



Water+wisdom Australia India installation image, by Mark Ashkanasy, 2017.

water+wisdom
Australia India

Curators: Suzanne Davies and Helen Rayment

RMIT Gallery
1 December 2017 – 10 March 2018

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Curators' statement



Water+Wisdom: Australia India looks at the importance of waterways in our everyday lives, and explores how visual artists, writers and film makers in both countries continue to tell the story of the stewardship of water through creative activities.

In 1999 the Australia-India Council supported an initiative that brought together two Australian indigenous artists Djambawa

Marawili and Liyawaday Wirrpanda and Indian artists Jangarh Singh Shyam and Lado Bai to create a collaborative artwork (image above). They began the painting at opposite ends of the large canvas creating a landscape of hills and forests inhabited by mythical animals.

As they approached the middle there was the question of how to conclude and they united on painting the river – confidently exploring each other's territory. The work poetically symbolises a shared recognition of relationship to land and shared knowledge of the importance of water.

In this exhibition more than 40 creative practitioners and researchers tell us stories about the importance of water in spirituality, economy, transport, diasporas and family; weaving connective threads of the rich cultural, ecological and economic flow of water now across two separate continents.

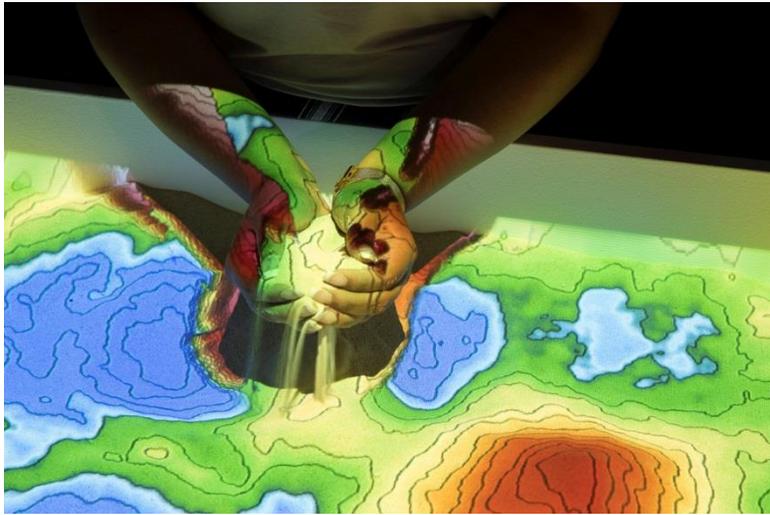
The safe, contemplative, questioning space of the gallery allows us explore the ramifications of poor water management and its' far reaching consequences. Some artists tell dramatic stories of river pollution and destruction. Others evoke a spiritual power. The message is we ignore the responsibility to the waterways at our peril. These poetic responses encourage reflection about our own relationships with the most precious resource we all share but not all equally; access to clean and plentiful water. The works of art attest to how much is currently at stake.

In shaping the exhibition, we have drawn on extensive research by experts from India and Australia to present various aspects of customary knowledge regarding water stewardship on both continents. In dialogue with trans-disciplinary water experts across RMIT University and industry including engineers and architects, the outcome has been multi-layered in approach and energetic in its outcomes. We thank our collaborators and the artists involved. Water is a political issue but the human connections to water across cultures is deeply visceral. In **Water+Wisdom: Australia India** we seek to provoke and reflect on the greatness of water in our lives to bring to the fore a focus for the future.

By Suzanne Davies and Helen Rayment

Water+wisdom Australia India installation image, by Mark Ashkanasy, 2017.

The river systems of India and Australia



Augmented reality sandbox, *Water+Wisdom: Australia India* by Mark Ashkanasy , 2017

Gondwana was an ancient supercontinent that once united Australia and India, as well as Antarctica, Africa, Madagascar, the Arabian Peninsula and South America.

Evidence for the existence of Gondwana includes the similarity of rocks and plant fossils on these now separate landmasses. The name Gondwana comes from an area in the former kingdom of the Gonds in central India, which has the characteristic geology. Biogeographers often refer to Gondwana to explain similarities in flora and fauna in disparate areas.

The earth's lithosphere is divided into plates. After the breakup of Gondwana over 100 million years ago, India and Australia drifted northwards, away from Antarctica. The Indian Plate collided with the Eurasian Plate to form the Himalayas, which include Mt Everest (elevation 8,848 m) and many peaks over 7,000 m.

Australia is comparatively flat; our highest peak, Mount Kosciuszko, is only 2,228 m. The rivers draining the Himalayas deliver large volumes of sediment, including source material for the Indo-Gangetic Plain.

The river systems of India and Australia share many common elements including natural extremes of floods and droughts. Both countries rely on their rivers for water supply, irrigation and hydropower, although India has a much larger population than Australia. Concerns have been expressed in both countries about human impacts on the river systems and competing demands for water resources. In 2009, Australia and India signed a Memorandum of Understanding to enhance cooperation on water management.

Dr Sandra Brizga

Director/Principal, Brizga Environmental, Member, Central Coastal Board

Member, Fraser Island World Heritage Area Scientific Advisory Committee

GALLERY 1 - LARGE, MAIN GALLERY



Judy WATSON (Waanyi)

Born Mundubbera, Queensland, Australia, lives Brisbane

sacred water, 2010

Pigment, pastel and acrylic on canvas

212 x 213 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Galleries, Brisbane

sacred water includes whirling marks that indicate springs bubbling out of the ground in the artist's Waanyi Country in North-West Queensland. The yellow, shield-like form echoes the reflection of the moon in water, or a long coolamon for collecting food.

Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill Gorge) is situated within the Barkly Tableland with an ancient, subterranean water basin. Water trickles up through fissures in the limestone, emerging as bubbles that break the skin of the water in the gorge and in the many creeks in this area.

The artist writes: "When I am immersed in water, I think more deeply, sounds are muffled and I am connected back to the wellspring of my ancestral Country. Water is the conduit for everything that I do; it brings life and is the precious jewel beneath the surface. It needs to be respected and cared for, not polluted and drained. It feeds the Country which replenishes our people."



Judy WATSON (Waanyi)

Born Mundubbera, Queensland, lives Brisbane

tenant creek, 1999

Blood wood gum on paper

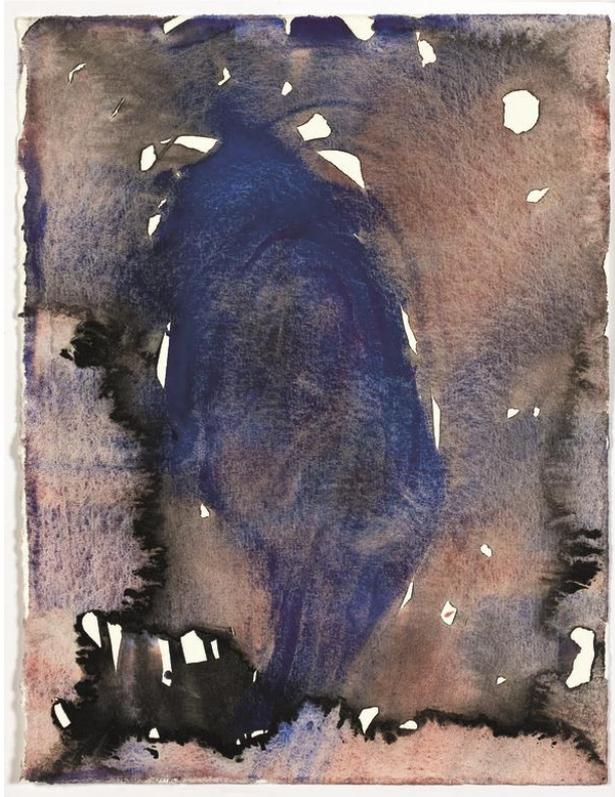
24 x 19 cm

Purchased through the RMIT Art Fund, 2013

RMIT University Art Collection

Accession no: RMIT.2012.41

This work was created by mixing local materials of bloodwood and other gums, collected from the bush and the riverside, to paint the work. By using these local materials, *tenant creek* is inherently connected with its place of creation. It was made at Tennant Creek, Northern Territory, during a residency program together with her mother, Joyce Watson.



