivals including Chicago, Aspen, San Francisco, Houston, Mill Valley and St Tropez, at national awards including AFI, AWGIES, Melbourne and Flickerfest. Film and television projects have been sold to international broadcasters including Channel 4 UK, SVT Sweden, Raisat Italy, and Israel Educational TV.

Rachel is currently developing dramas and documentary projects.

### **MURRAY LUI** – Cinematographer

Murray was born in the small community of Thursday Island in the Torres Strait. His interest in stills photography and video cameras as a teenager became a full time passion and profession and 'Muz' is now recognised as being the first Torres Strait Islander professional film and television cinematographer.

In 1994 he was selected as a part of Lester Bostock's Indigenous TV Training Course, which was based at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School.

In 1998 Murray was accepted into the mainstream AFTRS Cinematography course. He achieved his MA in Drama Cinematography, graduating in 2000. He has worked as a camera operator on the mini series **(RAN) Remote Area Nurse** and **The Circuit**, and as 2nd unit DOP for the feature films **Footy Legends** and **Prime Mover**. He was DOP on Dena Curtis's powerful short drama **Jacob**, Warwick Thornton's **Green Bush**, and Wayne Blair's **The Djarn Djarns**. Murray has been DOP on feature films including **Orange Love Story** and **The Finished People**, and has been DOP on many documentaries, including **Footy: the La Perouse Way**, and **The Good Fight**.

### **DAVID TRANTER** – Sound Recordist

Based in Alice Springs, David Tranter is Australia's leading Aboriginal sound recordist. With a career spanning more than 20 years, he has recorded sound all over Australia, in cities and the remotest areas, in New York, Paris and Beijing. David's work includes feature drama films (**Samson and Delilah** and **Here I Am**), television drama series (**The Alice** and **Double Trouble**), short drama films (**Green Bush**, **Nana**, **Plains Empty** and **Jacob**), and over 200 documentaries (recent work includes **Songlines to the Seine**, **Running for New York**, **Spirit Stones**, **My Brother Vinnie**, **art + soul** and **First Australians**). He won an AFI Award and an Australian Screen Sound Award in 2009 for his work on **Samson and Delilah**, and was also nominated for an IF Award.

David began directing documentaries in 2004. He directed **Willaberta Jack** in 2006 for the ABC, and has made 4 **Nganampa Anwernekenhe** documentaries for Imparja Television and ABC. His film **Karli Jalungu: Boomerang Today** was screened at Sydney Film Festival and ImagiNative in Canada.

### **KAREN JOHNSON** – Editor

Karen Johnson is a highly experienced drama and documentary editor, she has worked on over 50 productions and been nominated for two IF awards in recognition for her work on Ivan Sen's **Beneath Clouds** and Rachel Perkin's **One Night The Moon**. Recently, her body of work has included feature film **Griff the Invisible** and documentary **The Long Goodbye**, both released in 2011.

### **CAITLIN YEO** – Screen Composer

Caitlin Yeo is a unique and versatile film composer. Since graduating from a Graduate Diploma of Screen Composition at AFTRS in 2003, Caitlin has scored 4 feature films, including **All My Friends are Leaving Brisbane, Black and White and Sex and Jucy**, which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival to sell-out audiences. She has also scored 20 TV documentaries including **My America, Footy Chicks** and **The Matilda Candidate**, 2 documentary series, and many short films.

In 2007, Caitlin won an APRA-AGSC Screen Music Award (Best Music for a Documentary) for her highly original score for **Bomb Harvest**, about an Australian bomb disposal expert in Laos. Caitlin was nominated again in 2008 for the same award, for the documentary **The Last Trimate**, and for a third time in 2010 for her score for **The Long Goodbye**. In 2011, Caitlin won the APRA professional development award, which included a trip to Los Angeles to attend the ASCAP Film and TV Scoring Workshop to study scoring techniques with Hollywood composers.

Caitlin has a diverse musical background, having performed in rock bands, orchestras, gypsy bands and gamelan groups. She is an accomplished accordionist, flautist and pianist, and spent her time during her bachelor degree at Sydney University focusing on 20<sup>th</sup> century composition and ethnomusicology.



