

MEDIA RELEASE

Monday June 20, 2022



Feature documentary **THE ART OF INCARCERATION** set for global release on Netflix



Artwork by Robby Wirramanda

[VIEW TRAILER](#)

The Art of Incarceration, a feature documentary looking at the over-representation of Indigenous Australians in the prison system, will be released exclusively on Netflix globally on July 3, 2022. This uncompromising documentary narrated by Uncle Jack Charles (Boonwurring Dja Dja Wurrung), headlines Netflix's NAIDOC Week collection.

Seen through the eyes of Indigenous prisoners at Victoria's Fulham Correctional Centre, ***The Art of Incarceration*** explores how art and culture can empower First Nations people to transcend their unjust cycles of imprisonment.

The Art of Incarceration provides an insight into the deeply ingrained incarceration epidemic of Australia's First Peoples, and offers hope, as we follow the inmates' quest for cultural identity and spiritual healing as they prepare for the annual 'Confined' exhibition and life on the outside.

The film covers a range of perspectives from current and past inmates, including that of Robby Wirramanda (Wergaia), a former champion fighter who reconnected with his passion for art during his 6 ½ year sentence for drug trafficking. Robby is a symbol of strength and hope to many inmates due to his success as an artist/singer/songwriter, his work as a mentor and his unrelenting dedication to culture, community and family.

Christopher Austin (Gunditjmara Keeray-Woorroong), has been in a cycle of incarceration for 37 years, having been made a ward of the state at the age of 12 for being 'uncontrollable'. The injustices of Australia's colonial history are inextricably seen in Christopher's narrative. Through his new direction as an artist and his desire to create a lasting connection with his young daughter, Christopher is attempting to forge a better future. *"In the past I was a crook, you know, a jail bird, but now I'm an artist. My daughter is so proud of that. I never used to think of myself that way."* Christopher Austin.

Writer, director, producer Alex Siddons comments *"It has been a long road but I'm proud that this important story will be available to a global audience on Netflix. I'm grateful to everyone who contributed and supported us in completing the film. It is my hope that the film brings attention to the mass incarceration of Indigenous Australians in our criminal justice system, and affects urgent change."*

The statistics are sobering. PwC's 2017 report '*Indigenous incarceration: Unlock the facts*' revealed that Indigenous Australians make up less than 3% of the population, but account for 27% of the adult prison population. Indigenous youth make up 55% of young people in detention.

The Art of Incarceration premiered at the Gold Coast Film Festival, and also screened at The Tasmanian Breath of Fresh Air Film Festival (BOFA) and Hawai'i International Film Festival (HIFF). The film is directed by Alex Siddons, written by Christopher Austin, Robby Wirramanda and Alex Siddons, and produced by Kylie Pascoe and Alex Siddons. The original score was created by Theo McMahon (Bundjalung).

Ends.

Duration: 78 minutes | <https://theartofincarceration.com/> | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#)

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Assets for download: [Key art](#) | [Production stills](#) | [Netflix trailer](#) | [Trailer thumbnail](#)

Netflix YouTube link - Embed code: `<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/nVnX7eROZ_M" frameborder="0" allow="accelerometer; autoplay; encrypted-media; gyroscope; picture-in-picture" allowfullscreen></iframe>`

NOTES TO EDITORS:

SYNOPSIS:

Seen through the eyes of Indigenous prisoners at Victoria's Fulham Correctional Centre, *The Art of Incarceration* explores how art and culture can empower First Nations people to transcend their unjust cycles of imprisonment. This narrative documentary both analyses and humanises the over representation of Indigenous Australians within the prison system, whilst seeking answers and striving toward solutions. From deep inside Victoria's Fulham Correctional Centre the artists complete their works whilst painting the audience a contemporary insight into the deeply ingrained incarceration epidemic of Australia's First Peoples. The film is an uncompromising insight into the inmate's quest for cultural identity and spiritual healing as they prepare for the annual Confined exhibition and life on the outside.

