

Focus on; Kalumburu Photography Project



*(L to R) Freedom Garvey teaching Tarisha Mouda and Maria Fredericks © Clare Wood 2017
Group photo of Maria Fredericks, Ana Bundamurra, Caitlyn Djanghara, Esther Waina and Maria Maraltadj at Kalumburu Mission © Freedom Garvey 2017
Zerika Clement and Justina Clement reviewing photos. © Clare Wood 2017*

In the last edition of the DRS Newsletter we interviewed Broome based photographer Michael Jalaru Torres about his thoughts on photography and its versatility as an art form. Firmly believing the medium to be an important platform to communicate culture, he said ‘I think we can use it to capture a broad range of stories, capturing our people on country... I think if we can capture images it gives a lot more range for people to record.’ Sharing this same spirit of cultural pride and enthusiasm for new photographic possibilities a group of women in the far northern Kimberley community of Kalumburu have begun their own photography project born of aspirations to develop their own micro-enterprise.

The Kalumburu Tramulla Strong Women’s group is a volunteer group who proactively seek to empower the community through knowledge, and economic and social change. This group of women are widely regarded as strong in principle and culture. Meeting regularly to talk about social concerns impacting their community, the group is always on the lookout for ways to implement local action for young people to have meaningful engagement. The group gets involved with suicide prevention, creating opportunities for learning, pathways to employment and the revival of traditional knowledge and culture.

The group reached out to Clare Wood, inviting her to talk with the women about their enterprise ideas and ambitions. Wood, a trusted figure, having previously worked in Kalumburu for some time on mental health projects, brought with her experience in enterprise development work around cultural tourism and arts. Wood then got Enterprise Learning Projects (ELP) involved. The partnership made sense, started in 2010 and based in Katherine, Enterprise Learning Projects support micro-enterprise development for ideas embedded in Aboriginal culture in remote communities, predominantly in the Northern Territory. Put simply, ELP operates by mapping a

community group or individual's hopes and dreams and then goes about seeking grants, philanthropic support or crowd funding to make it possible.

Initially the Tramulla group's focus was to set-up an op shop, as ELP had already experienced success with these in remote places. However, after further discussions it emerged that there were a couple of women in particular who were very keen to learn photography skills and from this build some sort of sustainable, self-determined enterprise. In this vein, from artistic aspirations alongside a desire for practical development, funding was acquired from the Olympus Vision Project with ELP's assistance and the Kalumburu photography project was born. Over two sessions beginning in February and ending in May 2017 workshops took place in Kalumburu and were co-facilitated by Wood and professional photographer Freedom Garvey. Proving popular with community members participation grew over the span of the project with over 20 women getting involved in total.

The workshops commenced with Garvey sharing the story of how she became a photographer and business woman with the participants. Having never met a professional photographer, they were intrigued as much by Garvey's photographs as by the pathway to employment and business that photography might afford. As further inspiration participants were also shown examples of work by successful Indigenous photographers such as Wayne Quilliam. Some of the women came to the program with prior experience in painting, however the majority of the group were not artists and still demonstrated a critical eye - intuitively noticing details, making relevant observations and asking pointed questions about the sample photographs presented. As observed by Wood, 'some women noticed how Garvey used reflections in her photos and that afternoon some women practiced using reflections in the water in their own photography.'

After initial instruction on camera handling and the technical aspects of lighting, ISO, depth of field, perspective and focal points, the participants were eager to get out and start taking photos straight away. Despite some of the women never having picked up a manual camera before, they quickly demonstrated that they required minimal instruction on composition and subject matter. As Wood describes it, 'on the first day we went out in the troopy and with eight loan cameras from Olympus, as soon as we unloaded people just dispersed on country, the women were confident with finding, composing and creating images without guidance. It was quite amazing actually to see the strength of the composition of the shots and how they photographed their own country.'



Red rocks/wet season water by Maria Fredericks © Maria Fredericks 2017

The participants were keen to suggest locations for the shoots which Wood and Garvey then facilitated. Despite sometimes challenging logistics and at one point almost getting the troopy bogged, the group set out to iconic historical locations including the war planes wrecks and the Mission. The participants were especially excited about shooting at places with personal significance, such as beaches and bush blocks with connections to memories of family. As Wood described, 'it was so beautiful, that strength and pride of wanting to show and share where they're from.'

With the workshops taking place at the tail end of the wet season, the dramatic weather conditions and environment around Kalumburu informed the subject matter in a number of ways; the impressive sunsets, storm clouds and lightning presented opportunities to experiment in low light with exposure and shutter speed. Due to the heat some women stood with their feet in the cool water of the streams, experimenting with taking close ups of the water and the many colourful flowering plants and insects flourishing there.

