

FUTURE RIVER

WHEN
THE
PAST
FLOWS

PHOTO 2024
Official Exhibition

COUNIHAN GALLERY
3 FEB - 28 APRIL 2024

JULIE GOUGH
MAREE CLARKE
PETA CLANCY
JODY HAINES

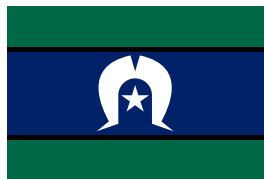




*The Future Is Shaped by Those
Who Can See It'*

Photo 2024

Blak Dot Gallery acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, live and create: the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people and Elders past and present of the Kulin nations, Naarm (Melbourne)



Blak Dot Gallery is proud to partner with
Counihan Gallery to present:

FUTURE RIVER

WHEN
THE
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FLOWS

This exhibition examines the Indigenous understanding that cities are obfuscations of what is. The artwork will reference the idea that monuments conceal the past. Underneath each building or stretch of asphalt there are deep layers of meaning and history. Beneath the concrete there are countless stories not memorialized. Under the cities, the rivers and creeks still flow, and with them the Indigenous narratives of the past that will naturally become future rivers. We can try to cage and redirect using concrete but, the waterways will inevitably run their own course. It re-images and re-memorialises what lies beneath the concrete slab. Thousands of years of story and life obscured.

This exhibition of work within the public realm will draw attention to the role of the city as a besiegement, and how through artistic intervention we can allow the past to flow into the future once more.

Kimba Thompson

Capturing our rivers of resistance

by Maya Hodge, Lardil

Beneath us lie layers of stories, histories, and unseen waterways, stifled yet persistently flowing beneath the city streets. Curated by Kimba Thompson, *Future River: When the past flows* is an exhibition, both indoor and outdoor, showcasing the work of esteemed Aboriginal artists Peta Clancy, Maree Clarke, Jody Haines, and Julie Gough. Their photographic works respond to the memory, disruption, and acknowledgment of how river systems and the living past cannot be suppressed by colonial industrialisation. First Peoples continue to respond, capture, and disrupt through our unique storytelling.

From the mid-1980s onwards, photography in Blackfulla communities was a conduit for social and political activism in the face of racism within so-called Australia. Curator, historian and writer Helen Ennis states in her article, 'Steeped in the now': Maree Clarke's photography, that photography in our communities formed 'at a time when the campaigns for land rights and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were beginning to achieve major successes.' This time in contemporary art was enriched by pivotal notable figures, Tracey Moffatt AO, Brenda L. Croft, Dr Fiona Foley and Michael Riley, founders of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-Operative. Locally, photographers such as the late Lisa Belleair used photography as a way to archive community activism, resistance, love and proper representation of Aboriginal peoples, emphasising the importance of Blackfulla perspectives in telling our stories.

Yorta Yorta, Wamba Wamba, Mutti Mutti, and Boonwurrung artist Maree Clarke's latest photographic series, *The Long Journey Home #3*, extends her project examining methods of river passage and the sacrifices made by her ancestors navigating using river reed canoes. Collaborating with family is integral to her practice, with family members stringing river reed necklaces and painting up with ochre against the vivid pink sunset on Boon Wurrung Country (Williamstown). Trawooloway artist Julie Gough's photographic and video works, *Aftermath*, traverses her island, lutruwita, by kayak, offering a different perspective on the land. Moving through time, she encounters colonial markers that obstruct the landscape, merging the past with the present. Gough and Clarke practises both navigate the simultaneous realities of circular time, often including cityscapes hovering in the horizon or markers of 'private property.'

Wandering through the landscapes of the images we witness the continual flow of Aboriginal knowledge systems, weaving together a tapestry of our connected existence. The exhibition is a vessel that holds unique and interconnected stories of place, time and cultural practice. In the words of Eastern Arrernte and Kalkadoon curator and writer Hetti Kemerre Perkins:

'All our [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] artists underline their connection to the land, whether urban-based, rural or remote. In this way these artists not only continue cultural practice in a unique and current way, they also become involved in "re-righting" history, repatriating it, and taking back what is ours.'

