

The Real Deal

WHAT THE MUSEUM SAYS OF NATHAN'S WORK: "NOT ONLY ARE THE

PHOTOGRAPHS STRIKING, THE CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION PROVIDED WILL BE

INVALUABLE TO THE RESEARCHERS WHO VISIT OUR COLLECTION."

As far as photo journalists go, Nathan Kelly has enjoyed an illustrious career rubbing shoulders with the who's who of the entertainment and political world, but it was his most recent achievement that has been the real icing on the cake.

WORDS BY TANYA BIRD

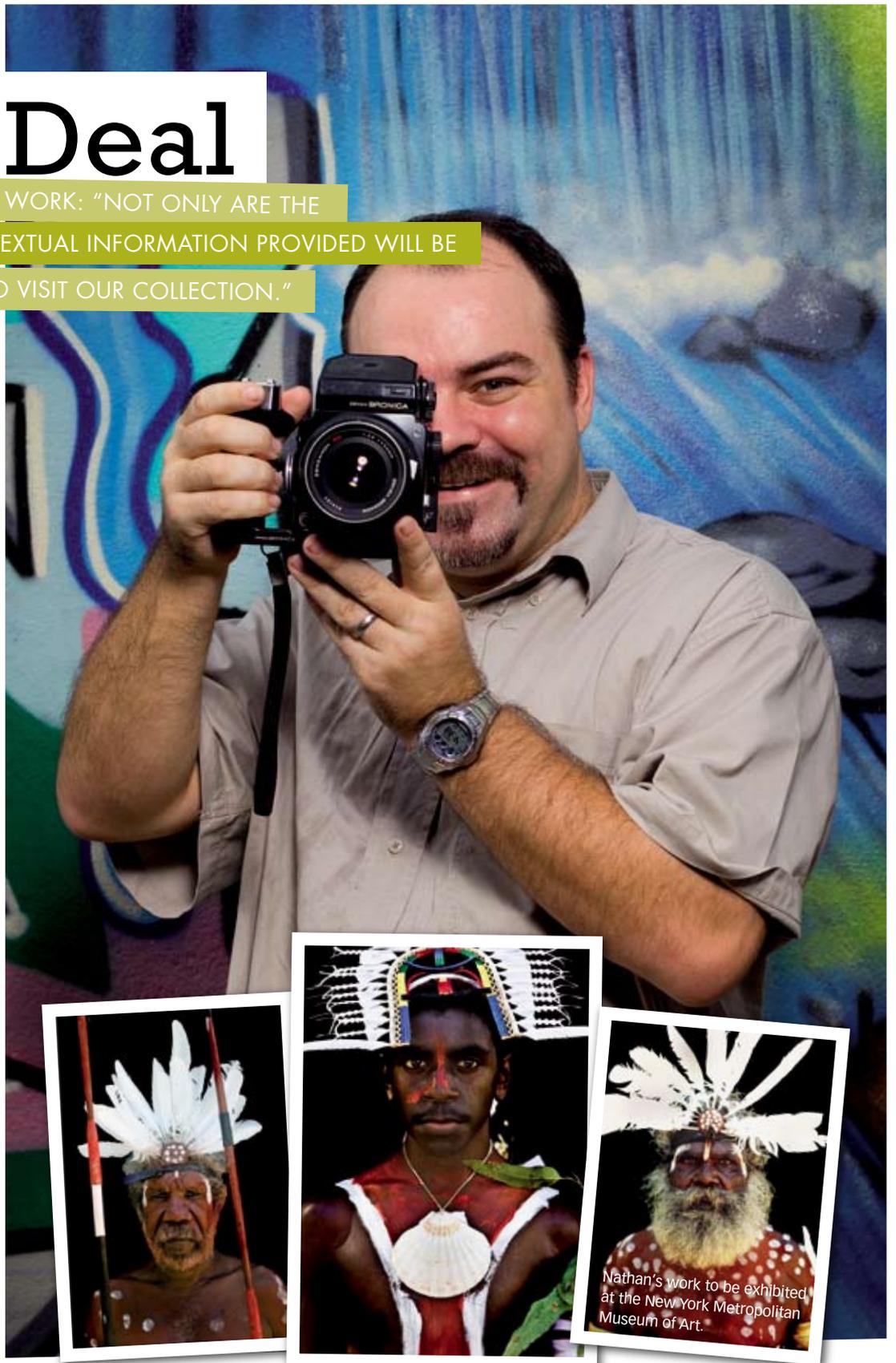
Photography by Andrew Watson

For Cairns-based photographer Nathan Kelly shooting international stars such as The Rolling Stones, Ray Charles, U2 and B B King is nothing compared to having his work sought by New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Considered one of the finest art museums in the world, its collections include more than two million works spanning five thousand years of world culture, from prehistory to the present and from every part of the globe. However, it was Nathan's photographs of four Australian indigenous dancers taken at the Laura Dance Festival in 2007 that had the curators wanting his work for perpetuity. "The inclusion of my work in such a prestigious institution is the realisation of a lifelong ambition and gives me a great sense of achievement both personally and professionally."

When Nathan first took the images, which were photographed on a black canvas background in the car park at the festival, he never envisioned the local and international interest they would receive. They were first exhibited at the Cairns Regional Gallery in 2008. "This makes me feel pretty good," he says with a smile. "It has really validated the eight hours driving to Laura and the untold hours later pulling it all together."

Nathan received his first big break in the industry when he met Nick Cave as a burgeoning



Nathan's work to be exhibited at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art.

photographer at the age of 16. Then at 25, he became the youngest photographer to be permanently exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra with his portrait of former prime minister Sir John Gorton. The portrait was part of a series of photos of Australians from the fields of politics, music, film and television that had become the subject of a book, *Collective Wisdom*, in which Nathan collaborated with his accountant brother.

"I had always done portraits of celebrities and I wanted to do something a little different and thought provoking," he goes on to explain. "I found Sir John Gorton's phone number in the White Pages, called him up and explained what I wanted to do. He was surprised I was interested in photographing him, after all I was not even alive

when he was prime minister," Nathan says. "It is sad but ironic for a photographer that the true value of a photograph is never realised until the subject is no longer there."

Nowadays Nathan works as the school art teacher at St Augustine's College, which he admits is somewhat quieter to the glamorous world of photography he moved in over the last 20 years, but nonetheless he enjoys inspiring another generation of would-be artists to take the leap of faith.

For now it appears life in the slow lane suits Nathan and his young family, but he is certainly not reminiscent about his achievements. He still works on many personal projects, runs a successful wedding photography business and sees his time in Cairns as a chance to grow, reflect and develop so he can be ready for his next big opportunity. **CL**