Now, more than a decade after his death, a scholarship in Jimmy Pike’s name is doing just that.

Eight people from communities across the state and from a range of culturally diverse backgrounds have taken part in a scholarship program that brings aspiring young Aboriginal artists to ECU to hone their skills.

The program, which is in its fifth year, is a collaboration between ECU’s Open Bite printmaking studio and the Jimmy Pike Trust, which funds the scholarship. It affords a rare opportunity for Indigenous artists to become part of the University and Mount Lawley communities.

Open Bite is a community-based program that gives local schools, community groups and graduates access to professional printmaking equipment and resources. Artists pay less than $20 an hour to use the workshop.

ECU’s Head of the School of Communications and Arts Professor Clive Barstow established Open Bite in 1998 and then implemented an Aboriginal arm to the program.

“From our perspective, to have Aboriginal artists working here is really special because we don’t have a lot of Indigenous students. So this is a way for us to bring people in but also for our students to work with people from quite different backgrounds and cultures,” Professor Barstow says.

“It works from a teacher-learning perspective and it works for them (the Aboriginal artists) in terms of access and ability to work with people that they wouldn’t normally get up in remote regions. It’s a two-way benefit.”

Indigenous artists spend at least two weeks at the university and hold an exhibition of their work before returning home.

One of the first Aboriginal artists to take advantage of the workshop facilities was Jimmy Pike.

Throughout his life, Mr Pike held exhibitions across the nation and the world, in places including China, Italy, the Philippines, Namibia and the United Kingdom.

In his will, Mr Pike, left all his future royalties with Desert Designs to promote Aboriginal art and culture. This legacy is supplemented from time to time by money from copyright and sales of his work.

“It’s enough money for the Trust to fly two artists down to Perth each year,” Professor Barstow says.

“Each year we’ve had artists from around the Kimberley come down to work with us and our students and to produce work, and then we exhibit that work.

“It gives them a chance to get into the art market in a way.”

Professor Barstow says one of the most important achievements of the program is that it gives artists confidence to go on and continue making works when they arrive back home.