

COMPANY PROFILE

Established in 1987, this small, independent production company has a strong reputation for creative, artistic documentaries that make thought-provoking contributions to a broad spectrum of topics such as history and the arts but also indigenous, social and political issues. Films on original subjects which nonetheless appeal to a wide, general audience. Films made for cinema and broadcast as well as non-theatrical outlets.

Award-winning writer/director/producer Frances Calvert is originally from Sydney, Australia and graduated from Sydney University. Her film-making began in earnest when she teamed up with British producer/director Lindsey Merrison in 1987 in Berlin to make *TALKING BROKEN*, her first film. The company is now based in Berlin and produces films with an Australian connection for German and English-speaking foreign markets.

A lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies (Film & TV) at Potsdam University, Frances Calvert also teaches students of production at the HFF Film School in Babelsberg. She acts as a mentor to young film-makers and students broaching their first film.

After extensive travels in South-East Asia, India, the Middle East, Africa and Europe, Frances Calvert returned to Australia to train as a teacher. Curiosity about the Torres Strait Islanders, Australia's 'other' indigenous minority, took her on the first of many trips to northern Queensland and Torres Strait. She established ties of friendship and trust with this largely unknown Melanesian people and was permitted to film on the island reserves. Islanders of all ages and backgrounds have expressed their satisfaction with her work and her non-Eurocentric approach to filming. Today her films run in a loop in the new Cultural Centre on Thursday Island. She immortalised such charismatic characters as Chairman Mau and Ephraim Bani, eloquent and knowledgeable cultural custodians who also possessed a fine sense of humour and a keen understanding of how to grapple with the powers-that-be.

Although the Islanders have been under missionary and government rule since 1871, they are proud of their identity and their place in world history. The Cambridge anthropologist Haddon produced the first scientifically ethnographic record of a whole people in 1898, even capturing a few minutes of film as well as songs on wax cylinders and many photographs. The Strait has been the subject of the famous adventurer Frank Hurley's movie camera as well as later feature films, more ethnographic work and, in 2006, *'RAN'* a 6-part TV drama using local talent.

TALKING BROKEN / A Portrait of the Torres Strait Islanders (Ein Porträt der Insulaner der Torres-Straße) (1990, 16mm) is a witty account of the Torres Strait Islanders, Australia's 'other' indigenous minority. This feature-length film was produced for Channel Four and funded by the Kuratorium junger deutscher Film. It enjoyed theatrical release at the Filmbühne am Steinplatz in Berlin. It is distributed in Germany/Austria/Switzerland by EZEF and in Australasia by Ronin Films. *TALKING BROKEN* was acquired for television in Germany by SWF (now SWR) ORB (now RBB) Berlin-Brandenburg, arte (France/Germany), ABC-TV Australia and Planète Cable (Multithématiques) Paris.

TALKING PICTURES FRANCES CALVERT was Associate Producer on Lindsey Merrison's 35mm feature-length documentary OUR BURMESE DAYS (Die burmesischen Tage) (1995) and the award-winning FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES (2001). Both also ran in Berlin cinemas (Filmbühne am Steinplatz and Klick) before broadcasting on television.

Calvert's second film, CRACKS IN THE MASK (Risse in der Maske) (1997, 35mm) sets out to acquaint the rest of the world with the art of Torres Strait and to examine what museums are really for. The journey to Europe by Ephraim Bani, a knowledgeable Torres Strait Islander, proves to be revelatory for him and for the museum curators he encounters. Ephraim's quest for his past and the film-maker's interrogation of her cultural institutions create an ironic dialogue that goes far beyond mere journalistic reportage.

A co-production between WDR Cologne, SBS Independent Australia and DRS Swiss Television, this documentary was also acquired by broadcasters in Taiwan and Maori TV in New Zealand and was released theatrically at the Filmbühne am Steinplatz in Berlin. The film has travelled to 24 film festivals and special events in museums, universities and schools and has accrued four awards and a great deal of press coverage. The film is distributed by First Run Icarus Film in the USA, EZEF in Germany/Austria/Switzerland and by Ronin Films in Australasia.

FILMOGRAPHY:

TALKING BROKEN (1990)
writer, director, producer

CRACKS IN THE MASK (1997)
writer, director, producer

CURRENT PRODUCTIONS:

WELCOME MONEY
(writer, director, co-producer)
- a documentary about attitudes to consumerism in the former GDR.

THE TOMBSTONE OPENING
(writer, director, co-producer)
- a documentary that centres on the unique ceremony of farewelling the spirit of the dead in Torres Strait

HADDON'S HEROES
(writer, director, co-producer)
- a whimsical drama documentary about Torres Strait Islanders' active response to Europeans in the era of early film and attempts to rejuvenate their contemporary culture.