



Occupation: Native

Press Kit, July 2017

PRESS KIT

OCCUPATION: NATIVE

Director: Trisha Morton-Thomas

Comedy Director: Craig Anderson

***Producers: Rachel Clements, Meredith Garlick and
Trisha Morton-Thomas***



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SYNOPSIS

ONE LINE SYNOPSIS

Getting all historical, Aboriginal filmmaker Trisha Morton-Thomas, bites back at Australian history.

ONE PARAGRAPH SYNOPSIS

In this country, the Aboriginal story is often buried deep beneath the accepted 247-year Australian historical narrative. It's not that the Australian story is wrong, it's just that it's a wee bit one sided. Getting all historical, Aboriginal filmmaker Trisha Morton-Thomas, bites back at Australian history.

ONE PAGE SYNOPSIS

In this country the Aboriginal story has been buried deep beneath the 247-year-old accepted Australian narrative. The story of Aboriginal Australia has in many cases been warped beyond recognition, often devoid of Indigenous input and belittling the enormous contribution Aboriginal people have made to the building of this nation. In effect, this distortion of the truth paints the story of modern Australia beyond recognition. Now the natives are getting all historical and Aboriginal filmmaker, Trisha Morton-Thomas, bites back at Australian history.

All was well in Aboriginal Australia. People thrived, and went about their daily lives raising families and maintaining healthy communities. Customs and laws developed over 80,000-odd years provided solid foundations for stable societies and national agriculture, balanced with environmental sustainability. Life was good, people were happy and then.....

All hell was about to break loose.

Captain James Cook, a hero to most Australians but a thief to Aboriginal people, sailed along the eastern coast of Australia in 1769, then stole the continent with a British flag. Of course, the Aboriginal people had no idea what Cook was up to. They continued on with their lives, blissfully unaware their 80,000 year kinship with their lands was about to be tested beyond their worst nightmares.

18 years after Cook, hostile invaders arrived, extremely violent and intent on occupation. Without regard for the land owners, the invaders razed a civilized society and its infrastructure, ravaged and slaughtered men, women and children on a bloodthirsty path of domination and genocide, and finally enslaved those who survived the killing times.

Yet in the face of tragedy and complete annihilation, Aboriginal people fought back, but numbers and guns were against them. During the battle, heroes emerged. Resistance warriors ready to shed



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blood for their people against all odds. In one of the longest, ugliest wars ever fought on Australian soil, brave men, women and children died in defence of their country, yet the European narrative buried their heroic stand and failed to mention their names and deeds.

Eventually the first peoples of this land were brought to their knees and modern Australia was born. New laws, new customs, new people. Paradise lost. Government policy iced the cake, and as winners, the invaders wrote the history. A history built of the concept of *terra nullius*, a land without people and so the existence of a black story became an inconvenient nuisance to the narrative of a newly-formed, white Federation of Australia.

But that inconvenience transformed into a stain. Somehow, the Aboriginal spirit survived, and in the early 20th century, much to the chagrin of the Australian public, the nuisance blackfellas stood once again and insisted they be heard. What did they want? Land Rights! When did they want it? Well, Now! A little bit of human rights, dignity and a place in their own country wouldn't have gone astray either.

Who was listening? Who cared? According to the Government and media, nobody. Move on, nothing to see here folks, and yet the voices of Black Australia would not be quietened. Their spirit and resilience captured the imagination of the Australian public and the attention of the International community. The new movement began to gain traction. Pretty soon it became a contemporary political issue, and a speck of light appeared at the end of the tunnel.

Old stories, cruel unimaginable stories, were retold to a public who now had both ears pricked and wanted answers. The tide was turning and the concept of reconciliation became an ideological mantra, but achieving that goal became a political football for decades, and is still getting a good kick around the park today.

In the 21st century, is it too late to reshape Australia to include the 80,000 year old history of the original Australians? No, it's not. The truth needs telling and consciences need clearing. Education, beginning with the full facts, would put some much-needed stitches in the wound of this country, and breathe life into the prospect of a reconciled, united and healthier Australia for all our children.



