

**Interviewee:** Graham Wilfred

**Interviewer:** Annie Rolfe

**Date of Interview:** 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024

**Location:** Online via Zoom

**Length of Video:** 29:41 minutes

## **Transcript**

**Annie:** So, Graham, can you tell us a bit about yourself and what has led you to your art practice today?

**Graham:** Um. Hi, everyone. Um, so my name is Graham. Um, I am, uh, a Yolngu person from the upper far north of Arnhem land. um, I come from a background of traditional, um, and ceremonial painters. Um, and I think what led me to art was my father, actually, because he used to, he used to paint a lot. Um and I used to, I remember sit down with him, watch him paint. Um, and I think that's where my love for art fell within that area. Um, and then I, um and then he passed on. We had his funeral and then. Um. It was my decision. I decided to, that it was time for me to leave my family and in, um, Ngukurr and just set off on a journey. Um, didn't know what was going to happen. Um, so I just left, and then, uh, I ended up having, uh, a carer in 2006. Um, that was the year I left my family, went back to Darwin. Um, and then, um. Yeah and I met my old carer in 2006 and, um, and yeah, it just went on from there. Um, we, we got into university. Um, I did adult education. Um, and then I started doing, um, um, music cert one, two and three, um, didn't really graduate, uh, because, uh, the, the whole, um, um, homework was too confusing? Um, so I just did my best and didn't get much, um, out of the homework, but I got a lot of, um, a lot of stuff, um, happening in doing, um, studio time, recording artists.

**Graham:** Um, and then I started getting into doing, um, CD covers for, for artists and, and, um. Yeah. And then I ended up in a three piece band. I was the drummer of Cobblestone. Um, we travelled, um, in different parts of Darwin. Um, and then we did the FUSE festival. I think that was in 2013 or 12. Um, so we did that and went well and then, um. As many like bands, they tend to fall out, um, due to some drug substances. Um, one of the band members was, um, in heavy drinking and all that and so he would run, um, run out of money, and then he would run late to our rehearsals and. Yeah. So I

learned a lot in that, um, me and my carer also, we did, um, country line dancing. Um, we went to to gigs at the, um, country nightclub for the oldies. Yeah. And I got to meet, um, a few oldies, and they taught me how to do the mixing desk, how to control the sounds, and I learned then from what they told me, um, and then, um, we went traveling in 2009, we left Darwin. Uh, travel down to the Alice Springs, went through Alice Springs down to the bottom of Australia, to Mount Gambier. Um, and then made our way back up to Alice Springs. Um, and then we got into Bachelor Arts.

**Graham:** We did the visual arts course. Um, and we did that for like a couple of years. And then, um, during the whole process of doing that, he was, um, going through courts, um, on matters that I would bring up. Um, but it was just his problems. that he caught up with him and then he went to prison for nine years and then I got stuck in, uh, in my old caravan and then I, um, the the CEO that owned the, um, that was the CEO at the truck museum out here in Alice Springs. Um, her name was Liz. She's the one that, um, helped me out and, um, got me into a unit. Um, and then that's how I got my unit. I got my unit through affordable housing. Um, and, yeah, just went on from there, and I, I ended up doing some projects with some people, and we did, um, Indigemoji, um, app. And I was the ringleader for it. Um. Um, and so I did most of the designs and the, the logos and such and. Um, won uh, an award. Um, and. Yeah. And um, did that and, um, so now that app is on Samsung and iPhones, you can download it. It's called Indigi, Indigemoji app. Um. And, um, after that, I, um, we didn't do any project because we ran out of fundings, and and then I ended up just, um doing my own personal stuff. Um, painting.