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## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### MACASSAN TREPANGERS

It has been estimated that Macassans were visiting the north coast of Australia from, at least, the 1660's. Macassans sailed from the island of Sulawesi in Indonesia to catch and process trepang, otherwise known as sea cucumber. They then traded the trepang to China, who considered them delicacies and aphrodisiacs. Trepang was Australia's first export to China.

Extensive trade within the South-East Asian waterways had been happening for over a thousand years before the trepangers arrived in Australia, and while the Chinese traders largely dominated the water, the Macassan trepangers sailed their small, dangerous boats south, often annually at the beginning of the monsoon or wet season (December, January), and returned home mid-year, to trade the trepang in Indonesian and Chinese ports. Trepang boats have been documented from North-East Arnhem Land to the Kimberley coast.

The Macassans faced violent confrontations with some Aboriginal people, but formed strong friendships with other communities and families, many in the North-East of Arnhem Land. The visitors were given permission to set up camps and trepang processing centres for long stretches of time and were often vast in numbers. It has been documented that some Macassan boats had crews of up to 60 people, and it has been established that 34 boats containing 1056 people visited Croker Island in 1829.

The Macassans traded items with the Aboriginal people, including cloth, rice, iron pots and tools, knives, opium and alcohol. In return, Aboriginal people allowed them to harvest on their lands, often working side by side with the Macassans, as shown by old photos, paintings and etchings, as they split, cooked, dried and smoked the trepang. For almost 200 years, these two groups of people forged strong alliances through trade, marriage and friendship. It is believed that some Aboriginal people travelled back to Indonesia with the trepangers in their small boats. There are people of Aboriginal ancestry living in Indonesia today. While much of this travel was adventurous and exploratory, there are stories of Yolngu women being forced into marriage and also of the kidnapping of women by trepangers.

It is believed that the Macassans were the first outside visitors to the Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land, and their historical visits have left many imprints on Yolngu culture that continue today. Clan flags in different colours are a symbolic link to the past relationships and these cross over into culture, for example the red flag dance and the yellow flag song. Archaeological evidence of the Macassan presence in Yolngu lands, such as wells and buildings, are prevalent today. The trepangers planted crops including the tamarind tree, which is now spread all over the Top End. The Macassan word "ruppiya", derived from the Malay "rupiah" and meaning 'loan', is used by Yolngu today as the term for 'money'. Among other things, this suggests that the concept of money was introduced to Arnhem Land prior to white settlement, and well before Aboriginal people were allowed to earn it themselves.

Matthew Flinders was the first British explorer to encounter Macassans on the coast of Arnhem Land, during his circumnavigation of Australia in 1803. His journal notes that he met a fleet of 60 trepanger boats with total crews of about 1000 men. He documented his discussions with the Macassan fleet captain, Pobassoo, who spoke of violent conflicts with Aboriginal people, including getting speared in the knee himself. Flinders honoured this meeting by naming that stretch of water 'Malay Road' and called the island that had sheltered the trepangers "Pobassoo's Island".

From 1824, the British established forts throughout the Arnhem Land coast, including on Melville and Croker Islands and the Coburg Peninsula, with the view to engage with the trepang trade and to develop trading ports within the South-East Asian waters. The British settlements were abandoned by 1850.

In 1884, the South Australian government, who were presiding over what would become the Northern Territory, introduced taxes against the Macassan trepangers. And finally, in 1906, the South Australian government prohibited the Macassans from trading the trepang from northern Australia. It is believed that Using Daeng was the last Macassan sea captain to travel to visit Australia, returning to his Indonesian home in 1907.

Even now, over 100 years since the last Macassan trepanger visit, the Yolngu people of Arnhem Land remember their friends through songs, ceremonial dances, oral history and paintings. The relationship between the two cultures, as evidence shows, was largely one of equality and respect, and not domination.

The history between Aboriginal people of the coastal north of Australia and the Macassans contradicts the widely held view that Aboriginal people and their culture before white settlement was isolated and static. They were engaged in international trade, and the inclusion of Macassan references in cultural activities shows that Aboriginal people were, in fact, adaptable to change.