A number of participants stood out in their eagerness to learn, attending all the morning and afternoon workshops, demonstrating commitment by following through with honing additional computer skills around record cataloguing and data back-up. Justina Clement and Zerika Clement attentively soaked-up as much knowledge from Garvey as possible and were keen to know more about experimenting with bigger zooms. Tarisha Mouda got up before dawn, enthusiastic to get to the river with Wood and Garvey to set-up the tripod, adjust the right settings and wait for the light to be perfect before capturing the desired images. Many participants made good use of the loan cameras by practising on their own in between workshops.



Sunset at McGowan Beach by Maria Maraltadj © Maria Maraltadj 2017

During the second workshop the subject matter steered towards portraiture with the training including specific techniques for framing, even lighting, backgrounds and colour contrasting. The participants, keen on representing the uniqueness of life in Kalumburu, pounced on locals paparazzi-style at the mission, the shop and men's work shed. Working their way down the 'Kalumburu Boulevard' they enticed more willing subjects, the community coming out and responding well to this rare occasion of locals taking photos of locals and the opportunity to have impromptu family portraits. Striking photos were taken in a mood of great fun, with behind-the-scenes shots also captured by Maria Maraltadj who chose to capture moments outside the shop and during family portraits.



Artist Gwen Clarke by Maria Maraltadj © Maria Maraltadj 2017

As the last workshop drew to a close it was clear that participants were becoming more experimental with their approach. According to Wood, 'people were being more artistic with light and slightly blurred images and textures and what they were taking photos of.' After the shooting on location was over, the mood was exuberant, and participants were rewarded with the immediate feedback that reviewing the beautiful photos afforded. A highlight involved the women each choosing one of their photos to share with everyone, composing a short summary about why they took it and then viewing the slideshow together. According to Wood, Garvey and Women's Centre coordinator Fi Sproule were moved to tears by this and immensely impressed by the quality of the images and skill of the participants resulting from such a short yet intensive program.

The obvious advantages of nurturing culture and skill-building aside, the longer term benefits of growth through commercial opportunities this project offers is exciting. During the workshops Wood and Garvey introduced ways photography skills could be used in business and shared product concepts, brainstorming with participants ideas such as taking family portraits for the local market, and selling postcards, calendars and framed prints to retailers and tourists over the dry season. There seemed to be popular consensus around two community-driven products - fine art prints and calendars. Inspired by pride of country and culture some were very keen to focus on artistic development, concerning themselves with fine art prints. Calendar production was driven by a desire to showcase Kalumburu's uniqueness and to fill a noticeable hole in the market. With Kalumburu receiving multiple tourists every year and having no specific merchandise to sell aside from generic Kimberley souvenirs, there is strong interest from the community for a calendar. It's also something that community members themselves would want to buy. Participant Tarisha Mouda said, 'I'd like to make a calendar to express something about Kalumburu, to show my kids what I've done and make them little bit proud about what I've done.'

Aside from hoping to sell locally at the Community shop, Wood is also helping the women to find retail stockists across the Kimberley and in the cruise ship market. ELP is developing a website for the Kalumburu photographers and soon people will be able to view a gallery of the photos and purchase on the recently launched ELP online shop, www.yunmi.com.au, which is promoting businesses and selling products by remote Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

Another opportunity for the Kalumburu photographers facilitated by Wood via ELP is an upcoming paid contract for a fashion photo-shoot with clothing brand Magpie Goose. The brief includes

photographing models showcasing the new clothing range made from Indigenous textiles, and has been conceived to inspire and inform the women about contract photography work with a view to opening up opportunities recording other events in Kalumburu. As Wood states, 'it's about how they can be their own storytellers.'

In an early effort to seek exposure and recognition a few of the women have been entering Kimberley photographic awards, with Tarisha Mouda managing to make it into the top ten of the annual Kimberley Echo photography prize in 2016. Esther Waina in particular is focused on breaking into the fine art market and dreams of ultimately having her works exhibited in galleries. For now however, with the recent intensive workshops behind them they already have enough quality work to kick-start sales. Olympus have provided two camera kits to remain at the women's centre for the group to continue to use and ELP are currently applying for further funding for future workshops. Wood enthuses, 'It's been a lovely project to be involved in and I think it has so much potential to keep growing, it's great.'



Wild Horse by Zerika Clement © Zerika Clement 2017

Many thanks to Clare Wood, the Kalumburu Tramulla Strong Women's group and the photography project participants for images and assistance with this article. Wood would also like to acknowledge the following supporting partners not mentioned above: The Kalumburu Strong Women's Centre for providing the venue, Community Focus National for providing the vehicle and Australia Post Neighbourhood for covering the printing costs associated with first run of art prints and calendars.

For more information on Enterprise Learning Projects go to www.elp.org.au or contact Clare Wood on E: clare@elp.org.au