Perkins emphasises how Aboriginal artists have been leading the frontline in recentring truth-telling. With this lens, viewers can understand the convergence of all the artists' stories as a critical defiance against false colonial narratives and in its place providing glimpses into the hearts, minds and realities of these Aboriginal women speaking to and with Country.

Peta Clancy, a Bangerang artist, presents her photographic work, here merri merri lies, focusing on Wurundjeri Country (Coburg Lakes). Collaborating and performing with the land, she reimagines the site pre-colonisation by layering and cutting into images, revealing the threads of a history stretching back millenia. Similarly, Palawa artist Jody Haines's video works and self-portraits in *Flowing with the Future (Surviving Batman)* reflect on her relationship as a visitor on Wurundjeri Country. She retraces the Maribyrnong River, travelled by John Batman in 1835, scrutinising the complexities of being on and off Country, and the blockage of waterways; symbolising the human psyche. Both artists employ photography to encapsulate the intricate layers of emotions experienced by Aboriginal people living off their traditional Country on someone else's land, respectfully portraying this complex relationship through a contemporary lens.

The practices of these four artists interrogate the obscurity of occupation on the collective lifeblood of Aboriginal culture, survival, spirit, and kinship—our Country and waterways. At the heart of this exhibition is a profound love for and connection to the power of waterways, resisting the erasure of First Peoples' narratives. *Future River: When the past flows* brings together a selection of newly commissioned and existing works as a statement that Aboriginal history and culture are unbreakable. Through their unique ways of making and being, these artists defy categorisation; their compass is the songs and spirit of the breathing Country beneath the concrete trickling together into a future where the unseen can become seen once more.

¹ Helen Ennis, *Maree Clarke: Ancestral Memories*, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria, p. 129.

² *Ibid.*

³ Hetti Perkins, *Hetti Perkins: you're Aboriginal all the time ... you can't just clock off*, *The Guardian*, 2014.

JULIE GOUGH



Julie Gough (Trawlwoolway). Gough's art and research practice focuses on uncovering and re-presenting conflicting and subsumed histories, often drawing from her family's experiences as Tasmanian Aboriginal people. Gough is primarily a mixed media installation artist, a writer and a curator of First Peoples Art and Culture at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Gough has exhibited in more than 200 exhibitions since 1994, with works held in most national and state collections and represented in two monographs, *Fugitive History* (2018) and *Tense Past* (2021). Gough holds degrees in visual arts: PhD (UTAS, 2021), MA (Goldsmiths, University of London, 1998), BA Hons. (UTAS, 1995), BA (Curtin University, 1993) and a BA in archaeology/english literature (UWA, 1987).





Aftermath (clues), 2024

Series of photographs 1-13

Inkjet prints on 310gsm Canson edition etching rag paper, 70 x 100cm (paper and print), Tasmania, river clay and water from Tinamirakuna (Macquarie River) Lutruwita (Tasmania)

Aftermath (embarkation), 2024

Aftermath faces me as I travel around my island, Lutruwita. Something drastic and dreadful obviously happened. We are witness to its effects. Also, it is not over, we are not post-colonial, this is our continuance, living with the ravages beset upon our Country. It is clear that a catastrophe occurred a long way back, that parcelled-up the land, and designated the roads and fence lines, that brought the drought and flood we live with. Travelling by riverways I experience the world in an arterial way. In my kayak I am at a different height than the land, moving at a different pace, determined by the water and the wind. I become part of Country whilst drawn through it by its own energy. Many creatures, of land, sky and water stay themselves in my waterborne presence. That is magic. I can imagine the old times, see, hear, smell it nearer. The rivers are portals to what I am locked out of, "private property", as well they offer glimpses, snapshots, and clues to what has and is happening around me. Being with the riverways wakes me up and propels me onwards.

MAREE CLARKE



Maree Clarke (Yorta Yorta/Wamba Wamba/Mutti Mutti/Boonwurrung) is a pivotal figure in the reclamation of southeast Australian Aboriginal art practices, reviving elements of Aboriginal culture that were lost – or laying dormant – during colonisation and is a leader in nurturing and promoting the diversity of contemporary southeast Aboriginal artists.

Maree's affirmation and reconnection with her cultural heritage has seen her revivification of traditional possum skin cloaks, together with contemporary designs of kangaroo teeth, echidna quill and river reed necklaces in both traditional and contemporary materials like glass and 3D printing. The artist also has a strong multimedia installation practice, utilising photography, painting, sculpture and video.