Judy WATSON (Waanyi)

gorge drawing 7, 2001

Pigment on paper

20 x 19.5 cm

Purchased through the RMIT Art Fund, 2013

RMIT University Art Collection

Accession no: RMIT.2012.40

gorge drawing 7 was made in situ at Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill Gorge). The arch-like lines refer to the image of a rainbow which appears throughout the area. The rainbow is an indicator of the rainbow serpent Boodjamulla, giver of life and creator of the gorge topography. The artist's great-grandmother said about the springs at Lilydale "the rainbow dried it up"; in fact, a non-Aboriginal man used dynamite to try to make the springs flow more profusely, which was detrimental to the water supply and to the integrity of this very important site.



Wanyubi MARIKA (Rirratjingu)

Born Yirrkala, Northern Territory, Australia

Three Waters, 2013

Natural pigments on bark

181 x 59 cm

Purchased through the RMIT Art Fund, 2013

RMIT University Art Collection

Accession no: RMIT.2013.36

This work combines the designs of three separate waters belonging to the artist's Rirratjingu clan. At the top of the painting is Muwalangal; a protected bay of saltwater below Cape Arnhem that is separated from the open sea by bush land and the highest sand dunes in the Northern Territory.

In the middle of the painting is the area Rulyapa; a rocky escarpment leading to the sea known as Galariya by the Rirratjingu people, and the island Dhambaliya (Bremer Island). These locations are important sites influenced by Djambawal the Thunder Man and Daymirri the Ancestral Whale, Dolphin and the Turtle Hunters. These Ancestral Hunters are manifest as rock near Galariya. The people today use these rocks as a wishing place; fishermen cover them with offerings to anticipate a good catch.

The water mingling with Rulyapa is a current known as Molmulpa that runs between Cape Wilberforce and ends at the island Yilipawuy. This water is the foam of honey, a reference to the union of the Dhawa clans around the actions of the Wuyal Ancestral Honey Hunter.



Yulyurlu Lorna Fencer NAPURRULA (Warlpiri/Ngaliya)

Born Yumurrpa country, Northern Territory, Australia

Water Dreaming, 1998

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas

80 x 50cm

Courtesy of the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory

Photo: Mark Ashkanasy, RMIT Gallery, 2017.

Napurrula is custodian for the sacred country of Yumurrpa, and for the Yarla-Pama (Caterpillar), Ngarlajiyi (Pencil Yam) and Yarla (Bush Potato) Dreamings of this site. She also has ancestral rights over Seed, Bush Tomato, Kangaroo Tucker, Bush Raisin, Water, Snake and Bush Plum Dreamings for the NapurrulaJapurrula, and Jakamarra-Nakamarra skin groups. This painting shows the Water Dreaming of Yumurrpa Country. Yumurrpa Country has underground water sources; Napurrula depicts the underground water systems used to drink underground water, known as sweet water.



Sandra AITKEN (Gunditjmara)

Born Victoria, Australia, lives South West Victoria

Eel Trap, 2013

Plastic hay bale twine

33.5 x 85.5 x 38.7 cm

Koorie Heritage Trust Collection

The Indigenous art of basket weaving was passed down to me through generations of my ancestors. I was taught and shown by my father's sister Auntie Connie Hart, who was a highly regarded Gunditjmara weaver and Community Elder. I found that weaving and making baskets with groups of people breaks down barriers, we enjoy each other's company and stories as we weave.

-Sandra Aitken



***Water+wisdom Australia India* installation image, by Mark Ashkanasy, 2017.**

Djambawa MARAWILLI (YoIngu), Liyawaday WIRRPANDA (Dhudi Djapu), Jangarh Singh SHYAM (Pardhan Gond) & Lado BAI (Bhil)

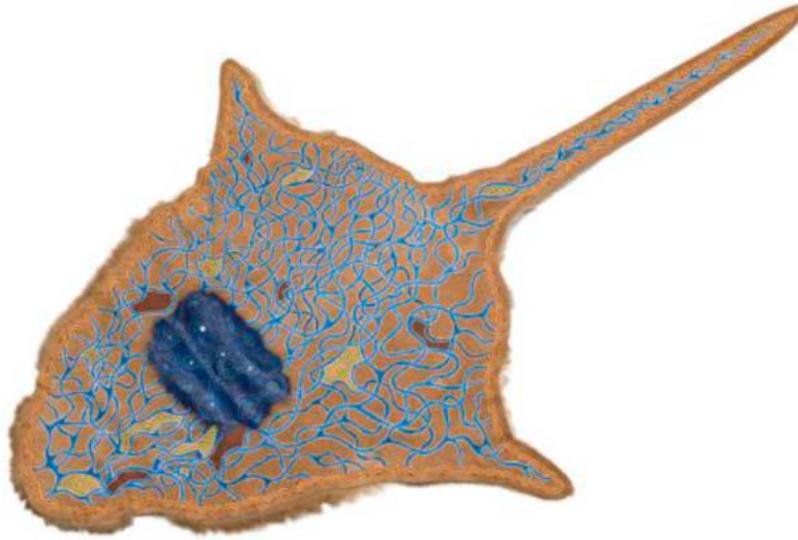
A collaborative painting by Australian and Indian indigenous artists, New Delhi, 1999

Acrylic on canvas

182 x 500 cm

Collection of the Crafts Museum, New Delhi

In 1999 the Australia-India Council in conjunction with the Crafts Museum, New Delhi brought together two esteemed Australian indigenous artists: and two equally revered Indian artists Jangarh Singh Shyam and Lado Bai to create a collaborative work of art. The artists began the painting at opposite ends of the large canvas creating a landscape of hills and forests inhabited by mythical animals. As they approached the middle there was the question of how to conclude and they united on painting the river. This work signifies an intense engagement with landscapes, waterways and the wildlife that inhabits them; suggesting a similar connection to one's local environment between all the artists.



Mandy NICHOLSON (Wurundjeri)

Born Victoria, Australia, lives Victoria, Australia

Map of Port Philip Bay (on kangaroo skin), c. 2000

Kangaroo skin, paint

128 x 80 cm

Courtesy of the Koorie Heritage Trust Collection

This is a map of Port Philip Bay and all the rivers that flow into it. The Southern Cross represents the Kulin Nation. The swirling motion of water in Birrarung (the Yarra River) travels to Port Philip Bay in the centre. The five circular shapes represent the five clans of the Kulin Nation: Dja Dja Wurrung, Boon warring, Taun warring, Woi warring and Watha warring. The border represents the land of mountains and valleys around Birrarung and the connection animal, land and water.



***Water+wisdom Australia India* installation image, Mark Ashkanasy, 2017**

Photographs and artworks in the exhibition highlight the important role of dingoes in Aboriginal culture particularly as water diviners. This is based on the research by Dr Justine Philip, who has a PhD in ecosystem management, focusing on the Australian dingo in environmental history and cultural heritage.

Dr Philip is interested in human–animal interactions in Australian and New Zealand history and heritage, and collates archival, narrative and visual sources that examine Indigenous ecological knowledge systems and colonial history. She also has a Bachelor of Science in Scientific Photography (RMIT), and two of her photographs are featured in the exhibition.

In her article on this fascinating subject in *The Conversation*, Dr Philip writes: "The dingo's ability to locate water above and below ground was perhaps its most indispensable skill. Written records, artworks and photographs in museum archives reveal dingo water knowledge as recorded by European explorers. Records reveal a number of accounts of wild/semi-wild dingoes leading Europeans to lifesaving water springs."

"In Australian cartography, a "Dingo Soak" refers to a waterhole dug by a mythical or live canine. There are other freshwater landmarks across the continent – "Dingo Springs", "Dingo Rock", "Dingo Gap".

"In Aboriginal mythology, the travels of ancestral dingoes map out songlines, graphemic maps tracing pathways across the continent from one water source to the next. Their stories tell of the formation of mountains, waterholes and star constellations. In some accounts, dingoes emerged from the ground as rainbows; in others they dug the waterholes and made waterfalls as they travelled through the landscape."