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BIOGRAPHIES - CAST

TRISHA MORTON-THOMAS – Presenter and Writer

Born in the Northern Territory, an Aboriginal woman from the Anmatyerr People, Trisha Morton-Thomas is a writer, producer and actor who has worked in film and television for over 20 years. Trisha trained in the Uta Hagen technique of acting at the Eora Centre for Performing arts in Sydney and has worked with some of the most celebrated Australian directors including Rachel Perkins, Warwick Thornton and Wayne Blair. Straight out of drama school, she landed the lead character Mae in Rachel Perkins' 1997 debut feature film *Radiance*.

In more recent years Trisha has appeared in the award-winning ABC drama series *Redfern Now*, series 1 and 2, as the formidable Aunty Mona, and most recently starred as Lola in *8MMM Aboriginal Radio*, Australia's first Aboriginal narrative comedy series, which she also wrote and produced. From 2004, Trisha worked for CAAMA where she produced, directed and wrote documentaries for *Imparja TV*. Many of her documentaries were sold onto the ABC and NITV. In 2007 she joined the newly established National Indigenous Television Services (NITV) as one of the first Aboriginal Commissioning Editors, eventually working her way up to Senior Commissioning Editor. While at NITV, Trisha oversaw hundreds of television hours including documentaries, dramas, music television and magazine style formats.

Trisha is currently writing the feature film *Cloud Money*, supported under Screen Australia's Gender Matters initiative, and intended to be produced as a French-Australian co-production. Other projects in development include the musical *White Blokes*.



Trisha Morton-Thomas presents *Occupation: Native*. Photo credit: Tim Alewood.