The Long Journey Home, 2024

Long Journey Home is part of my ongoing series of work, which reminds us that the lands and waterways of Naarm have always been cared for by Aboriginal people. My canoe represents our journey across the waterways and our engagement with them.

Part of this journey has included the making of a canoe and the sharing of this knowledge with my family. In 2023, my great nephew Mitch Mahoney, husband Nicholas Hovington and myself, spent long hours collecting the tall river reeds located in the swampy shallows of Kororoit Creek Road wetlands in Melbourne's inner west. Mitch and Nicholas cut and gathered over 1000 feathery topped reeds, bundling them together, ready for canoe-making. Once made, the canoe was left to dry-out for 11 months. In the meantime, Mitch built a clay fire-pit into the end of the canoe – traditionally used for warmth and cooking. These practices, although located in the present and drawing on contemporary methods of making, are steeped in traditional knowledges handed down through the generations

Almost 12 months later the canoe is ready. Photographing the images for Long Journey Home #3 took place on the shores of Point Johnson at Williamstown beach, a few kilometres west of Kororoit Creek. Fourteen members of my family, mainly nieces and nephews, worked together to adorn themselves in contemporary representations of ritual attire. Ochre was ground and mixed with sap for face paint, while clusters of sawn-off and dyed river reeds were threaded together to create long, elegant necklaces. In this photographic series each individual is evocatively dressed and stands together alongside the canoe at the water's edge, powerfully asserting our ongoing presence of connections with Country.

With the canoe I am creating a new visual narrative. Everything I do, I want the younger generations to learn from. The river-reed canoe is based on traditional Tasmanian river reed canoes, which also embody my Ancestors connections to northwest Tasmania – trawoolway Country. The location for the photo shoot is on my traditional Country, Boon Wurrung Country, which stretches along the coastline of greater Naarm (so-called Melbourne today).

These photographs are a statement of our ongoing presence as Aboriginal people in southeast Australia, of my family and extended community's Ancestral connections to Country, of our continuing knowledge of the lands and waters-ways, which we have cared for and lived on for millennia. This is history in the making, guided by Aboriginal people for the future of generations to come.



PETA CLANCY



Peta Clancy (Bangerang) works collaboratively and performatively with and on Country. She creates manually manipulated photographs that layer time, past and present, to re-construct and bring to light hidden histories of Country in a contemporary setting. Australian historical photographs of landscape/place/Country tend to frame Country as an object to capture or obtain. Clancy explores other ways of knowing Country through photography. In 2023 she was awarded a Fellowship from the Australia Council for the Arts. She is a Senior Lecturer and researcher in the Wominijeka Djeembana Indigenous research lab at MADA, Monash University and is represented by Dominik Mersch Gallery.

here merri merri lies, 2024

I live as an uninvited guest on Wurundjeri Country near merri merri (Merri Creek) in the suburb now known as Coburg. I have resided here for the past 25 years which is an insignificant amount of time compared with the thousands of generations Wurundjeri people have lived on and cared for Country and I acknowledge their continuous connection.

Black cockatoos screeched overhead, and the bellbirds gave the bush a softer ring...the creek widened occasionally into rich alluvial flats and the water was of a sweet taste...there were platypus in the creek...but the shouts of the measurers and the noise of their survey chains frightened them”.¹

In 1837 European perceptions of land ownership were imposed on Wurundjeri Country when Robert Hoddle began to carve the ‘land’ into box like sections of 640 acres. This marked the beginning of the degradation of the waterway and disruption of cultural sites along merri merri. here merri merri lies explores merri merri at Coburg Lake – an artificial lake that was formed in 1915 when the rocks in the creek bed were used to build a wall (near Newlands Bridge) forcing the creek water to back up and form the lake. This changed the trajectory of the creek and in turn flooded thousands of years of culture, history, and memory.

To create the photographs, I worked collaboratively and performatively with and on Country. I returned to the same location on Country with photographs I had previously created. I shared the photographs with Country before attaching them to a frame, cutting into them, and rephotographing them to create the final layered images which explore Country from multiple time frames, perspectives, histories, as well as acknowledge the cultural memory still here.