BIOS:

Alex Siddons, writer/director/producer: Alex Siddons is a Melbourne based writer, director and producer. He is a self-taught filmmaker who has been telling stories since the dawn of his existence, however most notably through his role as Head Producer at PLGRM Media. Alex's film works include *The Busker*, *The High School Lawyer* and *The Saints of St Kilda* -his controversial insight into the infamous Gatwick Hotel. His early works predominantly consisted of narrative driven documentary content and gained praise from the likes of The Guardian, The Huffington Post, the ABC and The Age. In 2016, Alex met indigenous artist Robby Wirramanda and a strong friendship was formed. After learning about the art in prison program, Alex left PLGRM and together with Christopher Austin - whom Alex met within the Indigenous unit of Fulham prison – the unlikely trio began a journey to document and tell the story of art inside one of Victoria's most notorious prisons. Today, Robby and Chris consider Alex as part of their family and this mutual love and respect is reflected in the film's journey

Uncle Jack Charles (Boonwurring Dja Dja Wurrung), narrator: Uncle Jack Charles is a national treasure, an award-winning actor, Aboriginal elder and activist. But in his 77 years he has also been homeless, a heroin addict, a thief and a regular in Victoria's prisons. A member of the Stolen Generation, Jack has spent his life in between acting gigs, caught in the addiction/crime/doing time cycle. Today—no longer caught in the cycle—he

lives to tell the extraordinary tale of his colourful life and brilliant career. “*Who would have thought we would survive to tell the story.*” -Jack Charles

Robby Wirramanda (Wergaia) - Robby Wirramanda represents his bloodlines in Wergaia, Wamba Wamba, Barapa Barapa, Wadi Wadi, Dhudhuroa and Nyeri Nyeri. He is a former champion fighter who reconnected with his passion for art during his 6 ½ year prison sentence for drug trafficking. Robby is a symbol of strength and hope to many inmates due to his success as an artist/singer/songwriter and his unrelenting dedication to culture, community and family.

Following the production of the film, Robby made global head-lines and coined the now famous #toostrongforyoukaren hash tag after an incident with a neighbour whilst he was painting in his garage went viral. Amidst all this, Robby continues to create and had his first solo exhibition at Melbourne’s prestigious Metro gallery in late 2020. Robby continues to emerge as a leader through his ongoing work on programs for Aboriginal justice and economic development. His latest project is the establishment of the WALPA WINAKA FOUNDATION for culturally appropriate alternatives to imprisonment for Indigenous Australians.

Christopher Austin (Gunditjmara Keeray-Woorroong): From being raised on a mission to being made award-of-the state and incarcerated from the age of 12 for being ‘uncontrollable’, the injustices of Australia’s colonial history are seen inextricably within Christopher’s narrative. Highly institutionalised at a young age, the longest Christopher spent outside prison as part of society was just 9 months. Through Christopher’s new direction as an artist and his desire to forge a lasting connection with his four-year old daughter, Christopher is attempting to break free from his 37-year cycle of incarceration. Christopher’s story of resilience and strength has inspired many and in a remarkable turn of events Christopher has now been granted unique access to work as an Indigenous mentor/art teacher back inside the Victorian prison system.

ABOUT ATHABASCA FILM

Athabasca Film distributes quality feature films across Australia; in cinemas, television, digital and home entertainment. Established as an independent entity in 2017, Athabasca Film is a joint venture between production company the Steve Jaggi Company and post production and digital marketing company Serve Chilled. As of July 2017, Athabasca Films has taken over all film distribution and marketing activities from its two parent companies. Recent releases include *This Little Love of Mine*, *Swimming for Gold*, *Kidnapped*, *Chocolate Oyster*, *Reaching Distance* and *The Marshes*. Athabasca Film is named after the famed Athabasca Glacier, located in Alberta, Canada.