**Graham:** Um. I got into doing home studio videos with green screen getting back into learning how that, um, all works and, and then I started to buy a drone, which I bought a drone, and I, um, had a car. So I did some filming out and about, um, around Alice Springs. Um, then I went into financial situations. I had to sell the drone and sort that stuff out, and then, um, and then, yeah, a few months kicked in. I ended up, um, getting a job at, um, the place I'm working with now is called CASA Services. Um. And. Yeah. And I, um, been working with them since last year. Um, and last year also, I think it was mid year last year I got into doing theatre making, um, with Incite Arts and yeah, now I'm, um, deciding on being a director and a screenwriter and a writer, um, for doing films, I, um, am doing theatre makings. Um, so I'm coming up with different ideas of what I want to, um, create, um, in my show. Um, and yeah and I was born with spina

bifida. Um, so yeah and so long story short, I ended up in foster care, um, because my mom couldn't look after me. Um, and I ended up in foster care, and I, that was in 80. I ended up in foster care in 1983.

**Annie:** Mhm.

**Graham:** Um, and I left that foster world in 1993, and then I went back to my family.

**Annie:** Right. So you've talked about a number of different art forms or mediums. So um, there was there was painting and music and theatre and film. Yeah. Um, are there any other art forms?

**Graham:** Um. Not really. No. Yeah.

**Annie:** That's a lot. It's a lot of different.

**Graham:** Oh, yeah.

**Annie:** Yeah,

**Graham:** Yeah, I love it.

**Annie:** So, um, what motivates you to do the work in, in those different art forms?

**Graham:** Um. Uh, people with disability.

**Annie:** Yeah,

**Graham:** They they motivate me to keep doing, um, what I do best in my life. Um, and they do a lot of arts and, and and a lot of shows and and, um. Yeah, it just motivates me more to do more.

**Annie:** What is it about people with disability that or artists with disability that motivates you? Is it being part of that?

**Graham:** Um, being part of that environment? Yeah, yeah. And just meeting them as well and seeing them being happy because they, they, they, they, they really enjoy it, you know, they don't see it as a negative. They see it as a real positive thing and yeah and, and I when I see that um, yeah. It just brightens my day and I and I like doing that also with them. And yeah, it makes me happy.

**Annie:** Has, has your motivation for creating art changed since when you started? No, no.

**Graham:** It was no. It would never stop. It will keep going. Yeah. Um. Yeah.

**Annie:** Yeah. Can you tell me more about the, um, Indigi emoji? Is that - did I get that right?

**Graham:** Yeah. Um, so we, I think it was. Oh, it's been a while now. I think we started that in 2019.

**Annie:** Right.

**Graham:** Um, and I think it ended in 2020. Um, it wasn't, it wasn't long but in that, just just those two years um, we've done a lot of hard work. Um, you had to get fundings. Um, we had to, um, wait on people to get back with us to to do these, um, drawings for the, for the elders and put the Aboriginal native names on each symbol. Um, and, and we even got the kids to help us. Um, the, and they were, they were really, um, really bright kids and they were brilliant. They wanted to learn more about, um, how to draw using the iPad and the pen and, um, how to colour in the, the symbols that we were given. Um, and we also did the drawings on tracing paper and, and then, um, we would take that drawing and, um, I think we were photocopying or scanning them onto A4 sheets, and then we would just, um, colour that in and then, um, take a picture of that symbol and then on with the iPad and then, um, yeah, go from there with Procreate.

**Annie:** Mhm.

**Graham:** Um, we would edit that in Procreate and then we would colour that in and zoom in and um, make it look really neat and tidy.

**Annie:** Mhm.

**Graham:** Um, and then we would send them off to another person who um does the editing and all that and make them look good and 3D and just polishing them up. Um, and then they would get back with us with good news and then they would send the finishing products and yeah, we would get, we would end up with, um, this, um, uh, poster size, um, symbol of the whatever it was and we

**Annie:** and that's become an app?

**Graham:** Yeah, yeah. Um, that took, uh, that took a while to do. Um, so. Yeah.

**Annie:** And, um, the emojis are symbolic of Indigenous culture. Is that what you were saying?

**Graham:** Yeah, yeah. So that's, um, that will also teach people how to speak. I think it was Arrernte. I think the main language here in the Alice. Um, yeah. So it will help people from, um, or or from wherever in Australia to learn how to speak Arrernte as well. Um, so. Yeah.

