

Bindi Cole

Sistagirls

8-31 July 2010

Opening drinks Thursday 8 July 6-8pm

Gallery I

ARTIST STATEMENT



The term 'Sistagirl' is used to describe a transgender person in Tiwi Island culture. Traditionally, the term was 'Yimpininni'. The very existence of the word provides some indication of the inclusive attitudes historically extended towards Aboriginal sexual minorities. Colonisation not only wiped out many indigenous people, it also had an impact on Aboriginal culture and understanding of sexual and gender expression. As Catholicism took hold and many traditions were lost, this term became a thing of the past. Yimpininni were once held in high regard as the nurturers within the family unit and tribe much like the Faafafine from Samoa. As the usage of the term vanished, tribes' attitudes toward queer indigenous people began to resemble that of the western world and religious right. Even today many Sistergirls are excluded from their own tribes and suffer at the hands of others.

Within a population of around 2500, there are approximately 50 'Sistagirls' living on the Tiwi Islands. This community contains a complex range of dynamics including a hierarchy (a queen Sistergirl), politics, and a significant history of pride and shame. The Sistagirls are isolated yet thriving, unexplored territory with a beauty, strength and diversity to inspire and challenge.

During August and September of 2009, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to spend a month living with the 'Sistagirls' on the Tiwi Islands creating a series of highly stylised portraits of them. I loaded a barge with a four wheel drive, lights, a generator, cameras and enough film to fill a suitcase. Each day brought an emotional roller coaster from moments of elation around what was being achieved with the images to complete anxiety from the many dramas that occurred. This time has affected me in a profound way. The 'Sistagirls' have touched my heart. I only hope that in some way I have captured the essence of who they are and the spirit of their community. I know that they will always be a part of me and that I will be a regular visitor to Tiwi to visit the 'Sistagirl' community for the rest of my life.

Bindi Cole is an award-winning artist. In 2009, she won the \$25,000 Deadly Art Award as part of the Victorian Indigenous Art Awards and she has also been a finalist in the William and Winifred Bowness Photography Prize, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards (Telstra) and the National Photographic Portrait Prize.

Image (above): Foxy, 2010, Pigment print on hahnemuele (cotton rag), 120 x 100cm

For images or further information please contact Olivia Poloni olivia@nelliecastangallery.com