

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NAPT Presents *VIS à VIS: NATIVE TONGUES*

Vis à Vis, the **groundbreaking television series** that uses digital video technology to create intimate dialogues between individuals separated by geography and culture, presents an all-new PBS special that introduces two performers, one in Australia and one in the United States, whose work is deeply rooted in their respective tribal and personal histories.

VIS À VIS: NATIVE TONGUES brings together Aboriginal actress/playwright Ningali Lawford (featured in the recent movie, “Rabbit-Proof Fence”) and American Indian solo performance artist James Luna — outstanding, outspoken performers who both use humor and storytelling to examine the myths and stereotypes about native people in their own countries, but with very different approaches. While he tends to confront issues and audiences head on, she is more likely to embrace viewers and mediate between her world and theirs. As the program begins, James and Ningali have never met or seen each other’s work.

Viewing each other on television monitors while conversing live, Ningali and James share video diaries about their lives and families, and excerpts from their performances. Over a period of four days, their conversations — videotaped and later shaped into the hour-long *Vis à Vis* program — prove to be a deeply moving journey of discovery, not only for the subjects but for viewers as well.

During their exchange, Ningali and James are joined, at times, by their partners and family members. They begin the links from their homes – hers near Melbourne and his on the La Jolla Reservation in the mountains northeast of San Diego – then continue over subsequent days from other locations which are important to them. Ningali takes James on a cross-country journey to meet her large family on an isolated cattle station in the Western Australian bush where she grew up. James links Ningali to a family gathering in Orange County, CA, where he spent his early years, then later to a funky rehearsal studio on the “rez.”

Over the four days, Ningali and James explore the complications each faces while navigating between the tribal cultures that nourish them and the mainstream society that often supports their work. Their encounter builds into an emotional and highly compelling double-portrait of how they create their work out of daily observation, anger at discrimination, and a determination to transform the way indigenous people are perceived. One revelation is the loneliness and pressure they experience as innovators who challenge deeply held stereotypes. Another, for viewers, is how much indigenous cultures have to offer the mainstream today – something that James and Ningali powerfully demonstrate as they give voice to the richness of indigenous life.

As Ningali and James consider the differences in their work and share fundamental experiences that have shaped their lives, they forge the beginnings of a friendship. And, as witnesses to the journey that they take together, viewers have the opportunity to appreciate their courage and their considerable gifts — not the least of which is to make us laugh — and to share in the blossoming of global bonds via the intimate and innovative **VIS À VIS** form.

Credits

VIS à VIS: NATIVE TONGUES is a co-production of Yerosha Productions, Inc. in New York and Nick Torrens Film Productions in Sydney. It is produced by Steven Lawrence and Nick Torrens, and directed collaboratively by Lawrence, Torrens and Phil Lucas. Editor: Bob Jorissen, Original Score by Hahn Rowe, Directors of Photography: Shana Hagan (U.S.) and Peter Zakharov (Australia). The Vis à Vis format was created by Patrice Barrat and Kim Spencer.

Major funding comes from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Native American Public Telecommunications, the Australian Film Finance Corporation and SBS Independent, with additional support from The Soros Documentary Fund and The Rockefeller Foundation.

VIS à VIS: NATIVE TONGUES is presented by Native American Public Telecommunications, and is distributed by PBS Plus. For information about educational video sales, please contact Visionmaker Video at www.visionmaker.org.

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