**Annie:** So that's, um, a digital presentation of your work. Where else have you, um, what other places have you presented your work?

**Graham:** With Indigemoji?

**Annie:** Uh, no. I mean, you know, I you were talking about your music before, but, uh, and the different places you've been. What about, um, your painting? Have you exhibited?

**Graham:** Um, no, I so I was just, um, painting and selling them to get pocket money. Yeah. Um, but I did, I did, um. I did, um, an exhibition through Bachelor of Visual Arts.

**Annie:** Yes,

**Graham:** we did our exhibition through there and, um, Parrtjima. I think it was we had this festival called Parrtjima.

**Annie:** Okay.

**Graham:** And I entered it and my, my art was in that as well and it was, um, I think it was. The story of Stingray.

**Annie:** Okay.

**Graham:** Yeah. Um, and it was different from, from the other, um, desert arts you would see in Alice Springs. It was. Yeah. And it was different. And, um. Yeah, I kind of liked it and well not kinda I liked it. I really liked my hard work. Yes.

**Annie:** And have you had, um, responses to the energy emoji and to other forms of your art?

**Graham:** Uh, no. No. Well, yeah. We I don't know what happened. I think we just pulled out like, we fell out and that was it. Um, went separate ways, I guess.

**Annie:** Yeah. Okay. Yeah, yeah. And and, um, are there other places that you'd like to present your art?

**Graham:** Um, so. Yeah, but I, um. I don't know what other places there are or what other festivals there are.

**Annie:** Yes.

**Graham:** I mean, I, I gave up painting, um, just because, um, I, you know, it was doing too much for me and it wanted to look for something different.

**Annie:** Right.

**Graham:** And I got into theatre making and I fell in love with acting and and, um. And I was a part of this. Um, I'm doing a workshop. I was doing a workshop with a guy named

Lesley, and he's been teaching me heaps about filming and and how it all, how it all unravels and I'm like, unwraps and because he's a character, um, he's an actor himself and he created some short films. So, um, I'm lucky enough for him to take me on board to one of his films he was working on and I also, um, I'm also acting in that film as well and yeah, so we can't wait till it comes out.

**Annie:** And so you will you be showing your film in different film festivals?

**Graham:** Um, well, I hope so. I, I don't know, um, per se, but I hope that it does go down that road.

**Annie:** Mhm.

**Graham:** Um, because I reckon the more Indigenous ones up here, um, express themselves through movies and, you know, um, showing how they can really express themselves through the camera, you know, and people see that and I'm just hoping that, you know, people would appreciate and connect to them and wanting them to join in in other films, I guess.

**Annie:** Yeah, yeah.

**Graham:** I mean, that's how I see it. I just hope it goes down that road.

**Annie:** Mhm. Mhm. Um, so do you think the the public have been aware of your work, or do you think there's still more to do? Um.

**Graham:** Um, I think there's a lot to do. Um, to get content popularity? Assuming. Yeah. Um, but no, I mean, some people know me from the emoji app when I see they, they come up to me and they say, hi, we know what you were doing. You're so good with your art, digital artwork and yeah, and I like that but then I'm hoping that when I do my own film and yeah, I get to play in them and, um, change that so when they see me. Oh, we saw your film. It was great. Are you doing more? So I want that to change to that but I gotta work hard to do it.

**Annie:** So you're just at the beginning of this, um, journey into theatre and film making? Yeah..

**Graham:** Um, yeah. Um, because some people know me from the emoji app. Yeah. And I like that. But I want them to also know me from this and that and this, you know.