Paddy BEDFORD (Gija)

Born Kimberley, Australia

Dingo Springs, 2004

Ochre on canvas

180 x 150cm

Private Collection, Melbourne

Courtesy of William Mora Galleries, Melbourne

Paddy Bedford's work features Dingo Dreaming, tracing sacred water sites within his traditional lands of the Eastern Kimberley. The waterhole, the Dingo Dreaming site is represented in the painting by the circle on the left hand side.

No image available

Donald THOMSON

Born Melbourne 1901 Died Melbourne 1970

Burrnilakili's husband with young dingo, Tjirmango (Echidna), in Arnhem Land), 1936

Photograph printed from glass plate negative

40 x 50 cm

Courtesy of the Thomson family and Museum Victoria

Anthropologist and biologist Donald Thomson lived with the Yolngu People of Arnhem Land in the 1930s, and recorded many photographic and written accounts of the close relationship between the Aboriginal people and dingoes.

No image available

Donald THOMSON

Born Melbourne 1901 Died Melbourne 1970

Burrnilakili with young dingo, Tjirmango (Echidna), in Arnhem Land, 1936

Photograph printed from glass plate negative

40 x 50 cm

Courtesy of the Thomson family and Museum Victoria

Thomson's photographs and notes from Arnhem Land and central Australia record beneficial encounters between dingoes and humans. Aboriginal women traditionally raised the pups in the camps, and on reaching maturity, the dingoes returned to the wild to breed. Themes emerge of dingo knowledge with regard to land, fire and water.

No image available

Herbert BASEDOW

Born Kent Town, South Australia, 1881-1933

Wongapitcha women carrying dogs which they hold across their backs to enjoy the warmth of the animals' bodies, Central Australia, 1924

Photograph printed from glass plate negative

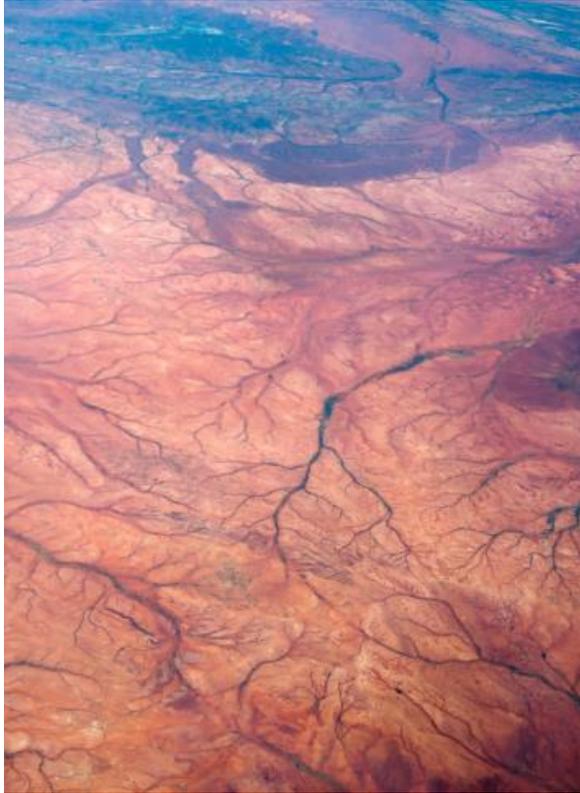
50 x 40 cm

Courtesy of the NMG Macintosh collection

JL Shellshear Museum, University of Sydney

The photographs of medical doctor and explorer Herbert Basedow provide insight into the close relationships between Aboriginal people, birds and animals. This photograph reveals the partnership between dingoes, women and children in traditional Aboriginal society.

Dingoes, carried like garments of clothing, and are believed to have greatly extended women's contribution to the traditional economy and food supply. They were highly valued for their water knowledge, navigation, as a hunting aid and living blanket.



Justine PHILIP

Born Matamata New Zealand, lives Melbourne

Pilbara from the air, 2017

Photograph

60.5 x 44.0 cm

Courtesy of the artist and AMRRIC

This photograph illustrates waterholes and underground water sources in the central Pilbara region as seen from the sky. Well 35 on the Canning Stock Route is called Jarntu, the Martu name for dingo. This is the site of the ancestral mother dingo, a sacred site with healing powers. Jarntu's pups live in the rock holes and soaks surrounding the area, linked by a series of underground tunnels. Martu film maker Morika Biljabu says "Jarntu is like the veins of the body."



Justine PHILIP

Born Matamata New Zealand, lives Melbourne

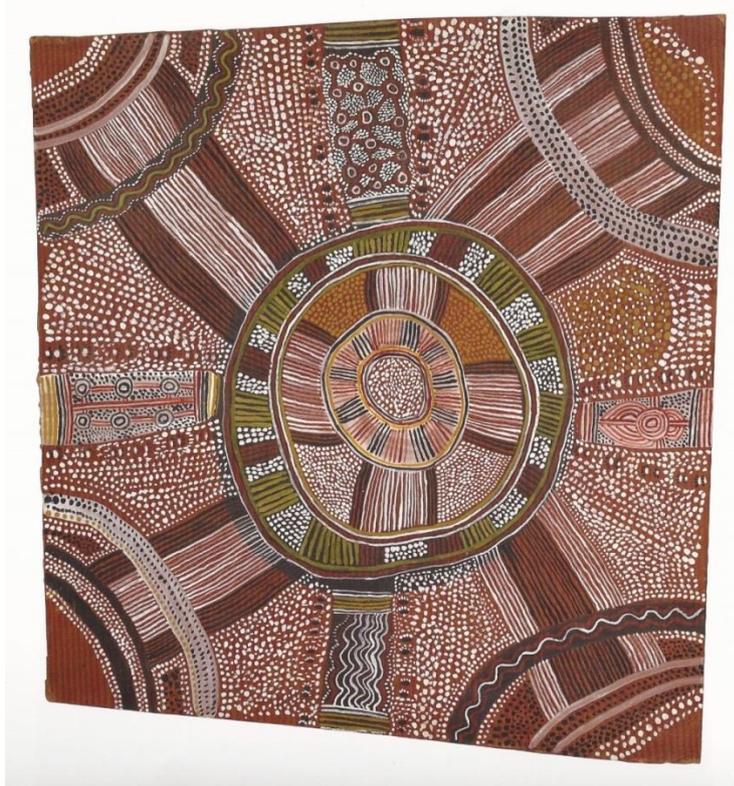
Young dingo in the Pilbara desert, 2017

Digital photograph

39 x 59.5 cm

Courtesy of the artist and AMRRIC

This photograph depicts a dingo near the outskirts of Punmu Community, one of Australia's most remote communities in the Karlamilyi National Park, Western Australia. The area is rich in dingo history with 19 permanent springs, known as jila by the Martu people. This is the heart of desert country.



Shorty Lungkata TJUNGURRAYI (Pintupi)

Born Walukuritji, Northern Territory, Australia

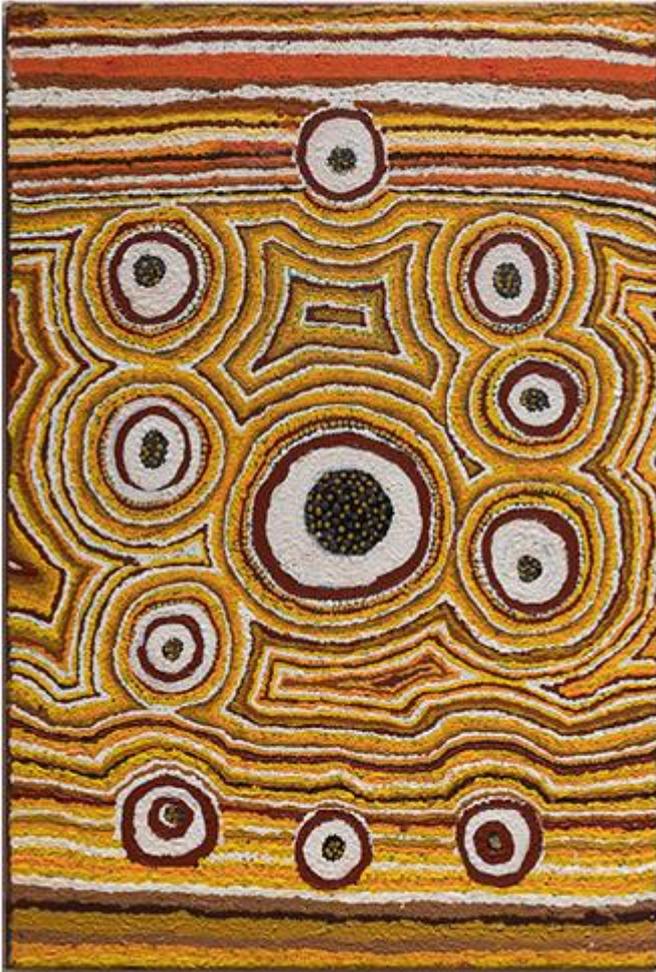
Dingo Dreaming, 1972

Synthetic polymer paint on composition board

56 x 53 cm

Private Collection, Melbourne

Through the act of painting, Shorty Lungkata was also dancing and singing and embodying his spiritual identity in the land. The reiterative circles, compulsive stippling, rhythmical mark-making and linear patterning of his paintings on board suggest the kinetic dance movements and percussive rhythms of ceremony.