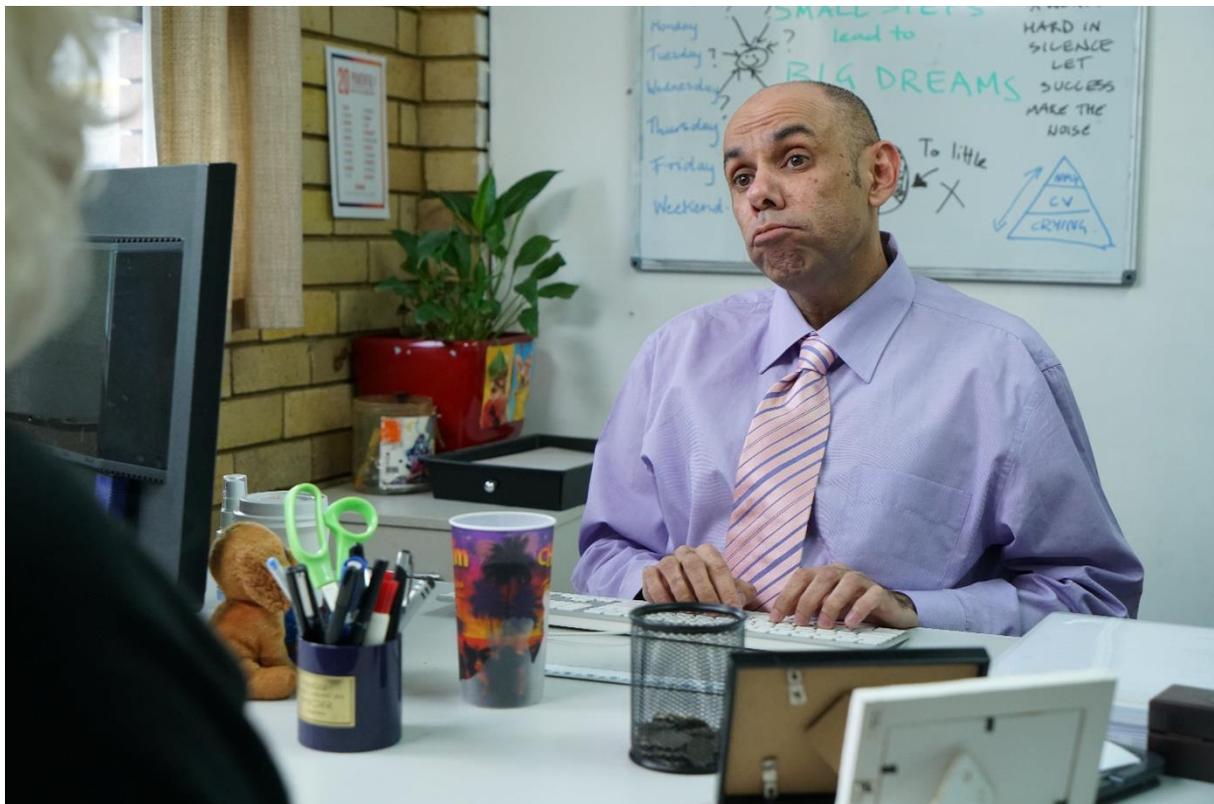


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Steven Oliver

Steven Oliver is a descendant of the Kuku-Yalanji, Waanyi, Gangalidda, Woppaburra, Bundjalung and Biripi (in other words, biggest mob) peoples. He was born in Cloncurry in North West Queensland and grew up in Townsville before moving to Perth to study performing arts. He has worked with numerous theatre companies and arts organisations across Australia and is currently an artist in residence at La Boite Theatre Company. He became notorious with ABC's hit sketch show *Black Comedy* as a writer/actor/associate producer and is also a published playwright and poet with his poetry accumulating over two million views online. A number only overshadowed by his comedic work which collectively has accumulated over ten million views. He currently works full-time at the Brisbane Indigenous Media Association as its Creative Director.



Steven Oliver in *Occupation: Native*. Photo credit: Tim Alewood.



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BIOGRAPHIES – PRODUCTION COMPANY

Brindle Films – Production Company

Brindle Films is an Alice Springs based production company, founded in 2011 by producer Rachel Clements and actor/writer/producer Trisha Morton-Thomas. They have worked together for over 10 years and have collaborated on over 70 hours of film and television, from remote Aboriginal communities to international locations. They have produced documentaries, comedy series, children's television drama, short dramas, and magazine-style television. The company's name reflects a commitment to creating unique and diverse Australian stories through collaborations with filmmakers of all ethnic backgrounds, be they black, white or brindle.

In late 2015 Brindle was awarded Screen Australia Enterprise funding to develop projects according to this ethos and to bring Territory stories and talent to the screen. Brindle Films is also the recipient of the 2015 SPA Breakthrough Business Award; it is the first NT production company to receive a SPA Award and the first to receive Enterprise funding. This success has given them the opportunity to work with Meredith Garlick, a highly experienced producer and development manager, who is working with Brindle to produce and develop the slate, which includes feature drama films, television and children's drama series, and documentaries.

In 2014, Brindle produced *Blown Away*, a documentary for ABC on the 40th anniversary of Cyclone Tracy, with Nirvana Films. The company produced *8MMM Aboriginal Radio* in 2014-15, the first Aboriginal comedy narrative series, with Princess Pictures and also for the ABC. Upcoming projects in 2017-18 include *Coat of Arms*, a Screen Australia Hotshots short film screening at Melbourne International Film Festival in August 2017, and *The Song Keepers*, a feature documentary about the Central Australian Aboriginal Women's Choir, also premiering at Melbourne International Film Festival in August 2017. Another feature documentary, *Finke*, depicting the iconic Finke Desert Race from within, and directed by Dylan River, is currently in post-production, and will be released by Madman Entertainment in 2018.

Projects in development include the Screen Australia Gender Matters feature film, *Cloud Money*, written by Trisha Morton-Thomas and intended to be produced as a French-Australian co-production, and *Broken*, a screen adaptation of the highly-awarded play written by Mary-Anne Butler. Also in development are the children's series, *Maverix Academy*, and a television drama adaptation of their documentary *Big Name No Blanket* about the highly popular Warumpi Band.

www.brindlefilms.com.au

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BIOGRAPHIES - CREW

Rachel Clements – Producer

Rachel Clements has produced over 85 hours of film and broadcast television. She wrote and produced her first short film *Flasher* in 1996, winning Most Popular Film at the Queensland New Filmmaker Awards. She then moved to London where she worked for Miramax and MTV. She graduated from AFTRS in 2001 with an MA in Producing, winning the inaugural FFC Creative Producer Award. From 2001 to 2004, Rachel produced award-winning short films including *Tree* (Sundance, Screen NSW) and *Soul Mates* (IF Awards nomination, AFC). From 2004 to 2009, Rachel worked at CAAMA in Alice Springs, producing shows including *Double Trouble*, the first Aboriginal (children's) drama series (13 x 30 min, Channel 9, Disney) and documentaries including *Karli Jalangu* and *Cheeky Dog* (both Sydney Film Festival). Rachel produced the award-winning documentaries *Ochre and Ink* (ABC, 2011) and *Big Name No Blanket* (ABC, 2013, Sydney Film Festival, nominated for ATOM and Deadly Awards). Rachel has executive produced documentaries commissioned by ABC and NITV, including *Urrpeye (Messenger)*, NITV's launch documentary. Still based in Alice Springs, Rachel recently produced the documentary *Blown Away* (ABC, 2014), and the first Aboriginal narrative comedy series *8MMM Aboriginal Radio* (ABC, 2015). She is currently in post-production on *The Song Keepers*, a feature documentary about the Central Australian Aboriginal Women's Choir, premiering at MIFF 2017, and *Finke*, a feature documentary from inside the iconic Finke Desert Race directed by Dylan River, to be distributed by Madman Entertainment in 2018.



