

National Institute
of Dramatic Art

NIDA

MEDIA RELEASE



Wuthathi and Torres Strait Island woman Jax Cornforth awarded fellowship to study at NIDA

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In a ceremony conducted by NIDA's CEO and attended by NIDA's graduate students and staff, producer, performer and choreographer Jax Cornforth was awarded the 2020 Luminis Foundation Indigenous Fellowship for Cultural Leadership.

Presented by the Managing Director of Luminis Partners, Jamie Garis, this fellowship supports Jax to undertake the Master of Fine Arts in Cultural Leadership, a graduate program for early and mid-career leaders in arts and culture, including in the political sphere.

The fellowship, funded by the Luminis Partners Foundation, is part of a \$300,000 grant to support the NIDA Graduate School.

Born in Cairns, Jax co-founded the cultural performance and education company Muggera, alongside her husband Darren Compton. Originally learning dance from Auntie Kay Zaro OAM and Uncle Noel Zaro OAM, Jax went on to study at NAISDA Dance College, after which she undertook a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Dance/Indigenous Studies) with Distinction at Queensland University of Technology.

Accepting her award, Jax said, 'I am a proud Traditional Owner from the Nara Jira Para Clan of the Wuthathi (White Sand People) of the Far North Queensland Cape, where the rainforests meet the reef.'

I'm also of Badu and Moa Island descent in the Torres Strait and my father's family hails from Germany, England and Ireland.

'I'm very honoured to be standing up here tonight and to be the recipient of the Luminis Fellowship. There aren't enough words in English or my languages that would summate my gratitude to the Luminis Foundation. Thank you, Jamie, for being here tonight, for your kind words and for entrusting me with this honour.

'This Fellowship is more than just a 'leg-up' or 'scholarship' or 'short-term assistance program'. It's a mark of respect, of belief and encouragement that will transcend not only over the length of the course, but over my career...

'The next generation requires experienced, confident, selfless leaders to empower them to embrace their stories as First Nations people and strive to not just identify the gifts of our previous generations but to use them to build lives of true joy, and well-deserving of all our beautiful First Nations peoples.

'From a personal point of view, I want to thank my husband for his support, as this Fellowship will benefit not only me but us and our two small jarjums at home.'

Previous winners of the Luminis Foundation Indigenous Fellowship for Cultural Leadership include Marilyn Miller, board member of the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair and Granny's Yarns coach and counsellor for children in out-of-home care, and Mel George, glass artist who went on to manage Ernabella Arts, Australia's oldest Indigenous art centre.

Introducing the evening, NIDA's CEO, Liz Hughes said, 'I'm excited to be present with Jacqueline 'Jax' Cornforth, this year's highly deserving and inspiring recipient. We need leadership that is brave, courageous and powerful, and it is wonderful to have forward-thinking and innovative organisations like the Luminis Foundation investing in strong Indigenous leaders.

'Indigenous storytelling has a deep importance for us all. I am heartened by the opportunity the Luminis Foundation affords to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island cultural leader, helping to ensure that Indigenous leaders are front and centre in Australia's cultural future and enabled to hold the highest ranks in the country's cultural institutions.

'I wish to thank Simon Mordant AM, Ron Malek, Jamie Garis and Richard Marques from Luminis Partners for the generosity of the Luminis Foundation Indigenous Fellowship in Cultural Leadership. They continue to be visionary and longstanding supporters of the arts, creative education, and NIDA.'

The course Jax will be undertaking, NIDA's Master of Fine Arts (Cultural Leadership), brings together leaders from the performing arts, museums, galleries, libraries, local government, festivals, independent arts practice and cultural organisations, who are motivated to drive change and aspire to resilient, new leadership models.

Mr Malek said, 'Throughout her career, Jax has experienced an array of amazing opportunities as a performer, teacher, choreographer, event host and creative producer across a variety of sectors. Following your time here at NIDA I hope your career further blossoms.'

Media Enquiries

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