



Australian Government



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## Thorpe to give Red Ochre to leading dancer

Artistic director, dancer and teacher **Michael Leslie** will tonight be honoured with the Australia Council for the Arts' \$50 000 Red Ochre Award, for his lifetime of achievement in Indigenous dance.

The Australia Council's National Indigenous Arts Awards – held every year on the 27 May – showcase the diversity of Australia's Indigenous arts. The 2010 Red Ochre Award will be presented by Australian Olympic swimming champion and Indigenous advocate, Ian Thorpe.

Dr Mark Bin Bakar, Chair of the Australia Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board, said the Red Ochre Award recognises Michael's continuing achievements as an artist and cultural leader.

'Michael Leslie is being presented with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board's highest honour in recognition of a career that has seen him excel in dance, choreography, acting and directing, both in Australia and the United States,' he said.

Speaking in the recent edition of the Australia Council's Indigenous arts magazine *Arts Yarn Up*, Michael Leslie said he hopes more young Indigenous Australians will experience the transformative power of the arts. 'The arts can empower and help people harness their own destiny,' he said. 'Performing arts are an area in which Aboriginal people can, will, and are making an important cultural and social contribution to Australia.'

Michael's journey began at the Aboriginal Dance Theatre in Redfern. He was a founding dancer at the National Aboriginal and Islander Dance Skills Association before training in New York at the Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre for seven years. He then returned to Australia and turned his skills to benefit Indigenous young people. In the past year, he has established the Michael Leslie Foundation for the Performing Arts. Michael currently runs the Michael Leslie Pilbara Performing Arts Program. Throughout his career he has trained and inspired leading Aboriginal actors including Leah Purcell, Trevor Jamieson and Ursula Yovich.

Past winners of the Red Ochre Award include Jimmy Chi, author of *Bran Nue Dae*; Doris Pilkington Garimara, author of *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*; singers Jimmy Little and Seaman Dan; artists Banduk Marika and Johnny Bulan Bulan; and last year, Yolgnu painter and activist, Gawirrin Gumana AO.

The National Indigenous Arts Awards will also include the presentation of:

- the Qantas Young and Emerging Indigenous Visual Arts Award to 21 year old NSW photographer **Crisse Longbottom**
- a three month residency at the Albers Foundation Studios in Connecticut, USA, to Queensland contemporary visual artist, **Zane Saunders**
- a two year fellowship for music to Black Arm Band's **Lou Bennett**
- a two year fellowship for literature to author and social commentator, **Dr Anita Heiss**.

An interview with Michael Leslie features in the Australia Council's *Arts Yarn Up*. It's free and you can subscribe at [www.australiacouncil.gov.au/artsyarnup](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/artsyarnup)

For further information about the winners, media kits and images– and to attend the event – please contact Nancia Guivarra on 0402 107 042 or 02 9587 2142 or [nancia.guivarra@me.com](mailto:nancia.guivarra@me.com)

Australia Council for the Arts

More information can be found at [www.australiacouncil.gov.au](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au)