As I photographed at Coburg Lake, the resident family of black swans glided in and out of my view across the lake, descendants of which have lived here for thousands of years. I imagined the water level in the creek rising, then falling, then rising again swallowing the rocks and stones. I thought of the narrative of the flow of the creek prior to colonisation. here merri merri lies reimagines a place where the past flows into the future once more.

Thank you to Wurundjeri Elders, Aunty Julieanne Axford and Aunty Gail Smith, from the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation for your permissions for me to photograph this beautiful part of Wurundjeri Country.

¹ Richard Broome. *Coburg Between Two Creeks*, (Second Edition, Coburg Historical Society, Pascoe Vale South, 2001), 34.



JODY HAINES



Jody Haines (Palawa) is a contemporary artist based in Naarm/ Melbourne. Her unique practice blends social practice, photo-media (photography/video/film), and public art, creating large-scale public activations that include projections, paste-ups, and street-wide photographic installations. Rooted in Indigenous feminist (k/new/known) materialism, Jody's work explores themes of identity, representation, and the female gaze.

Flowing with the future (surviving Batman), 2024

But how can we remain in the flow of being on Country when living within an urban environment?

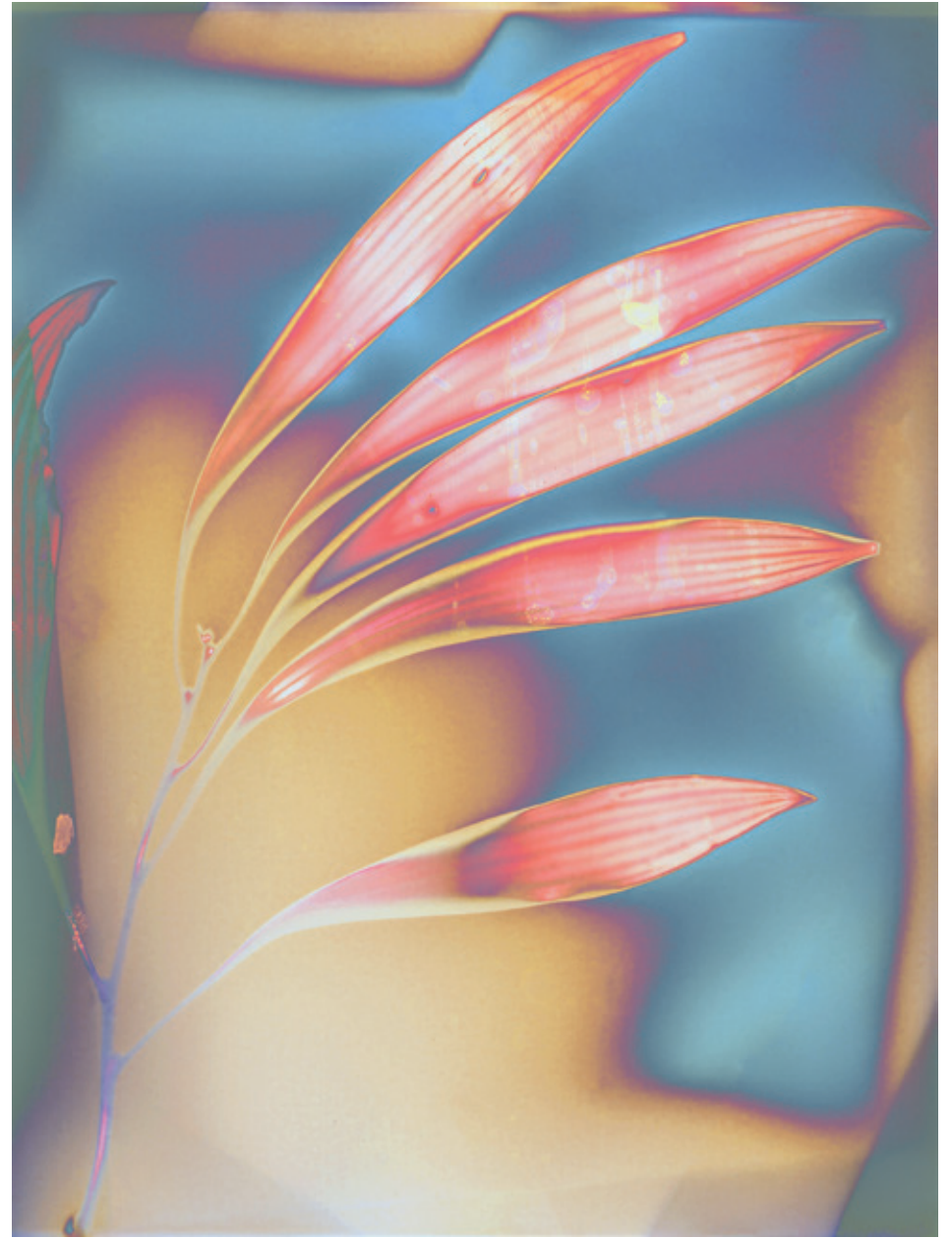
The idea for this project came about while I was visiting tommeginne Country in March 2023. There I immersed myself in the environment, using a relational approach to make images with the more-than-human kin around me - sun, salt, sand, trees, and animals, creating a series of lumen prints on and with Country. These prints are the starting point for this new body of work.