Wendy WISE (Walmajarri/Nakarra/Mulan)

Born Kurungal, Western Australia, Australia

Walkali, 2002

Acrylic on canvas

75 x 50 cm

Private collection, Melbourne

Courtesy of Hydronumerics

Photo: Mark Ashkanasy, RMIT Gallery, 2017.

The artist painted country close to Lake Gregory or Paruku. The circular design represents the winds that are the Tjukurrpa (the Dreaming). The winds come in the form of willy willys which travel across Walkali. The surrounding country is marked by sand dunes as seen by the yellow and orange lines in the painting.



Clare ARNI

Born United Kingdom, lives in Bangalore

Digital archival prints

40.6 x 50.8 cm and 50.8 x 40.6 cm

Courtesy of the artist

Kumbh Mela, 2013

From the artist's *Kumbh Mela* series

Thirty million people gather by the Ganga, near the city of Allahabad. This is the most auspicious day for 144 years. The Maha Kumbh Mela sees the largest congregation of humanity on earth gather to renew their lives as they dive down beneath the water. They believe that, in addition to the two rivers that meet here, the Ganga and the Yamuna, there is a third, the Saraswati. Lost now, the river is a figment of myth and legends, but the belief is strong that the mingling of three waters has an e

Sundarbans, 2015 – 2016

From the artist's *Sundarbans* series

In the islands of the Sundarbans, lost in the vast muddy estuary of the Ganga, the presence of the river offers such rich textures that they confer an elusive beauty to the trials of life on the margins. The power of the river over the ephemeral land places everything in motion and in tension, and an individual is thus poised against incomprehensibly powerful forces of natural change, that must be feared and propitiated in these every day rituals of survival. special spiritual power in cleansing and removing sins.

Varanasi, River Ganga, 2013

From the artist's *Varanasi* series

The River Ganga shapes Varanasi, a city of pilgrims who are drawn to these most sacred of shores to bathe in the river that has the power to purify and wash away all sins.



Bhavani GS

Born India, lives Bangalore

Journey to the River Cauvery, 2012

Single channel video

Duration: 24:55 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

This film follows the journey taken by the River Cauvery to reach the Bay of Bengal. The artist travels alongside the river, following its flow and passing through spaces of worship, areas of contamination, ritualistic bathing, washing and other human activity connected to the river. In India, most of the rivers are named after women, referred to as *she* and worshipped. In Kodagu, where the river originates and where the artist was born, the River Cauvery is known as *Kuladevatha*, the family deity.



Ravi AGARWAL

Born India

The Sewage Pond's Memoir, 2013

Single channel video

Duration: 06:30 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

The forest of the Delhi Ridge marks the end of the Aravalli Range, the billion-and-a-half-year-old mountain chain that extends along the western coast of India. For more than a thousand years, its water and cover have provided ecological security for the many cities of Delhi that have arisen. Although parts of the forest are now legally protected, it is constantly being degraded; as the growing cities approach, dumping sewage, waste, and erecting illegal constructions. Sewage is measured in both its litres and water quality. When sewage does not flow in its desired course, it overflows into the forest, which becomes a marker of Delhi's dysfunctional water and waste systems.



Glenda NICHOLLS (Waddi Waddi/Yorta Yorta/Ngarrindjeri)

Born Wemba Wemba country, Victoria, Australia

Miloo (Blue Net), 2015

Jute string and dye

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

Photo: Mark Ashkanasy, RMIT Gallery, 2017.

Glenda's practice in crafting nets started as a result of seeing ancestors in a vision and has inspired an on-going creative journey around river life. Weaving demonstrate a continuous and evolving link with techniques passed down through generations of Aboriginal women living in and around South-East Australian waterways. While drawn from functional design, the objects are imbued with a deep cultural significance beyond the practical, weaving a connection across the generations of women still living on river country.



Connie HART (Gunditjmara)

Born Little Dunmore, Victoria, Australia

Eel Trap, 1987

Natural fibres

34 x 93.5 x 38 cm

Koorie Heritage Trust Collection

Photo: Mark Ashkanasy, RMIT Gallery, 2017.

Eel Trap, 1991

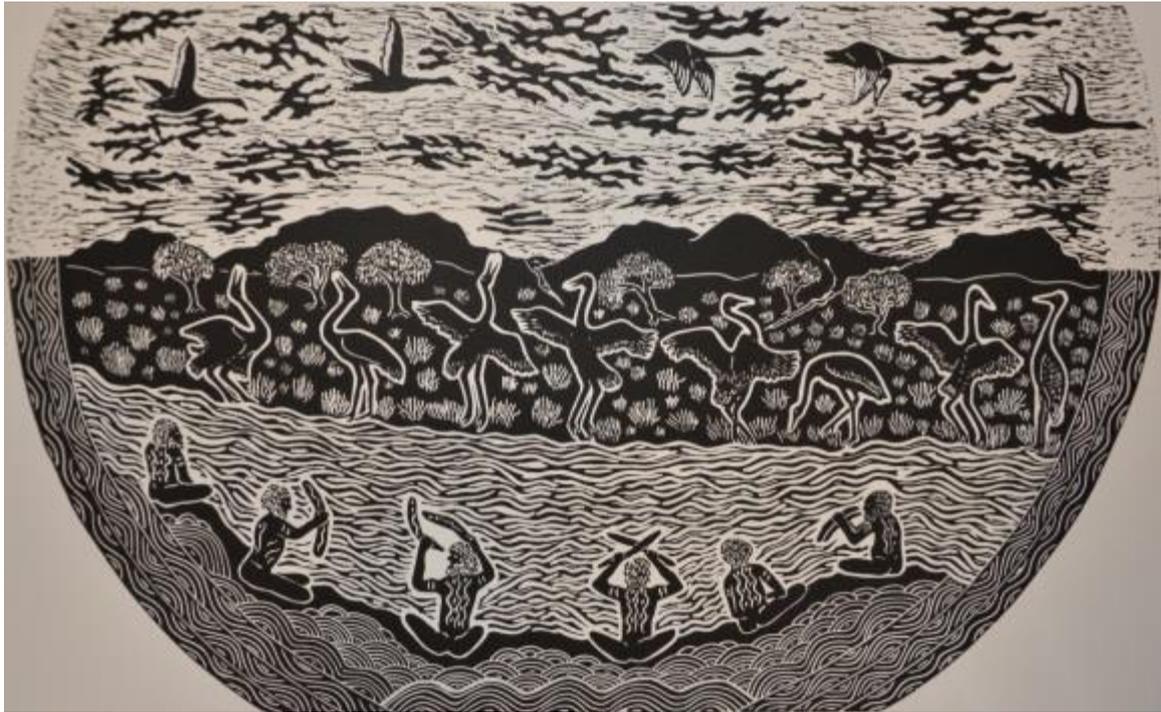
Reeds

29.2 x 92.5 x 35 cm

Koorie Heritage Trust Collection

Photo: Mark Ashkanasy, RMIT Gallery, 2017.