**Annie:** Mhm. Yes, absolutely.

**Graham:** Writing. Script. Writing. Storytelling. Yeah. Mm.

**Annie:** What do you think the public would say are the key milestones or big things that have happened in the history of Writing. Script. Writing. Storytelling of disability arts in Australia?

**Graham:** The big milestone.

**Annie:** Yeah. So any big events that have perhaps brought more, um, awareness to disability arts.

**Graham:** Uh, no.

**Annie:** No, no. It's it's, um, a challenging question for many people. Um, which is one of the reasons why we're doing the project to bring more awareness. So, um, do you think your art is political in that it changes how people think and act and treat each other?

**Graham:** Um. Uh. I'm not sure per se.

**Annie:** You were talking before about the Indigemoji.

**Graham:** Line.

**Annie:** Yeah, yeah.



**Graham:** Yeah. Um, well, yes. Yeah, yeah. I, um it is that it is that, um. I mean, that's what I'm aiming for and to inspire others, um, to, you know, you don't have to waste your life. You can do this.

**Annie:** Yes.

**Graham:** That type of thing. Um, so. Yeah trying to spark the brain to help change the world, I guess.

**Annie:** Yes. Yeah.

**Graham:** And that's that's my aim. I'm trying to spark the brain to help change our backyard.

**Annie:** Awesome. So, um, do you want to identify, um, or be identified as disabled or having a disability? Or is it about just being another artist?

**Graham:** No um just being another artist. Yeah. Um, I mean, people would know about my disability because it'll be in my bio.

**Annie:** Mhm.

**Graham:** Um, but as for now, it'd be just my name. I want to see my name in the spotlight. That's that's all that counts. You know my name, and everyone knows I know him. You did this, you know so what I'm saying is, I want people to recognize me as me. Um, and you know that I have a disability and to let them also know that, um, I'm trying to, you know, spark the brain to help change the, the backyard of Australia and one, you know, parts of the world. Um, and to to also say that, you know, having a disability doesn't stop me from doing what you love doing best and what you can do because you can achieve if you put your mind to it and to also um don't let your disability get the best of you and that's my main, my main fight. I don't let my disability get the best of me because and I want to do this. I want to do that. I want to do things that I love doing.

**Graham:** Um, I would say that doing gym workouts. So I put my body to the maximum pressure until it is sore, you know, um, and I just, I just keep going the next days. Keep

going so I guess that's my aim, you know, just to have my name up there and people know who I am and when they read my bio, it's all there, you know.

**Annie:** Mhm. So you've, you've, um, had a number of art practices and, um, you aiming to get your name out there. What's next, do you think? Do you think you will continue with film? or.

**Graham:** Oh, yeah. Yeah yeah, yeah. Script writing, screenwriting, writing. Also doing theatre making. Mhm. Um and if it comes to doing workshop with people, yeah, you know, get fundings and and create a workshop because, you know, I think I assume that maybe in the long run in the future, um, well, you know, people want to learn how to learn how what I did and how I went about it and how I developed it and how I made it grow. Um, yeah um, and I and I that's the other thing I want to do also but as of now, just doing film directing, script writing, screenwriting and writing. Um.

**Annie:** And do you think, um other artists would give similar answers about, um, wanting their work to be visible and, um, wanting um, wanting perhaps to be known as artists rather than disabled artists.

**Graham:** Um, I'm going to it's really up to them. Like, um, it's like they, you know, whatever they feel, I reckon um but if they, if they do, if they do make a decision then yeah. It's it's I mean they have every right.

**Annie:** Mhm.

**Graham:** Yeah to do what they want to do and, and to call it what it is. Yeah.

**Annie:** Mhm. Mhm. so, Graham, is there something we haven't asked about that we should with your art practice?

**Graham:** How's it going? Oh, it's going good. Yeah. No, no. Um. No, no. I mean, I mean at the end of the day, I really want my work to be known as well. I really want me and my hard work to be known as one of the greatest.

