

# MARSHALL ARTS

## David Gulpilil, AM

*Born 1953, Gulparil, near Ramingining, Northern Territory. Lives Darwin, N.T.*

David Gulpilil's full name is David Gulpilil Ridjimiraril Dalaithngu. Gulpilil is also spelt *Gulparil*, which is the name of his Country near Ramingining, central Arnhem Land, N.T.

When, as a seventeen year-old, David Gulpilil lit up the cinema screen in the film, *Walkabout*, he did more than play a role. The performance was so strong, so imbued with a new type of graceful naturalism, that it re-defined perceptions of Aboriginality, especially in the field of screen acting.

Over the next decade, David became the iconic Aboriginal actor of his generation, paving the way in the resurgence of the Australian film industry for more parts to be written for Aboriginal people, for more Aboriginal stories to be told. His charismatic, engaging and unforgettable performances in films like *Storm Boy* (1976, dir. Henri Safran), *The Last Wave* (1977, dir. Peter Weir) and *Crocodile Dundee* (1986, dir. Peter Faiman) helped bring Aboriginality into the mainstream of the screen arts.

In his later work, including *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002, dir. Philip Noyce), *The Tracker* (2002, dir. Rolf de Heer), *Australia* (2008, dir. Baz Luhrmann) and the soon to be released *Charlie's Country* (2013, dir. Rolf de Heer), Gulpilil has brought tremendous dignity to the depiction of what it is to be Aboriginal. Through his art he has brought an incalculable amount of self-esteem to his community.

Since the early 1970s, Gulpilil has earned more than 30 film credits, and performed alongside Dennis Hopper, Jack Thompson, Miles Davis, Nicole Kidman, Hugh Jackman, Kenneth Branagh, William Hurt, Richard Chamberlain, Guy Pearce, Paul Hogan, and Ernie Dingo, under acclaimed directors such as Peter Weir, Baz Luhrman, Philip Noyce, Wim Wenders and Rolf de Heer. In 2002, he was awarded Australian Film Industry Best Actor in a Leading Role for *The Tracker*. That same year, the AFI awarded his other film, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, Best Film.

Gulpilil is not just a screen actor, however. He was a peerless dancer, for a time perhaps the most renowned traditional dancer in this country. He has written the text for two volumes of children's stories based on his people's beliefs. He has performed a one-man autobiographical show to great acclaim on the stages of the Adelaide Festival of Arts and Sydney's Belvoir Street Theatre. And he paints, in his own distinct but traditionally evolved style, paintings which convey his reverence for the landscape, people and traditional culture of his homeland.

In 1987, Gulpilil was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for service to the arts through the interpretation of Aboriginal culture. His significant contribution to Australian cultural life was again acknowledged in 2001 when he was awarded the Centenary Medal for service to Australian society through dance and acting.

David Gulpilil is, above all, an artist.