These eel traps were woven by master weaver and Gunditjmara artist, Aunty Connie Hart. Connie learnt her weaving technique in secret by watching her mother and other women making baskets with collected puung'ort grasses while she was growing up at Lake Condah Aboriginal Mission.



Badger BATES (Paakantji)

Born Wilcannia, NSW, lives Broken Hill, NSW

Warrego-Darling Junction, Toorale, 2012

Linocut

56 x 75.5 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery

The men are singing and the brolgas dancing near the swamps along the Warrego on Toorale. The brolgas are my ancestors. The Toorale hills in the background are very important as they are covered in silcrete and chert which was quarried and made into stone tools that were traded along the Darling River and out into the back country. The Warrego cuts through the hills making deep waterholes and a "choke" where the floodwaters banked up and spilled out onto the western floodplain, which is where the brolgas gather and dance even today. -Badger Bates



Badger BATES (Paakantji)

Born Wilcannia, lives Broken Hill, New South Wales

Mission Mob, Bend Mob Wilcannia 1950s, 2009

Linocut print

57.5 X 90.7 cm

Courtesy the artist and Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery

This linocut print shows how the river bend to the east of Wilcannia looked in the 1950s. The Mission Houses are neatly lined up, all the same with their toilets and showers out the back. The Mission School is beside the Mission, all the Mission kids and the River Bend kids went to school there. Some of the families still lived on the river bank like they always had, in tin huts and tents. I lived with my grandmother, grandfather, mother, and my older brother in the two tin huts on the right hand side of the picture near the *Ngatyi* (Rainbow Serpents or Water Snakes) head. Old Grandfather Jack Smith lived in the second hut. To the south of us is the One Mile Billabong where we used to catch yabbies, turtles, shrimp, mussels and fish. To the north of us was the tin hut of Cousin Sonny and Cousin Amy Quayle and their family. To the north of the Quayles is the White Sandhill, it was a special place that belongs to *pytyuka* the moon. We used to meet the Mission kids there to play, but we were told not to go there after dark as it is a burial place.

-Badger Bates



Jennifer MULLETT (Gunai/Kurnai/Monero/Ngarigo)

Born Victoria, Australia

The Great Gunai Fisherman, c.1990s

Lithograph

36.6 x 43.5cm

Koorie Heritage Trust Collection

Jenny's people are of the Gunai/Kurnai, Bidawal and Ngarigo (Monaro) peoples of North-eastern Victoria and South-eastern New South Wales. Jenny's Gunai paternal line is one of many generations of artifact makers that include Jenny's father Albert Mullett, a well-known and knowledgeable local Elder. Jenny has a Bachelor of Arts from Monash University, has shown in over forty exhibitions from Gippsland to Japan and has works in the collections of the National Gallery of Victoria as well as several other public and private collections. She favours a unique, contemporary abstract style strongly grounded in a rich Aboriginal culture.

- East Gippsland Aboriginal Arts Corporation



Artist Unknown (European)

Night Fishing, 1864

Original chromolithograph

45.7 x 49.1 cm

Koorie Heritage Trust Collection

This image was published in *The Australian Sketchbook*, by S. T. Gill in 1864. The text accompanying this image 'Night Fishing, Old times in the Bush of Australia' by James Kirby is reproduced below:

[They] used to catch fish in the river with line and hook, but in the lagoon they used to spear them. Their hooks were made of two teeth of a kangaroo tied together in the form of the letter V, one tooth somewhat longer than the other. Where the teeth were joined they tied them together string of their own manufacture and glue or gummed them over with a hard substance like gum that they got out of the box trees. These hooks did not answer very well for often the fish would slip off before they could land him. Their lines were made from the fibres of the bulrush, or *compung*. They did not use fishing lines in the lagoons; their mode of catching fish was by spear and canoe. The canoes were made from the bark of gum trees... [Some canoes] would carry eight persons across the Murray; but the majority would only carry two or three people. The spears used for catching fish were unlike those used for war or hunting purposes; inasmuch as they had three prongs very sharp and strong at the end, and these prongs were about four inches long.



Fishtrap at Culpra Station: A Barkandji Story of landscape
Digital photographs

This project is a collaboration between Sophia Pearce, a Barkandji woman, member of the Culpra Milli Aboriginal Corporation and Doctoral candidate in Anthropology at La Trobe University and Jock Gilbert, a landscape architect and academic at RMIT University.

The Culpra Station fishtrap is one of two fishtraps in the area made by Sophia's ancestors. This fish trap is part of the on-going Story handed down from Sophia's ancestors which is told here by Sophia:

Once Nhuralli made the riverbed when the earth was soft and new. During times when the river was low, our old people were able to make the stones for clan members to make the trap after watching the way the river water flows always on bends in the river. Each clan member participated in making the pool for old man Manalla the monster cod to have a rest in the gentle backwaters.

My father, Uncle Barry Pearce, and Uncle Jumbo Pearce have knowledge of these traps handed down from Great Grandfather Pearce. We still fish at this spot and there awaits a good catch of black brim and cod. Manipulated flows and high carp numbers are destroying the banks and disturbing the rocks, a situation which worries our people greatly.

- Sophia Pearce



Henry KING

Born United Kingdom

Aboriginal Fisheries, 1880-1900

Photograph printed from glass plate negatives

50.8 x 60.9 cm

Unattributed artist

Aboriginal Fisheries, 1880-1900

Photograph printed from glass plate negatives

50.8 x 60.9 cm

Courtesy of the Museum of Applied Arts and Science, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney

The Ngemba, Wonkamurra, Wailwan and Gomolaroi people who live in the Brewarrina region of NSW are custodians of an intricate series of stone fish traps across the Barwon River. It is believed that they have shared and maintained the traps for thousands of years.

The traps form a complex net of linked weirs and ponds along 500 meters of the river. They operate at varying water heights and can be altered to suit seasonal changes. People use their expert knowledge of fish species and the environment to maximise their catch.

Baiame, an ancestral being, threw his net across the Barwon, thereby creating their design. Along with his sons Boomooma-nowi and Ghinda-inda-mui, they built the traps using dug up stones and boulders, then allocated the traps to different family groups, making them responsible for their use and maintenance.



In a display case, there is a collection of photographs, maps and diagrams that illustrate the sophistication of ancient eel traps in south-west Victoria by the Guditjmara people. Known as Budj Bim, the site received national heritage listing in 2004.

The river runs right through the Budj Bim lava flow, and according to Traditional Owner Denis Rose, means ‘always there’ – the water is always there. Denis says that this creek and its permanent water source provided the perfect scenario for the Gunditjmara people to thrive and settle the area; the constant flow of the river provided varieties of fish, birds and wildlife who would drink there, so the Gunditjmara people didn’t have to roam, had plentiful supplies of nourishment and could therefore focus their attention on the industry of building stone houses and engineering the extensive fish traps, thereby developing their system of smoking the eels and trading them.

In the photographs displayed you can see the basalt rocks that have been split using fire and impact, these are placed into trenches that converge down to a narrow point – that is where the eel baskets were placed. Beyond that point the water and smaller eels continued on to a pooling area where they could grow – that pooling area again would be connected to traps further downstream.

With thanks to Bruce Partland, RMIT University and the Gunditjmara Traditional Owners, through the Gunditj Mirring Aboriginal Corporation, and the local Co-op, Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation, kindly gave permission to use these images and materials to illustrate their traditional resource exploitation techniques.

RMIT fully acknowledges the ownership of Traditional Knowledge and techniques, as displayed here, by the Gunditjmara people.

We also acknowledge important research undertaken by: P.J.F. Coutts, R.K. Frank & P. Hughes of the Victorian Archaeological Survey, and Dr Ian McNiven, School of Geography and Environmental Science, Monash University, which has aided understanding of the eel trapping complexes in Gunditjmara Country.