The lumens were scanned, printed onto fabric, and made into clothing for me to wear in this series of self-portraits. These elements have become a direct link to the Country of my DNA and offer me a way to explore and maintain the feeling of being on Country while not on Country — a metaphorical cloak, a shield, an ancestral hug — a reminder to breathe and connect... to flow.

In contrast, cities are a tribute to the ongoing neo-colonial project of capital, disconnect, and individualism. They sit in opposition to a relational approach to Country — a violent blockage to flow. Yet, this is where I have chosen to live, a visitor on someone else's land. Cities will remain, and there is no immediate removal of their existence outside of a cataclysmic disaster. So, I am searching for ways of flowing with the future that fit with a more relational methodology— thinking historically while in the present.

To make the self-portraits, I followed a path along the Maribyrnong River that in 1835 was travelled by John Batman before entering the Birrarung and determining a location for “settlement”. He had come by boat from the land of my tommeginne ancestors, the land of my birth, where he was a bounty hunter. On this side of history, Batman is described by many as the founding father of Melbourne. Three images installed at the site of the Mechanics Institute in Merri-bek explore this path: listening to the Wind, 2024; Batman's Landing, 2024; and Blak Swan, 2024. Wearing the lumen clothing, I explore my entanglement with this space, this history, and the more than human kin I am surrounded by while continually searching for a way to disrupt the colonial blockage within and remain in flow.

Acknowledging the physical spaces of the colonial blockage led me to look inward for the next three portraits. Here I sit with the blockage that lives within my psyche – an internal mind escape from the clutches of colonialism: A cloak to disrupt, 2024; A shield to protect, 2024; and A (metaphorical) hug, 2024. Each portrait is accompanied by the lumen image, which made the print of the fabrics worn in the portraits.



Ko wai koe? Who are you?

by **Dr Kirsten Garner Lyttle**

I am a Māori-Australian artist and academic, living outside of my ancestral homeland and an uninvited guest on another, sovereign, First Peoples land - the Wurundjeri of the Eastern Kulin Nation, in Narm. I acknowledge the Elders, both past, present, and emerging of the Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung people of the Kulin Nation, who are the Custodians of the unceded land, waterways, and skies where I live, work, and make. I further pay my respects to all First Nations People engaging with this text. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

*Ko Taupiri te maunga. Ko Waikato te awa. Weraroa (Waikaretuu) te marae.
Ko Ngāti Tahinga te hapū. Ko Waikato te iwi. Ko Tainui te waka. Ko Kirsten
Garner Lyttle ahau.*

Above is my pepeha, my genealogical citation that locates my connections to Te Ao Māori (the Māori world). The Waikato River is my tupuna, my ancestor. This statement is not an allegory or metaphor but is written into Aotearoa (New Zealand) law within the Te Tiriti or The Treaty of Waitangi¹.

The Waikato is Aotearoa's longest river and has been crucial for the physical and spiritual well-being of Waikato-Tainui people for centuries. It was our highway, larder, kākahu (clothing) and textiles, a site of leisure and spirituality². Before colonization we managed our rivers with care, honouring our relationship with and respect for our awa tupuna (river ancestor).

