

My name is Nikita. I am a 24 year old woman originally from Perth, Western Australia but I moved to Melbourne at the age of 18 to study a Bachelor of Film and Television at Swinburne University. Film school was a transformative experience for me, I learnt so much and grew as a creative during my time there. Most importantly- the people I studied alongside have become some of my closest friends and I have continued to make films with them since graduating. These are people I am sure I will still know and be working with in years and years to come.

In my final year of education I made two short films: I produced a short documentary titled *Serial Pest*, and I wrote and directed a short drama titled *El Niño*. Over the course of a year I gave my all in to making these films, they both dealt with subjects I feel very passionately about. The following year the films started to show at festivals both nationally and internationally, picking up some awards along the way too. The year after I graduated I travelled to New York to conduct research on a feature film that my mother had written. During the month we were there I got to work alongside a family friend who is a documentary filmmaker. I helped him at his office by doing some research on a project on mass incarceration in the US that his production company was working on at the time.

Upon my arrival back in Australia I felt energized by my creative experience in the US but at the same time I felt confused and lost after graduating; there were many paths I could take in the next steps of my career in the film industry. I had always been interested in working in the art department as my mother worked as a set dresser for many years in the industry. Through her, I had been able to undertake a handful of internships on various tv shows, whilst studying. So, upon deciding that I would seek work in the art department, I started to compile a list of productions that were shooting that year and who to contact regarding work. I spent months going through this list, emailing people and asking for a job, not hearing back and then emailing again a few weeks later. All the while I was bartending and working for free/helping friends out on independent shoots, music videos, TVC's etc. I started back up an art practice and did an art residency at the Frankston Art Gallery. I dreamt of the day I would get a proper job on a film shoot.

Mid that year I received a call from a friend of a friend- the production he was working on (a the Dr. Blake telemovie) needed someone to replace their art department runner for the last 2 weeks of the shoot. I accepted the offer immediately and was thrown in-to the deep end on the job. It was terrifying at times, thrilling, exciting, laborious, challenging. But most of all, I felt entirely relieved to have finally landed a 'proper' job in the art department. This tiny little opportunity that was essentially handballed to me felt like the biggest step in the right direction. During these two weeks I was introduced to another young woman who was stepping up into a more senior role as the Standby Props person on a kids tv show called Mustangs. I was asked to be her assistant and we started shooting not long after that. This was my first real experience being on set, working long hours, dealing with actors, navigating the industry. I learnt so much in the three months of the shoot and by the end felt confident that I wanted to pursue a career in Standby Props.

After Mustangs, I got offered the job of a lifetime; on a feature film called Dirt Music, which was to shoot all up and down the coast of Western Australia. I wished so hard to be given the job and a month later found myself flying back home to Perth to start pre-production. The shoot itself was one of the most amazing experiences of my life and I have so many cherished memories from those 11 weeks. THIS is what it was all about. Filming in the most amazing, sacred, beautiful Australian locations, with a hard working Aussie crew and telling a uniquely Australian story by one of our most beloved authors, Tim Winton. I decided then and there that bringing Australian stories to life IN Australia is what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. Don't worry about Hollywood, Bollywood, the European industry- Australia is where it was at for me.

Since then I have crewed on a multitude of Victorian productions including *Hungry Ghosts*, *Five Bedrooms* and *Bloom*. I started working on the second series of Five Bedrooms late January this year. We were stood down due to Covid-19 come late March and by April it felt like it would be months and months before we ever got to step foot on a set again. We got word the other day that we would be starting back up the production by the end of this month. I have never felt more relieved and nervous in my life. More importantly though, I am now a proud MEAA union member and I am committed to bringing the issues facing our industry to attention.

The lack of support our industry has received throughout this crisis is terrifying.

To me, it feels like the government is giving us all a big finger and saying 'we don't need you', 'we can get our entertainment elsewhere, for less money'.

Well to that I say, never have I felt a stronger urge to see our stories, lives, experiences and people reflected on our screens. The apathy from the government towards our arts industry makes me angry- but it also makes me feel energized.

As explored by the MEAA Future of Australian Stories on Screens paper I believe that:

*“ Both broadcasters and digital platforms like Netflix and Stan should be required to produce Australian content, including scripted and documentary programs — they profit from Australian audiences, they should invest in Australian stories and jobs.*

*“ Tax incentives should be updated to become internationally competitive and applied equally across platforms, with additional support for culturally significant programming, like kids. Let's support content across platforms and bring more work to Australia.”*

And

*“Funding for public broadcasters and screen agencies should be increased so they can continue to invest in our industry, and support Australian jobs and storytelling.”*

This is my life. Our film and television industry is my life. I want the opportunity to tell my stories and bring them to Australian audiences.

I am the future of our industry and I would like to see myself having a fruitful career years down the track.

If the government doesn't support our industry it will die. Plain and simple. It will be like cutting off a main artery in a body of creativity, slowly but surely the body will stop functioning.

Culture is important. Art is important. Films are important. Crew are important. Australian stories are important.

Don't let us become un-important.