Vicki COUZENS (Kirrae Wurrong & Gunditjamara) & Carmel WALLACE

Kurtonitj, 2007

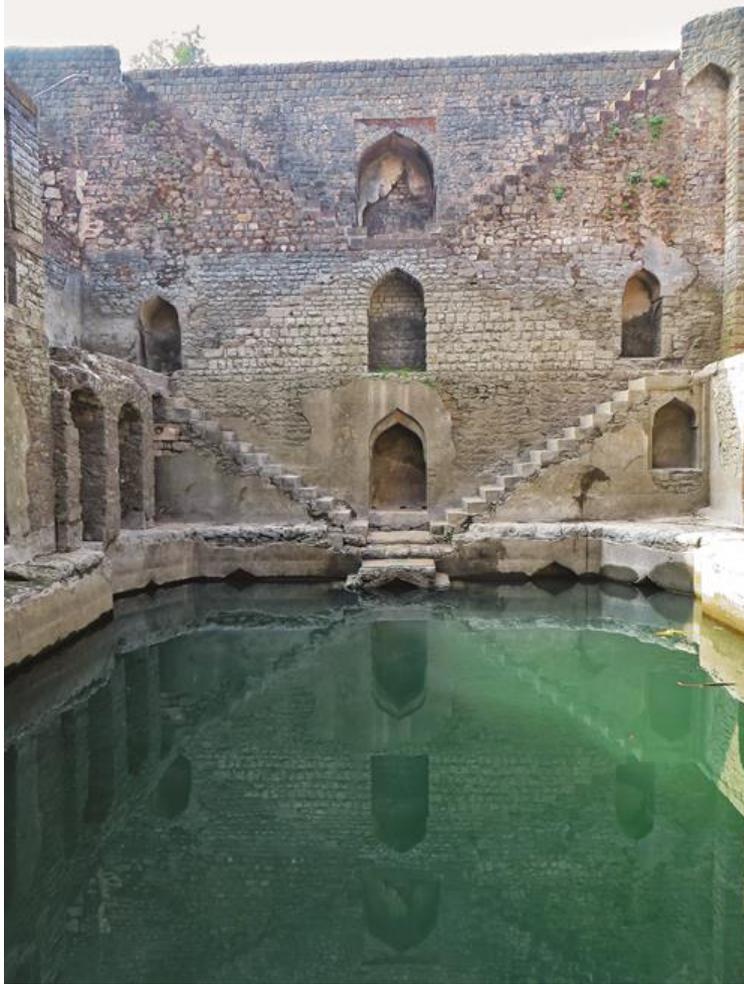
Outdoor stone sculpture

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artists and Regional Arts Victoria

Photographs by Bindi COLE CHOCCA (Wadawurrung)

Located on a site important to both indigenous and European traditions, *Kurtonitj* is a cross cultural project between two south-west Victorian artists and the Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation. The impressive permanent structure references Indigenous and European uses of water. It pays tribute to traditional Aboriginal drystone work, and the European use of drystone walls to create boundaries on agricultural land. *Kurtonitj*, as part of the Fresh and Salty Project as supported by Regional Arts Victoria, has become an important part of the local landscape due to its emphasis towards the importance of this cultural heritage area.



Victoria LAUTMAN

Lives Chicago, United States of America

A series of photographs from journalist Victoria Lautman's book *The Vanishing Stepwells of India* provides an insight into the remarkable subterranean structures that not only provided communities with water all year long, but also served as civic centres, refuges, remote oases and, in many cases, active places of worship. Besides their many functions, stepwells were marvels of engineering, architecture, and art.

Ujala Baoli, Mandu, Madhya Pradesh, 2014

Digital photograph

76 x 60 cm

Courtesy of the artist

Ujala Baolo was built in the sprawling fort of Mandu, where many water structures were required to withstand years of sieges.

GALLERY 4 – LONG, DARK SPACE OFF GALLERY 1



N'Ahweet Carolyn Briggs, Photo by Evelyn Tsitas.

People of the River, 2017

Documentary film (still)

Duration: 21 minutes

Coordination: Evelyn Tsitas

Cinematography: Timothy Arch

Editing: Karen McPherson

Produced by Arch Creative

Speakers; N'Ahweet Carolyn Briggs, Indigenous language specialist and Boonwurrung Elder and Aunty Di Kerr, Wurundjeri Elder

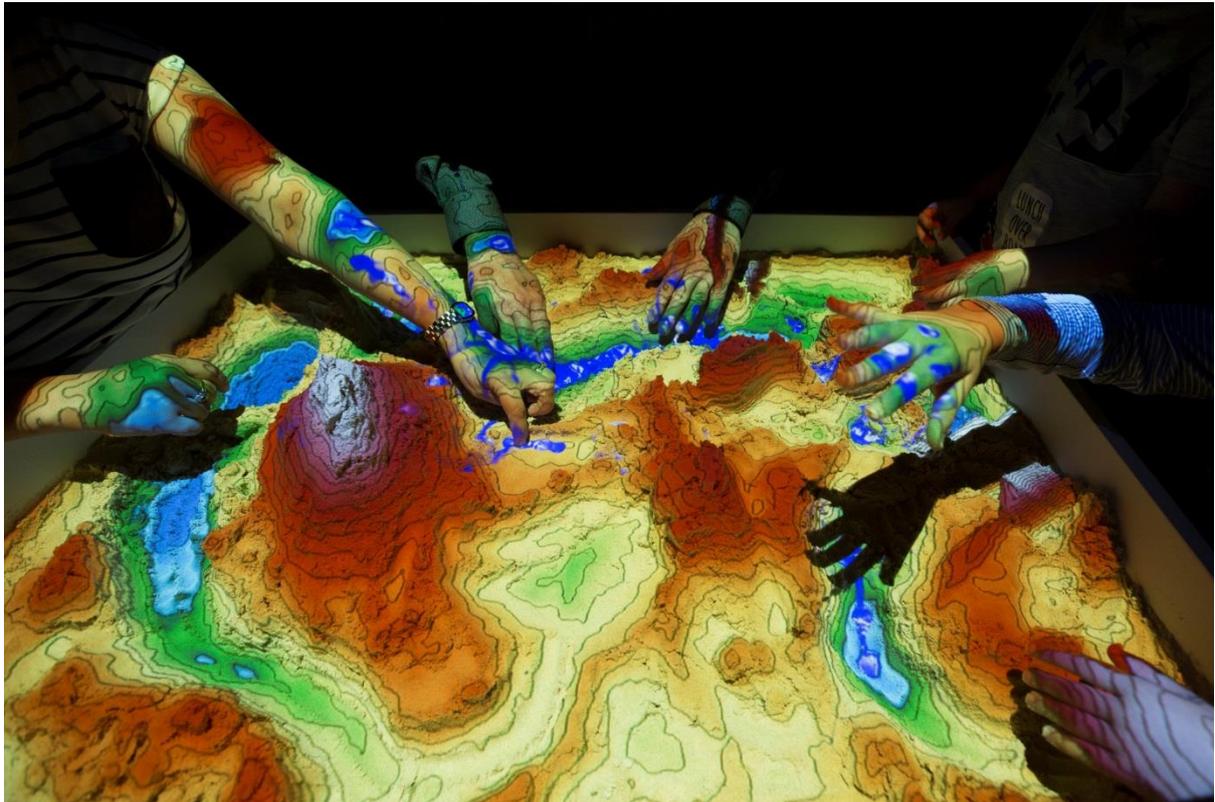
Additional images: State Library of Victoria Digital Collection Archive; Bruce Partland, RMIT, Gunditj Mirring Aboriginal Corporation and Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation.

People of the River is a specially commissioned documentary in which Elders N'Ahweet Carolyn Briggs and Aunty Di Kerr share their traditional knowledge of the Victorian waterways.

The largest wetland in Australia

"Melbourne as we know it, Barunga, the country, was the largest wetland in Australia. The story of the rivers is one of the continual journey cycle of our food sources and our connection to place. When the watercourses were changed there were blockages and it had an impact on hunting, and people were pushed further away from their natural food sources like fowls and eels. We have got to understand how the billabongs and the lagoons are all connected up with the waterways of the major water that we know as the Yarra or Birrarung. That's why you've got the floodings every now and again. The river is trying to find its way back. Water will always reclaim itself and remind us. Man can't keep changing her direction."

N'Ahweet Carolyn Briggs



Augmented Reality (AR) Sandbox

The augmented reality (AR) sandbox allows users to create topography models by shaping real sand, which is then augmented in real time by an elevation colour map, topographic contour lines, and simulated water.