Meredith Garlick – Producer

Meredith Garlick is a producer, writer, consultant and senior executive, with over 20 years in the film and television industry. In 2015-16 Meredith worked in the Northern Territory, first as Director of Screen Territory, delivering the report of the Ministerial Advisory Council, *Charting new territory*, which resulted in a significant funding increase to the local industry, and, later, also producing the arts and cultural policy for the Northern Territory Government. As Head of Development and Production and CEO at Screen Queensland, Meredith was responsible for the strategic direction of the organisation and drove the expansion of the local industry through targeted



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development programs. She oversaw development and production investment in over 100 domestic and international projects, of all genres and formats. Meredith has produced for film and television on three continents. Meredith's \$30M children's film, *The Secret of Moonacre*, was a UK-France-Hungary co-production starring Dakota Blue Richards, Ioan Gruffudd, Juliet Stevenson and Tim Curry. It released in over 120 territories. Meredith has an MFA (Producing) from Columbia University and was awarded the University Medal and First Class Honours from University of Queensland for her thesis on the films of Quentin Tarantino.

Craig Anderson – Comedy Director

Craig Anderson is a comedian who works in the medium of film. As a director he has twice won the Australian Oscar (AFI - Best Comedy TV Series 2004, and AACTA - Best Director - Light Entertainment or Reality 2015) and an International Gold Promax for his network promos for Showtime Australia.

In 2016 Craig's horror film *Red Christmas* (starring horror/sci-fi icon Dee Wallace) had a very successful festival circuit receiving praise from *Variety*, *Scream Magazine*, *Fangoria* and *Bloody Disgusting*. ABC Arts Australia has also commissioned a 'making of' film of the production which will broadcast in 2017.

As an actor Craig has appeared in many successful comedy television programs including *Black Comedy*, *Double The Fist*, *The Moodys*, *Review With Myles Barlow*, and *The Elegant Gentleman's Guide To Knife Fighting*. He starred in indie comedy *The Tail Job* which screened at Slamdance 2016. Craig has also starred in the ob-doc programs *Next Step Hollywood* and *Miso Hungry*.

Craig has a First Class Honours degree in Performance from the University of Western Sydney where he also lectured for three years in Performance and Anthropology. He has currently deferred the writing of his PhD, an epistemological analysis of academic comedy.



James Bradley ASE – Editor

James Bradley has worked in film and TV for 35 years in various roles – as editor of over 40 major documentary films, and recently as writer, producer and director. James has a reputation for telling powerful stories and a passion for cross-cultural collaboration. His editing credits include award-winning Australian Indigenous films including Rachel Perkin's feature *Radiance* and documentaries *Dhakiyarr vs The King*, *Mr Patterns*, *5 Seasons*, *In My Father's Country* and *art + soul*.



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James shared the 1994 AFI Best Documentary Award for *50 Years of Silence* and won the 2005 AFI Non-Feature Editing Award for *Mr Patterns*.

In 2007 James produced Indigenous director Sonja Dare's comedic documentary *Destiny In Alice* and in 2011 he produced and directed the multi award-winning documentary *Ochre and Ink*, the extraordinary story of Chinese-Australian artist Zhou Xiaoping and his 23 year collaboration with Aboriginal artists.

James has taught at METRO Screen, the University of Western Sydney, AFTRS, and Macquarie University, and has been a regular mentor at workshops for the Screen Australia Indigenous Department.

James recently produced and edited *Blown Away*, the story of Cyclone Tracy, and is currently developing several major documentary projects.

Tim Alewood – Director of Photography

Tim is an award-winning cinematographer whose work spans documentary, television, corporate and drama. He is an AFTRS cinematography graduate (from the famed Macquarie Uni campus), and has filmed extensively throughout the world.