Johnny Bulunbulun's ancestors were among those who formed friendships with the trepangers and this old relationship has many resonances within the family history.

## **CHINESE ART – INK ON PAPER**

Zhou Xiaoping was trained in traditional Chinese painting by a Master in his hometown of Hefei. This study took him many years.

Chinese painting as an artform began around 4000BC, and it has continued to develop for the last 6000 years. After Buddhism was introduced from India in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, Chinese painting moved from being used on other crafts such as pottery and carved jade, and moved towards religious murals and figures. From about 1000AD, paintings of historical characters and everyday stories became popular.

Landscape painting as a genre was established by the 4<sup>th</sup> century, with two separate styles: "blue-and-green" and "ink-and-wash". The ink-and-wash, as practiced by Xiaoping, relies on skilful brushwork and changing degrees of concentration of ink.

The Chinese brush is an important factor to the distinctive style of traditional Chinese painting. It has a very fine tip, allowing detailed use. The instruments used for calligraphy and painting are, in essence, the same, so developments in the art of calligraphy can be transferred to painting. Brush techniques demonstrated in Chinese painting include line drawings, shade, texture and dotting.

Ink has been used in Chinese painting and calligraphy for more than 2000 years. Ink is ground on a painter's stone and mixed with water, creating ink of various shades and density. It is possible to use this method to produce works balancing light and darkness, and to create feeling in a subject.

Chinese paper, when it was first produced around 100AD, was made from materials including pulp, bark and fishing nets. Today, there are various textures and qualities of Chinese paper, often called 'rice paper' by westerners. The paper is very absorbent and its texture will dictate the spread of ink, i.e. whether the ink will sink into the paper or if it will gloss across the outside. The painter will often lay the paper down on the floor to paint on it, and a traditional glue is used to stick the paper onto canvas or other mounting material.

There are elements in composition of traditional Chinese art that surprise a western audience. Painters have complete freedom to omit backgrounds to place prominence on foreground objects. Leaving 'blanks' is common and these white areas are considered genuine parts of the paintings. Sometimes the painter will write words in the empty places.



## INDIGENOUS CULTURAL PROTOCOL

**Ochre and Ink** is the story of the collaboration between Zhou Xiaoping and Johnny Bulunbulun (JBB), an Aboriginal artist from the Maningrida area in north-east Arnhem Land.

Tragically, JBB passed away in May 2010. JBB's wife Laurie, son Paul and brother Peter have signed release forms supporting the ongoing inclusion of JBB in our documentary.

We have been granted permission to use JBB's image and art in **Ochre and Ink**, and for promotion and publicity use. We have similar permission forms from the Wulkabimirri and Wurdeja communities for JBB's funeral, traditional songs and ceremonial dances used in the film.

All Indigenous IP rights in the paintings shown in the film remain with JBB's family or the other artists involved. All representation of Indigenous people, art, culture and places remain in the control of the appropriate Indigenous people and can not be used for any other purpose outside of **Ochre and Ink** without permission from the appropriate people. This includes any interpretations of traditional art or culture discussed in the film, and translations.



## CREDIT LINES

### Credit Line for Production

Produced in association with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and National Indigenous Television, Financed in association with Screen NSW, Produced with the assistance of the Northern Territory Film Office, and Developed and Financed with the assistance of Screen Australia. Featuring Zhou Xiaoping and the late Johnny Bulunbulun, Writer/Director James Bradley, Producers Rachel Clements & James Bradley, Director of Photography Murray Lui, Sound Recordist David Tranter, Editor Karen Johnson, Sound Designer Liam Egan, Composer Caitlin Yeo. © Yellow Mountain Films and Nirvana Films.

### Credit Line for Publicity

Featuring Zhou Xiaoping and the late Johnny Bulunbulun, Writer/Director/Producer James Bradley, Producer Rachel Clements, Director of Photography Murray Lui, Sound Recordist David Tranter, Editor Karen Johnson, Sound Designer Liam Egan, Composer Caitlin Yeo.



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