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The works of “Australia’s first modern poet” reimagined by award winning filmmaker and Brisbane MC

Ronald McCuaig was once described by acclaimed author and historian, Geoffrey Dutton, as “Australia’s first modern poet”, for his stories portraying battered women. It’s perhaps poignant then that his granddaughter, award-winning documentary maker and SAE Creative Media Institute film lecturer, Dr Nicole McCuaig has breathed new life into his poetry for a modern-day audience in collaboration with award-winning Brisbane MC, Crooked White.

The project was part of Nicole’s PhD on the creative treatment of her grandfather’s poetry, which, at the time of it’s writing, was censored for it’s raw take on society.

“The stories were contemporary for the time, and focused on battered women and prostitutes. The content was seen as very disturbing to a lot of publishers in the 1930s, who wouldn't touch it,” Nicole said.

The link between rap music and Ronald’s music from the start, was clear to Nicole. “There are parts of his poetry which portray what he was seeing on the streets. He had a beautiful way of expressing it and bringing so much colour to his words,” she said.

“I thought one way of bringing my grandfather’s poetry to a modern day audience, was to tell his stories through rap music.”

After a year of researching artists, Nicole spoke to former Queensland hip-hop artist of the year, Zac James, AKA Crooked White, about the project. “Zac left a fractured family in North Queensland and escaped to Byron Bay, where he spent time picking up odd jobs and partying,” Nicole said.

“He started writing down some of these experiences and later found he could transfer this to music, which is perhaps why he felt connected to my grandfather’s work - Zac had a real energy about him, which I felt was a great fit for what I was trying to achieve.”

Zac commented that the topics explored in the poetry still have significance in modern society, and believes Ronald would made an impact as an MC if he was around today.

“Ronald describes the human struggle in unflinching detail, touching on themes that present day hip-hop artists, including myself, draw upon,” Zac said.

“His flow was surprisingly punchy. Once I found a tempo, it felt very natural reading through his works; he would have made an excellent rapper!”

Nicole said that she hopes the research she has been doing inspires her film students at SAE Brisbane, in a small way, to expand their creative thinking.

“As soon as I say I’ve been working with Crooked White to read my grandfather’s poetry, they can’t help but be intrigued. ‘Poetry and hip-hop music, how does that work?’ I hope it illustrates to them, in a small way, there are endless possibilities of what you can do creatively.”

Nicole recently presented her research on Ronald’s poetry, at the Visible Evidence Conference (10-14 August) at the University of Gdansk, Poland. The conference focused on the role of film, video and other media as record, witness, and voice of social reality, exploring a wide range of studies. The 2022 conference highlighted the connections between history and documentary film making.

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**About SAE**

SAE Creative Media Institute is the place for creatives and innovators. Since 1976 we’ve been the leaders in creative media education across animation, audio, creative industries, creative technologies, design, film, games, and music. Every year, we support students globally to develop the skills and experience needed to carve successful careers. Students enjoy access to the latest technology and are taught by industry-experienced faculty, while putting their skills to the test in small class environments. Our graduates become part of a highly-respected global community of creatives that’s been around for over 40 years. We pride ourselves on being technically explorative, transformative and brave through our range of creative media programs, from short courses and professional training through to bachelor and postgraduate degrees. In Australia, our programs are delivered at campuses in Sydney, Brisbane, Byron Bay, Melbourne, Perth and Adelaide. SAE is a part of Navitas Pty Ltd. More information about SAE is available at [sae.edu.au](http://www.sae.edu.au).

**About Dr Nicole McCuaig**

Multi-award-winning documentary filmmaker, Dr Nicole McCuaig has spent the last 20 years in Australian broadcast television across all the major networks that include ABC, SBS, Nine, Seven and Ten. She has worked with many cultures and communities, telling the stories of a diverse range of Australians from downhill skateboarders to world renowned scientists. Since 2019, Nicole has been educating the next generation of documentary filmmakers at SAE Creative Media Institute’s Brisbane campus.

**About Crooked White**

Brisbane-based MC Crooked White has been described as laidback, combining effortless flows, technical word-play and solid hooks. Otherwise known by the moniker his mother gave him, Zac Eakin, the fun-loving MC was born and raised in Cairns, Far North Queensland - a tropical start in life, which is thoroughly reflected in his chilled out musical vibes.

Crooked's no-nonsense approach and wicked sense of humour shine through his lyrics, which paint a picture, endearing audiences to his songs with well-crafted stories, clever word combinations and infectious choruses. After almost two decades in the music industry, Crooked is well-acquainted with what Aussie hip-hop fans love most about homegrown beats. Crooked was recognised for his skills as an MC in 2018 when he was awarded hip-hop/rap artist of the year for his song, ‘Put Me On’.

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