Some of Tim's TV and documentary projects include four seasons of *MythBusters* in San Francisco for the Beyond/Discovery network; *Goldtown*, a mining documentary series set in Kalgoorlie for National Geographic; and numerous shark specials all over the world for Discovery.

He lensed the Australian version of *Pawn Stars* for Foxtel/A&E, riding on the back of one the biggest reality shows in the world.

Tim was co-cinematographer on the acclaimed documentary *Big Name No Blanket* about George Rrarrambu from the Warumpi band, which screened at the Sydney Film Festival. He also shot the ABC documentary *Blown Away* for the 40th anniversary of Cyclone Tracey in Darwin.

He has also filmed documentaries for the United Nations University on land and fire management, and has immersed himself in documenting the cultural camps of our Indigenous land owners.

Tim has won two golden tripods at the ACS awards, and has a passion for timelapse photography. Tim has also exhibited his stills photography in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and San Francisco. He lives in Sydney, NSW.



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Caitlin Yeo – Original Music

Highly acclaimed screen composer, Caitlin Yeo has received a swathe of accolades including an APRA screen music award; Feature Score of the Year for *The Rocket* (2013), and Best Music for a documentary for *Getting Frank Gehry* (2016) and *Bomb Harvest* (2007), a 2014 AACTA nomination, and the 2014 Film Critics Circle award, to name a few.



Caitlin has scored multiple feature films, documentaries, and TV series, including critically acclaimed feature film *The Rocket*, *David Stratton: A Cinematic Life*, Channel 7's telemovie *The Killing Field*, ABC's *Compass*, *Bomb Harvest*, kids' television series *Tashi*, SBS series *For The Love of Meat*, and recently finished feature documentary *After The Apology*, set to premier at Adelaide Film Festival later in 2017.

In 2011, Caitlin was also awarded the APRA Professional Development Award, which garnered her a spot at the prestigious ASCAP Film and TV Scoring Workshop in Los Angeles.

Caitlin's musical style comes from a fascination with music from different cultures, twentieth century composition, and a deep love of telling stories with music. Caitlin recently composed an audio-visual concert work called *Seven Stories*, which premiered at the City Recital Hall for Vivid 2017.

Barbara Doran – Art Director and Costume Designer

Barbara has worked as an art director and costume designer in film and television for close to 20 years. She has worked across the spectrum of indie to commercial productions and has a passion for meaningful story telling. Barbara is also an artist and educator. Her artistic training culminated in a PhD at Sydney College of the Arts and she teaches into the post-graduate program at NIDA.

Barbara's work has been recognised in several awards including the international UNESCO bioethics and art award twice over.





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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Okay, Australians, you can stop playing ignorant now!

In a time and age where the libraries and vast knowledge of the world are virtually at our finger tips, it's no longer acceptable for mainstream Australia to remain wilfully uneducated about the enormous contributions other cultures, and in particular, Aboriginal people have made to the construction of this nation.

We are a relatively young nation but our continent has an ancient Aboriginal history that transcends a time frame of over 80,000 years or more; yet our mainstream schooling system still struggles to teach Aboriginal people's long connection and contribution to the building of this land. This is an area of our society that needs to be reformed.

The reality is clear to anyone who cares to see that Australia is a multi-cultural, multi-coloured country, but if you're looking at Australian history or our television screens, you wouldn't believe it. The white Australia policy may have declined in the political arena but it's still very much at the forefront of the mainstream media and the Australian psyche.

With *Occupation: Native* I wanted to take that white Australia psyche and bitch slap it with 80,000 years of Aboriginal occupation and the enormous contribution my mob have made to the building of Australia; but good ways. It was important to do it without blame.

White Australia most definitely has a black history but shovelling guilt at a people who have no control over the actions of their forefathers is counter-productive to fostering good relations. Humour and satire, on the other hand, open people's minds and allows for a safe reflection on a dark, often cruel aspect, of Australian history.

If we can open people's minds, then we can open their hearts and in doing so, maybe we can invoke a sense of outrage at the bad treatment of Aboriginal people and minority groups in this country.

-- Trisha Morton-Thomas



Trisha Morton-Thomas in *Occupation: Native*. Photo credit: Meredith Garlick.