**Annie:** Yes, yes.

**Graham:** And the reason, the reason why I'm doing this is because, well, we lost our our actor. Okay. This famous actor and two, two of our icons we lost in the in the Aboriginal native um world um and, and so I wanted to take that, and and take the next step and keep that going so that you know, when my work is done, someone else out there can read the history of what I went through and what I've done.

**Annie:** Um.

**Graham:** And then now pick up the yeah, pick it up and run with it and yeah. So I just wish it will be an ongoing thing rather than I they passed on and it just drops and it doesn't go anywhere so yeah. So and that's another reason why I'm doing this.

**Annie:** So you're continuing a legacy, a legacy of work.

**Graham:** Yeah, yeah.

**Annie:** Yeah, that's that's impressive. So, Graham, you mentioned Incite Arts before your, um, theatre involvement. Can you tell me more about your involvement with Incite Arts?

**Graham:** My involvement. Um.

**Annie:** So when, when did you come to Incite Arts?

**Graham:** Oh. Oh. I think it was...Last year.

**Annie:** Okay. So, um, since you've been involved in Incite Arts, um, what programmes have you done there?

**Graham:** Um. Music workshops?

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Graham:** Um, with a guy named Dan. Um, and acting classes with Lesley Simpson. Um. And I did theatre making. Um, yeah, that's about it.

**Annie:** Okay. And, um, what's led from those programs? Have you had opportunities since?

**Graham:** Um, so I also had to add, um, NT Writers workshop.

**Annie:** Fantastic. All right. And then, um, from there, um, you've been writing scripts. Is that what you were saying?

**Graham:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Annie:** And have you gone on to perform with those scripts?

**Graham:** I've been creating the, the structure of the project.

**Annie:** Okay.

**Graham:** Um. Uh, no. Not yet. Uh, we're just in the in the process of, um, reading the script before we can actually, um, create it.

**Annie:** Okay.

**Graham:** Yeah.

**Annie:** And so you you're aiming to have a theatre, um, performance with the script?

**Graham:** No. Uh, movie.

**Annie:** Movie? Okay fantastic

**Graham:** Um, yeah. Film which we're hoping that it will, uh, happen.

**Annie:** Okay. Yes.

**Graham:** Yeah. So. And at the in the meantime, we just, um, we just basically I handed over the script to, um. Jenine [McKay]. Um, go ahead and read it and go through it before the next step.

**Annie:** Fantastic. That sounds exciting.

**Graham:** Yeah. I'm so excited, I can't wait.

**Annie:** That's awesome. And so, um, you are aiming to continue with Incite Arts and the theatre?

**Graham:** Yeah. Yeah. So what's so what's important with me? Um, with Incite Arts, um, is number one, um, being an inspiration, uh, to to people of all, all walks of life.

**Annie:** Mhm.

**Graham:** Um, and to make a difference within, um, the Aboriginal, um, uh, area, if that makes sense. Um, and just loving what I do best, which is learning from the best of the best, um, working with the people that helps me create my story as I'm going along, doing these workshops, um, inspiring others. Um, my passion with acting and being a DJ has come a long way. Um, and being passionate about being here and working with Incite Arts, um, means a lot. And, um, it also opens other doors for me, um, as an actor and a, um, music producer. Um, and not only that, but I'm telling the story as I'm going along and these people that come into my life working with me, they are a part of the story. So in a way, it all, it all comes to storytelling, my, my life and how everything works and what I'm doing to help it, um, come into light. So my aim, my main aim, my main goal is to have someone document this whole story of mine. So when I'm gone, it's there for people to watch. Um, yeah. And my, my passion is music. Um, my passion now is acting as well and being creative.

**Annie:** So did you realise that you had these skills and, um enjoyment of theatre before you came to Incite Arts?

**Graham:** Um, in the music area? Yes. Yeah. As a as a, um, upcoming actor or actress, I should say. Um, no, I didn't really, thought I would, um, become an actor. Um, but then thinking of that, um, I've always been an actor when I didn't even know it, because when you're, when I was doing the music course, we were in, in, uh, in front of people. In front of audience. Um, yeah I was basically on stage performing, which is acting in a way. Um, Yeah.

