John Winch

Artist Statement

John was born in Melbourne and taken back to Balranald NSW shortly after his birth. John is the grandson of the late Alice Kelly, Mutthi Mutthi Tribal Elder. John’s family left Balranald when he was 4 years old and lived in Bendigo until he was eight years old. From Bendigo, his family moved to Lightning Ridge, N.S.W. Lightning Ridge was a small but very busy opal mining town. His father established himself in Lightning Ridge as a gemstone dealer and distributed gemstones throughout the international gemstone industry.

At the age of 12, John attended boarding school, Red Bend Catholic College in Forbes, NSW some 700 kilometres away from Lightning Ridge, and remained there until the age of 17. After leaving school, he went to work with his father and learnt the gemstone business. Not long after the age of 20, he decided to retrace his heritage and moved back to Balranald and lived with his grandparents. He spent a lot time working in the bush around Balranald with his family. These jobs included sawmilling and crop irrigation. However, the most important part of this experience was learning about country from his grandmother, the late Alice Kelly. His grandmother, Alice Kelly, was involved with Mungo National Park and the Greater Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area since the discovery of Mungo Man in the early 1960s. She was awarded Aboriginal of the year in 1987 for her work with the continuation and enrichment of Aboriginal culture and heritage throughout the Willandra Lakes World heritage area, and women’s health. She was also a board member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the agency of the United Nations established in 1946 to encourage collaboration among nations in the areas of education, science, culture, and communication.

In 2001, not long after moving to Balranald John gained employment with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service at Mungo National Park as Cadet Ranger. Through this job and teachings from his grandmother John learnt about his connection to this highly sacred place and established a strong spiritual connection to his traditional Lands. During this time he co-ordinated the discovery tour program, was involved in flora and fauna survey and was involved in many joint management aspects between National Parks and The Three Traditional Tribal Groups.

John also gained an Associate Degree in Applied Science (Parks Recreation & Heritage) through Charles Sturt University and Represented the Aboriginal Youth of Victoria at the World Youth day in Cologne Germany.