

Claudia's brush helps paint a future



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Claudia Moodoonuthi with her *Ms Rainbow 2012*, painted on a car bonnet, at Brisbane's Woolloongabba Art Gallery yesterday

SARAH ELKS

LOOKING at her bright and bold works now, it's difficult to believe that teenage artist Claudia Moodoonuthi picked up a paintbrush for the first time only two years ago.

The 17-year-old grew up on remote Bentinck Island, a tiny speck in far north Queensland's Gulf of Carpentaria, at the feet of her grandmother and the island's other "old ladies" — whose richly coloured paintings would later shoot to worldwide prominence.

But it was not on Bentinck or in the red dust of Cape York's Aurukun — where she lived for much of her later childhood — that her talent emerged. It was in the classroom of a private Brisbane girls' school, Clayfield College, on a



scholarship from the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, that Claudia the artist was born. "I never used to paint, until one day, I did," she told *The Weekend Australian*.

The foundation received a funding boost of \$12 million over four years under the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program in Tuesday's budget.

That was on top of an extra \$10m this year announced by School Education Minister Peter Garrett on Saturday.

The commitment is still well

short of the \$100m that chief executive Andrew Penfold wants to generate to educate an additional 5000 children over 20 years.

When the foundation began in 2008, it set a goal of raising \$40m to provide 2000 indigenous children with scholarships to top schools over 20 years. It reached the funding goal — with the help of an initial \$20m from the federal government — in 2011.

Claudia says she would not have picked up a paintbrush if it weren't for the AIEF. She said this week's funding commitment was "excellent" and that more indigenous students should "absolutely" receive a similar scholarship.

Claudia's artistic promise was recognised immediately at Clayfield College. Even her unfinished

work, using the "pretty colours" the Bentinck Island "old girls" specialised in, was sold from the school's art room when she left it lying around. Since then, her career has skyrocketed. Her first exhibition, at Brisbane's Woolloongabba Art Gallery earlier this year, was a near sellout.

Claudia graduated from high school last year and, with the support of the AIEF, has almost finished her first semester at Griffith University's Queensland College of Art contemporary indigenous art program.

She also plans to write and illustrate a children's book. "I can't picture what life would have been like without (the AIEF scholarship)," she said. "I don't think I'd be at Griffith. I wouldn't have started painting."