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PRODUCTION NOTES – Stories from Location

It took us a while to find Yemmerrawanne's headstone but when we did, I felt overwhelmed with sadness. He must have been so scared of dying, knowing his remains would be buried in a country that his spirit being had no connection to. I truly felt like sobbing for him but it was already embarrassing that the death of this young man, whom I had never met and who lived over two centuries before I was even born, could bring me to tears.

Meeting Margaret Taylor was a god send. When we arrived to film at St. John's church in Eltham in South London, we were surprised to find a sprightly elder lady cleaning the leaves and rubbish away from Yemmerrawanne's headstone – this was Margaret. We learned that Margaret Taylor, a retired teacher, was the head of the Eltham historical society and since first discovering the Wangal man's headstone as a six-year-old, Margaret has had a lifelong fascination with Yemmerrawanne, or Yem as she fondly calls him. She has taught the story of Yemmerrawanne and Bennelong to countless generations of Eltham children as well as students in Papua New Guinea and other parts of the world. Margaret, as it turned out, was a wealth of knowledge on Bennelong and Yemmerrawanne's visit to England, and was gracious enough to agree to be interviewed for the film.

125 Mount Street. This was the place Bennelong and Yemmerrawanne lodged in while they were in London. Even today, it's situated in a very posh part of London. I remember looking through the front doors and up a staircase that curled around and up again. I got a vivid image of Bennelong and Yemmerrawanne coming down those stairs in all their English finery. The flash of white teeth in dark faces. Bennelong mimicking some Lord or Lady and Yemmerrawanne laughing along. I smiled to myself. I felt close to them.

Filming at Cook's cottage in Fitzroy Gardens in Melbourne was an interesting day. Steven Oliver, dressed as James Cook, attracted bus loads of Asian tourists, intent on being photographed with him. Steven, of course, dived into entertainer mode and they loved it. It seemed when he'd finished the photo-ops with one group, another turned up and the process of posing for pics started all over again. Somehow we managed to shoot one or two takes in between the bus loads of tourists.

Steven Oliver's performance as Captain James Cook is wildly entertaining. If it wasn't so wrong on the particulars of Cook's life it would have been so right to use his interview. There was a wonderful moment when we were filming where an old man, a visitor to Cook's cottage, took exception to Steven making fun of Cook. The old man didn't verbalise anything but if his body language and expression were anything to go by, he was not happy with us.

Filming in the Tanami Desert is not recommended during the height of summer. The light is a harsh white and the heat is relentless. Yet there we were, in the remote outstation of Arrenge, 220 kilometres North West of Alice Springs. From sun up to sun up, it was ridiculously hot the entire time we were there; even the night gave us no relief, and with the darkness along came an army of ants who nibbled on us while we tried to sleep. If it wasn't for the tireless work of our film unit we would surely have perished. It sounds dramatic but that's how it felt to me anyway. To top off the experience of the weather cooking us in our own skins, we had to be heroes and light a camp fire big



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enough to reflect a good enough light to film an interview with Bruce Pascoe, the author of *Dark Emu*. Bruce, of course, is an absolute trooper; though we were both being cooked alive near the camp fire, he didn't once complain. Unlike me, the director, whose country we were filming on.



Director of Photography Tim Alewood, sound recordist Dan Miao, and Trisha Morton-Thomas on location in the Tanami Desert for *Occupation: Native*. Photo credit: Meredith Garlick.



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CREDITS AND LOGOS

Screen Australia
and
National Indigenous Television Australia
present
in association with Screen Territory
a Brindle Films production
Presented by Trisha Morton-Thomas

“Occupation: Native”

* * *

Written and Directed by
Trisha Morton-Thomas

Comedy Director
Craig Anderson

Producers
Rachel Clements, Meredith Garlick and Trisha Morton-Thomas

Editor
James Bradley ASE

Director of Photography
Tim Alewood

Original Music by
Caitlin Yeo

Featuring

Trisha Morton-Thomas
Steven Oliver
Ian Meadows
Justin Smith
Jeremy Ambrum





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Interviews

Dr. Thalia Anthony
Ken Canning
Richard Green
Bruce Pascoe
Rachel Perkins
Matt Poll
Margaret Taylor

* * *

A Moment in History Initiative

Produced in association with Brindle Films



Developed and produced in association with Screen Territory



Developed and produced in association with NITV



NITV.com.au

Screen Australia
Principal Funder



Australian Government



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