

## ***Manhattan Dreaming* by Anita Heiss (Bantam, 2010)**

### **Launch Speech by Terri Janke**

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land – the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. I pay my respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders who are the heart and strength of our Indigenous community. I welcome all of you – Aunty Elsie Heiss and the Heiss family, and all of Anita’s friends. Tonight we celebrate the release of *Manhattan Dreaming*. It’s already had a baby shower in Brisbane last month, and launches in Adelaide, Wollongong and University of Western Sydney. And, it’s already selling well in bookshops. But tonight, here at Gleebooks, we are celebrating the official Sydney launch. Here it is - *Manhattan Dreaming*. Another book in the Chic Lit finding a man series. You will have already read *Not Meeting Mr Right* and then *Avoiding Mr Right*, both published under the Bantam Books imprint of Random House. You would have grown to know Alice and her friends Liza and Petra. But this book introduces a totally new character, Lauren Lucas – more on Lauren later. The book follows in the same engaging and witty style as the first two.

You’d all have to agree that Anita has extraordinarily talent and diligence. That’s three books in three years. The series is becoming a bit of a phenomenon. I have had the honour of launching the past two books but I have to tell you all, I was lucky to keep the gig. I saw on Facebook Oprah Winfrey was trying to steal my job. The group page ‘Anita Heiss needs to have Oprah Winfrey launch her book!’ was drawing a large fan base. Hands off Oprah this honour is mine!

#### **So what is all the fuss about?**

Lauren Lucas is a curator at the National Aboriginal Gallery in Canberra, now in the site of old Parliament House. She’s a leader in her field – a curator of Aboriginal art. Whilst she has carved out a career in her chosen professional, her good sense and judgment has been averted by the star forward of the Canberra Cockatoos, Adam Fuller. Now Adam’s a ladies’ man with a very big My Space page. Adam can pull out the charm, but Lauren

realises it's time she faced the sad reality. Adam's got her under her thumb. She's hopeless when it comes to matters of the heart. But, she just can't seem to stop stalking Adam at footy practice, and refreshing his My Space page every half hour.

That's when her boss at the National Aboriginal Gallery approaches her to go to New York for a 12 month fellowship at the National Museum of the American Indian. She has to think about it once or twice. Her friends have to persuade her. What would a country Koori girl from Goulburn do in the New York? How could she leave Adam? This man addiction has her by the balls, well, at least by the balls of the Big Merino from her hometown in Goulburn, aka Rambo. But to understand that, you'll have to read the book or come from Goulburn.

I don't think I'd be giving it away if I told you. Of course Lauren goes to work in the big apple; otherwise we wouldn't have a story, would we? She styles it up in the city that never sleeps. She visits the Metropolitan Museum of Art (the Met), the Chelsea Markets, and the Statue of Liberty and spend new years' eve with her at Time Square. She shops at Macy's for lucky underwear and parties at the most chic bars and restaurants. And, of course, she explores the New York dating scene. She finds American men more romantic than Adam. One of the chapters of the book is set during a world history marking time in American politics – the Obama election night. Anita has called the chapter, 'Obamarama'. All of you can probably answer the question – What were you doing when Obama gave his election victory speech? But for Lauren, the question is '**who** were you doing?'

### **More than romance, it's about culture?**

Don't be fooled that the book is just a romance story; it is packed with cultural references. As the *Australian Book and Publisher Magazine* reported, Anita's 'deep connection to her people and culture is a vital part of the story--and what sets Manhattan Dreaming apart from other chick-lit.' *Australian Book and Publisher Magazine* said it was a subtle way to introduce people to Indigenous arts, music and culture. A range of

Indigenous creative artists are mentioned from Elaine Russell, Julie Dowling, Adam Hill, Wayne Quilliam and Papunya Tula artists. Musicians like Emma Donavon, Munkimuk, Jessica Mauboy and Geoffrey Gurrumul Yupupingu also feature because these are the performing artists Lauren has on her iPod.

The book, through Lauren's character also introduces political and sovereignty issues that we Indigenous Australians share with our US Native American brothers and sisters. Art is the vehicle for cross-cultural linking with Native American nations such as the Mohawk and the Iroquois. Indigenous people from American and Australia do have a lot in common. Art is the thread for that political voice. There is also reference to international Indigenous rights. Kirsten, Lauren's friend works at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. They go the Manchester, the hotel where all the world Indigenous people hang out after sessions.

### **The black Carrie Bradshaw**

*Manhattan Dreaming* is a book that truly illustrates the cosmopolitan style of the author, Dr Anita Heiss. She was described by the *Courier Mail* last year as 'the black version of Carrie Bradshaw from Sex and the City'. In the book *Manhattan Dreaming* we get to imagine what Dr Heiss would be like if she did live in New York, as she sets up the fiction world of the beautiful and en vogue Lauren. Many of you will know that Anita takes her writing seriously and does extensive research, getting the right food, the right beverage there is every attention to the detail. I've never been to New York – but *Manhattan Dreaming* took me there. I've been to Macy's, the Australia Bar, and the National Museum of the American Indian. I've walked down Madison Avenue and stood on top of the Empire State. The book operates on two levels. Yes, it is a finding the right man story – but is also about a woman finding her way in the big city.

The novel is a story about a country Wiradjuri woman who is negotiating the maze of love relationships in the biggest of cities. I read the article on Anita in the latest *Women's Health Magazine*. She gave a candid interview when she spoke about herself

and love. But you see a deeper side of the writer; she is someone who believes in love. She gives a reference to the great love her mother and father shared for each other. A love that inspires her. When Anita visited the Metropolitan museum, she saw an exhibition with a sign on the wall which said ‘Amore vole fe’ – ‘Love needs faith.’ Anita wears that necklace around her neck. To me this is a message from the book, not just the single person, but for all of us.

### **Who put the MAN in Manhattan?**

Gathered here at Gleebooks tonight, we stand in awe of our good friend Anita. I think the underlying lesson from the book is that even in the biggest city in the world, you will always be strong in yourself, if you remember where you are from. Anita, I think that this is also something that you’ve lived by, and as you get more celebrated and accomplished. Many of you would know that I have known Anita for 20 years. She is someone who I am pleased to call a close friend, a sister. I think this book, and the series, is but one facet of her many talents. She is involved in the community on boards, lecturing at universities and schools, and working on National Indigenous Literacy Projects. I don’t know where she finds the time. Anita has a passion for writing, and for promoting Indigenous people, our causes, our cultures and our talents. As her books become well known and well read, Indigenous Australians also share in the success.

Congratulations to Random House, this book is everywhere. So friends, be lucky tonight and buy a copy or two and have the author sign it.

Before I introduce the author, I’d like to ask the Manhattan Dreaming Glee Club to join me for a short sing along. A one a two, a one two three – Start spreading the news.

So it is with robust fervour, I invite you join to join in the applause for the woman who put the MAN in Manhattan - ANITA HEISS.