Developed by the UC Davis' W.M. Keck Centre for Active Visualisation in the Earth Sciences, the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Centre, Lawrence Hall of Science, and ECHO Lake Aquarium and Science Centre

Coordination for RMIT Gallery: Dr Jonathan Duckworth Director - CiART (Creative interventions, Art and Rehabilitative Technology), Centre for Games Design Research School of Media and Communication and Ross Eldridge Software Installation (Senior Programmer CiART)

Many thanks to Assoc Professor Stefan Greuter for supplying the technology (Co-director of CGDR)



Putuparri and the Rainmakers, 2015

Film (still)

Director: Nicole Ma

Duration: 1:37:00

Courtesy of Ronin Films

Putuparri and the Rainmakers tells the story of an Aboriginal man living in Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia who maps out his ancestors' spiritual connection to the land and his family's continuing custodianship of it.

GALLERY 2 – MEDIUM-SIZED WHITE GALLERY NEXT TO FOYER RECEPTION DESK



K.R. SUNIL

Born Kodungallur, Kerala, lives Kerala India

Chronicle of Disappearance - Documentation of vanishing water bodies in Kerala, 2016

Digital photographs

Courtesy of the artist

Commissioned by Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre

Ponds are the eyes and souls of villages in Kerala. Every village pond has many memories and narratives surrounding it, that of people whose lives are closely intertwined with it. Women, for whom the ponds act as lifelines, are the major disseminators of these narratives. People often mark their lives alongside the history of the pond.

Once a symbol of life, water bodies in Kerala are now fast turning into the graveyards. Some are reclaimed due to non-availability of land for housing and industrial, while others became the dumping grounds for urban waste. Due to neglect from civic authorities, household waste and sewage water amalgamate into huge piles of garbage. The age-old ties between humans and ponds have been cut.

Movements and initiatives have come forward to revitalise local ponds, with local people on the forefront. Collectives and community groups from local women and environmental groups to swimmers' clubs have emerged alongside the dying water bodies with the purpose to conserve the ponds, as well as maintain the relationships and stories attached to them for future generations.



Rebecca MAYO

Born Leiden, the Netherlands, lives Canberra and Melbourne

Bound by Gorse (Ulex europaeus), 2017

Gorse and digital print

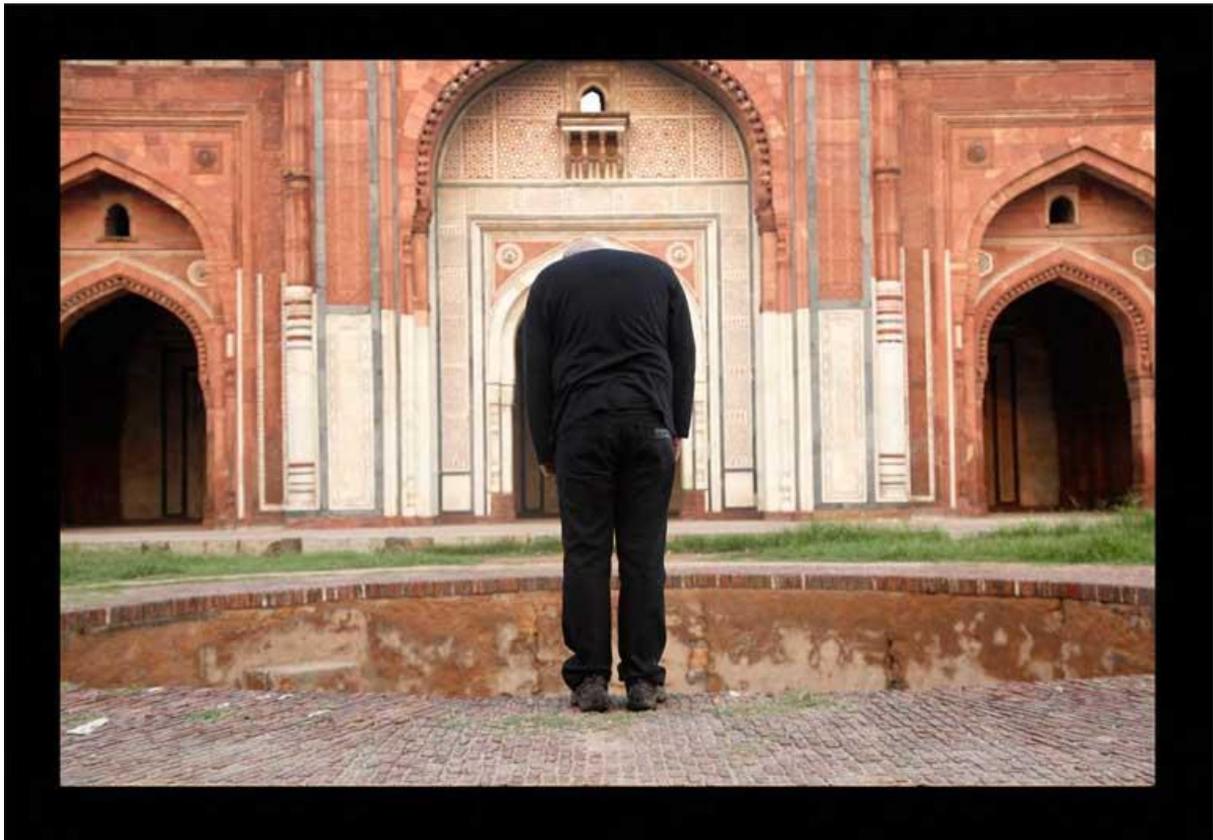
Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

water+wisdom Australia India Installation photos by Mark Ashkanasy, RMIT Gallery, 2017.

The first herbarium record of *Ulex europaeus* (gorse) from Australia was collected at Studley Park, Melbourne in 1884. Brought to Australia as a hedge plant and for fodder it quickly naturalised, especially along waterways. The long viability period of its seeds and its prickly foliage contribute to its successful foothold in southern Australia.

Bound by Gorse considers the flow of gorse through the Merri Creek catchment since its introduction in the 19th Century. Responding to how gorse no longer marks boundaries and fence lines, the artist has used the plant to construct a series of 'paper' bricks. Stamped with postcodes – starting at Studley Park and moving north, they form a wall or boundary in the gallery. The labour intensive process of papermaking - adapted to create the bricks - echoes the slow and repetitive work of clearing gorse. *Bound by Gorse* considers humans' current relationship with gorse conflating its historical use to *contain*, with the contemporary task of keeping it at bay.



Atul BHALLA

Born India, lives New Delhi

Looking for Dvaipayana, 2013

Photographic performance

12 photographs: 53.5 x 59 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi

While looking for lost and diverted ancient water ways in Delhi, the artist performs at locations named for water. He locates old wells, step wells and water bodies that have been covered to make way for roads or for the ease of traffic; a water body lost to time and to greed.

The abstracted silhouette/body with a de-humanising shape or with a head in supplication may be understood as a metaphor for defeat, submission, confession. The artist's head is bowed reverently as if in a moment of silence for Delhi's lost water bodies.



Judy WATSON (Waanyi)

Born Mundubbera, Queensland, Australia, lives Brisbane

water body, 2012

Three channel film

Duration: 04:04 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Galleries, Brisbane

In *water body*, Watson combines histories of site, scientific research, and cultural memory. The image of water is a conduit, carrying memories of the past and connecting cultures and country, while sustaining life.



Parthiv SHAH

Born India, lives Delhi

A.N.O.M.A.L.Y. 1, 2016

Digital photograph

47 x 66 cm

A.N.O.M.A.L.Y. 2, 2016

Digital photograph

51 x 66 cm

A.N.O.M.A.L.Y. 3, 2016

Digital photograph

41.5 x 66 cm

Courtesy of the artist

In the *A.N.O.M.A.L.Y* series, Shah uses the ubiquitous plastic bag to create an aberration, a disturbance to the beautiful, tranquil space of a stepwell. He says 'My photographs celebrate the beauty of the monument with the bag as the anti-aesthetic intervention from a different world. Here representations of beauty collide with anxieties about consumerism '.