**Annie:** Yes and so, um, what are your aims with the theatre now?

**Graham:** My aim is to create more stories, create more shows. Um, I've been imagining, um, so many, um, thoughts about coming up with different shows that I want to put out. Um, making a name for myself. Um, I just want to be that person who's, uh, um, a household name um and yeah, for the world to see that, um, I mean, basically, I'm. I'm Graham, and this is what I do. This is my story. Yeah.

**Annie:** Fantastic. That, that sounds great Graham. Um, so is there something that, um, we haven't asked that we should about your art practice?

**Graham:** So the songs I create, um, based on my life, um, uh, what do you call it? Um. Past experience - Um, what I went through and how I got through it and how I ended up here, you know. So it's like chapter one, two, three. Um, so, like I said, look, it's all to do with my story.

**Annie:** Yes

**Graham:** Um, creating music, writing music, um, is my other passion that I have, and. Yeah, it's just based on my life or, um, whatever happens in the world I would write about.

**Annie:** Mm. Fantastic. I think we're going to have to watch you and, um.....

**Graham:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Track your journey.

**Graham:** And I hope you guys do, because it's.... See, I'm not doing this for fun. You know, I'm doing this because, well, you know, I got a story to tell, and I want to. I want to make this, like, a serious thing, you know? Like, I want to get out there and. Yeah, not show up, but, like, yeah, basically, this is me. I'm Australian. Um, this is what I can do. And for someone with a disability to also show that, you know, being a person that was born with spina bifida doesn't mean I can't do what, you know, people thought I cannot do, you know, so I'm also correcting those people that down talk me in the past and said, you know, you were wrong. I can do this. So that's also me, um, showing that, um, you know, I'm looking at my other self, the, uh, the, um, demon that's been haunting, um, that's been saying negative things, um, telling them that "No, I can do this. This is why I'm here, and I'm not going to stop because you don't want me going to the extreme", which is basically what I'm doing. I'm going to that area. Um, yeah.

**Annie:** So is that, that a message, um, that you hope will, um, be visible for other people with disabilities as well? That, that it is possible.

**Graham:** Yeah.

**Annie:** To achieve great things and, um, yeah, yeah.

**Graham:** And I want to be the one at the end um, saying that well I been there, done that. What have you got? You know.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Graham:** So basically, I want to pass on the torch.

**Annie:** Yeah. For everybody, isn't it? You know.

**Graham:** Yeah. It's like in sportsmanship. You got to like this person. He's a great wrestler.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Graham:** You know, they're getting old and that, but they're still teaching.

**Annie:** Mhm.

**Graham:** You know because. Yeah. You're never too old to teach.

**Annie:** Yes. Yeah. An important part of what you do.

**Graham:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Teaching others and leading others. Yeah.

**Graham:** Um, so my theatre program is awesome. I gotta say, and I love it. Um, and I am doing another show, which is - we're in the process of creating it....what we're going to....we haven't, we haven't given it a name yet, but it's, it's more going to be a comedy one.

**Annie:** Mhm.

**Graham:** There's a comedy side of me as well, that I like to bring out, um, and show people that, hey, I'm not just a person living in the dark [pointing to his left then right], dark, dark. I wanted to say, but, you know, I don't want to be in the dark. You know, I'm. I'm more that person. Where I'm a comedian. I can make you laugh. I can make you smile. Um. Because I want to heal your frozen heart, you know, and hope that you do the same for that person while I'm doing the same for that person. So, yeah, it's basically just learning and sharing is caring.

**Annie:** Nice. All right. Fantastic. Graham I think we'll leave it there. Thank you for joining me today and telling your story.

**Graham:** Awesome, Annie.

**Annie:** Great.