Cop SHIVA

Born India, lives Bangalore

The Water Agora series, 2015 – present

26 digital photographs

29.5 x 40 cm x 25

60 x 86 cm x 1

Courtesy of the artist

One of urban India's ongoing issues is water access and water shortage creating a social divide between those with regular access to water and those without. Bangalore has 562 slum areas which do not have active water connections. At least 450 million litres per day are lost in water theft and leaking pipes. This shortage is the origin of the water divide, between those with regular access to water and those left out.

Water tanks are recognised as symbols of cohesion and acceptance by the civic body; once a tank is provided to a slum area, the wellbeing of residents is seen to be acknowledged. They are decorated by locals with cinema icons, religious idols, freedom fighters, cultural values or political figures; turning them in a totem for devotion. Women gather around the water tank for their daily chores; men engage in friendly banter under its shadow; and the whole community takes responsibility in keeping it tidy, healthy and well maintained.

Water tanks also echo the failures of the society. Many are often left empty, or receive water in limited amounts. Often they are used for political gain and forgotten for the rest of the political cycle.



Asim WAQIF

Born Hyderabad, India, lives Delhi

Maintain - Scavenge from the *HELP* series, 2011

Single channel video

Duration: 15:30 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

Maintain – Scavenge is an installation that artist Asim Waqif executed on New Dehli's Yamuna River, one of the most polluted locations in the world. Here, Waqif candidly interviews Jagdish, a man who has lived for decades on the riverbank as a scavenger—while Jagdish speaks, his words provide an honest, entertaining voiceover for heartrending images of what was once a crystal clear body of water that is now murky and littered.



Asim WAQIF

Born Hyderabad, India, lives Delhi

Andekhi Jumna, Delhi, 2011

Single channel video of performance: recycled plastic bottles, LED and battery, boats and drummers

Duration: 6:24 minutes

Location: Yamuna- Elbe Public Art Project, 2011. Curated by Ravi Agarwal (New Delhi) and Till Krause (Hamburg)

Courtesy of the artist and Yamuna Elbe Project

Andekhi Jumna is the documentation of a performance on the Jumna River in Delhi 2011. In the film, you can hear the incessant beating of drums, coming from somewhere far off shore that mingles with the noise of a passing train making its way across the old iron bridge that leads from near Lal Qila over to Kailash Nagar. After crossing a clearing you mount an incline and, suddenly, spread out across the dismal refuse of liquid scum of the dying river, hundreds of illuminated plastic bottles snake up and down the waterway, twinkling like stars in their peaceful meandering, throwing their oily setting of filthy reeds, rubbish and iron beam-work into sharp contrast. The filthy river is made beautiful with the rubbish that is killing it.

GALLERY 3 – SMALL BLACK GALLERY AT THE FAR END OF GALLERY 2



Hanna TUULIKKI

Born Sussex, England, Lives Edinburgh, Scotland

SOURCEMOUTH : LIQUIDBODY, 2016

Three screen film and sound installation, vocal composition, choreography, visual score

Courtesy of the artist

Commissioned for Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2016

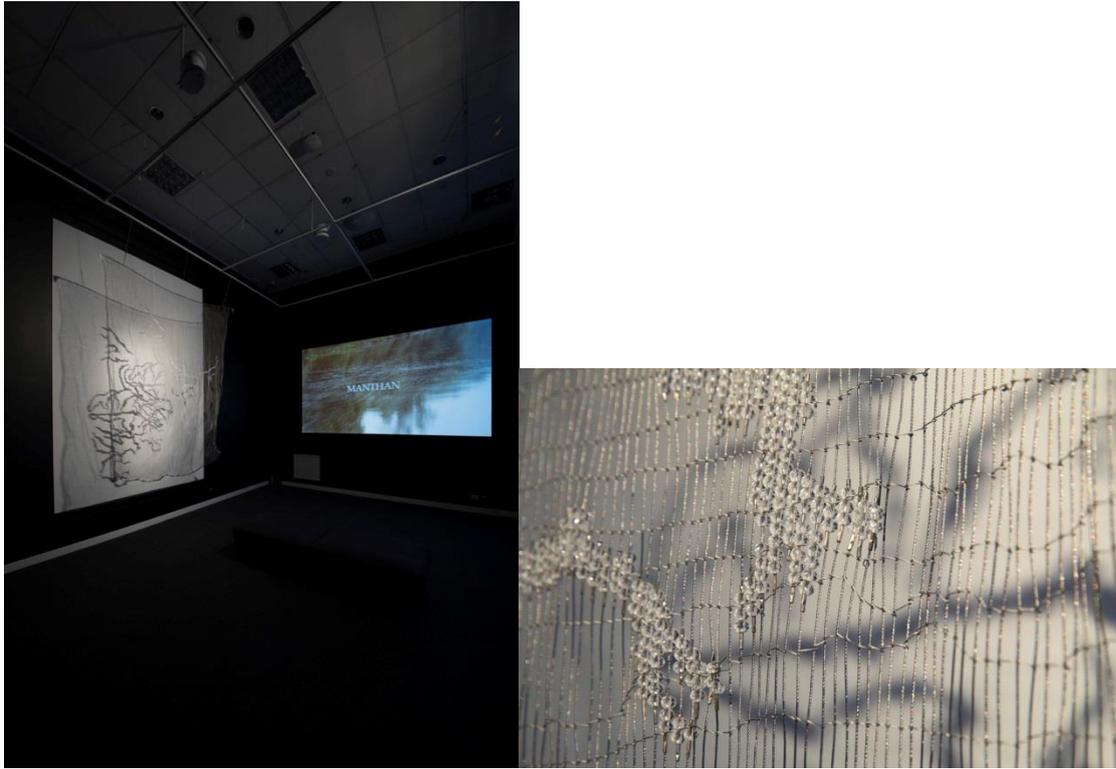
Made in collaboration with Kapila Venu (Kutiyattam mentor & choreography); Daniel Warren (film); Pete Smith (final sound mix); Emily Millichip (costume maker); Beinn Watson (production consultant); Amy Porteous (production management). Supported by the National Lottery through Creative Scotland, The British Council, Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop and CCA Glasgow

The installation flows between gesture and sound, inspired by the mnemonic landscapes of India and the relationships between river-systems and the human body.

The Nadi Varnana (river description) from the Kutiyattam tradition – a form of ancient Sanskrit theatre practiced in Kerala – embodies the watershed mimetically, through a range of exaggerated gestures made with the eyes and hands, representing the river cycle as a sequence of codified movements – the first rain on the mountaintop, rivulets becoming mountain streams, fast flowing river, and, the completion of a slow meander to the sea.

Tuulikki adapted this traditional sequence into a performance-for-camera with three interlinked films. In the first, her silver-painted figure traces a fluvial line embodying a river's journey. The second is a startling close up of her open eyes performing gestures signifying the same transition from river source to mouth. In the third, her disembodied mouth incants instructions for the performance. Two visual scores are displayed nearby, transcribing the stages of the river embodied movement. An accompanying vocal composition created from multiple-layered vocals whose drum-like sounds conjure up the original percussion, playfully and poetically depict the sounds of rain, wind, insects, and the effects of water in motion.

GALLERY 5 – BLACK GALLERY PAST THE GALLERY LIFT



Vibha GALHOTRA

Born India, lives Delhi

River Map, 2016

Glass and bugle beads, cable, silver wire

Dimensions: 271.8 x 182.8 x 25.4 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York



Vibha GALHOTRA

Born India, lives Delhi

Manthan, 2015

Single channel, digital video projection

Duration: 10:43 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Manthan invokes a legend from Hindu mythology in which the gods churn the ocean to obtain the nectar of immortality.

Through a romanticised, performative gesture, this film examines the prospects of ecological threat and envisions a process of churning the deleterious out of the Yamuna. The Yamuna is the longest and the second largest tributary river of the Ganges (Ganga) in northern India.



Hannah DONNELLY (Wiradjuri)

Born NSW, lives Melbourne

Long Water, 2017

Video and sound installation

Duration: 11:02 minutes

Courtesy of the artist

Through storytelling *Long Water* explores Indigenous water rights and the future threat posed by climate change to accessing water systems.