Since colonization, my river's history—though unique—resonates with many Indigenous and First Nations communities. It is a story of colonial violence, where the most fertile land and rivers were stolen and commodified by European settlers, seized under British Crown rule(s). Since the late 1820s³, Europeans brought trade, guns, wars, irresponsible farming practices, introducing pest species—altering the river's flow, temperature, and sediment with dams, bridges, and hydroelectric power stations. This disruption caused floods, the extinction of native species, growth of noxious weeds, and damaged vegetation and wetlands.

In 1863, twenty-three years after over five hundred Māori rangatira (chiefs), including those from Waikato, signed the Te Tiriti or The Treaty of Waitangi, British troops invaded and confiscated lands from Waikato-Tainui and other tribes who refused allegiance to the British Queen⁴. It was not until 1995 that the Crown began restitution for treaty breaches, returning some confiscated lands to Waikato-Tainui and initiating the management of the Waikato River in 2009.

Much of the river is ailing. In 2013, Waikato-Tainui published its environmental plan, which “aspires to have waters that are drinkable, swimmable, and fishable”⁵. This long-term goal reflects the poor condition and health our ancestor has been returned to us in.

The Visit

I have spent years dreaming of you. Longing to be immersed in you, feeling you envelope me. Hoping you recognise me as whānau (family). My first glimpse of you was through a bus window nearly five years ago, and I was unable to get near you, to speak with you or touch you. I have come back to visit, this time with my tāne, my husband, to get closer to you and spend some time with you.

I am shocked at your appearance; you look sicker than I had imagined. I had heard the stories of your deterioration, seeing this in person is different. I try to imagine you in your prime, the mightiness of your body, your strength and your beauty. Before unnatural interventions distorted your body. Before the disrespect, abuse and neglect.

I have heard your call across oceans, mountains, and rivers. I am here now. In my mind, I had romanticised our first meeting; but in the reality of the moment, I am confronted with your odour; of rot and disease. I am shocked by the rubbish surrounding you. Can you read this in my expression when we meet? Have I offended you? I try to hide my uncontrollable disgust, but my nostrils betray me. I timidly touch you but am secretly relieved to instantly remember that I have hand sanitizer back in the car. Disgust gives way to overwhelming sadness, I have the urge to run far away from you. The emotions are too much, and I want to leave. My tāne hangs back, understanding my desire to be with you, not wanting to interrupt or intrude.

I had wanted to take our photo together, but it is hard to crop out the parts of you that look ill; too much of your body is sick. How do I make our family portrait look good? How can I create a memento of our time together? Though trained as a photographer, I am struggling to find an angle of you that is not riddled with pestilence. There is nothing Instagram-worthy here. I take some photos of us, smile, and say goodbye. I hope my relatives are able to give you the medicine you clearly need, and that they long to provide for you; that you get better and stronger for my next visit. I am exhausted and saddened, ready to go. I will come back—I think you know this. I cry on the car ride back to Auckland. I only spent ten minutes with you.

¹ New Zealand Government: The Office for Māori Crown Relations – Te Arawhiti (2010), *Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010, Public Act 2010 No 24, 24 September 2010, New Zealand*, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2010/0024/62.0/DLM1630004.html>

² Waikato River Authority (2024), “A History of the Waikato River and its Catchment”, Waikato River Authority, accessed January 28, 2024, <https://waikatoriver.org.nz/history/>

³ Nancy Swarbrick (2010), “Waikato region - Pākehā impact”, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, accessed 28 January 2024, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/waikato-region/page-5>

⁴ Waikato River Authority, (2024).

⁵ Waikato-Tainui, (2013), *Tai Tumu, Tai Pari, Tai Ao: The Waikato-Tainui Environmental Plan*, Waikato-Tainui, August 2013, <https://waikatotainui.com/taiao/environment/>, p. 152



KIMBA THOMPSON



Kimba Thompson (Wiradjuri), director and founder of Blak Dot Gallery (2011), A non-for-profit artist-run space that showcases contemporary Indigenous and traditional artworks from world Indigenous cultures. Kimba is an established filmmaker, director, freelance producer, and curator. She has always worked on a diverse range of projects, which focus primarily on the use of storytelling as a vehicle to promote Aboriginal art and culture within Australia. Kimba currently uses her lived experience to train, and mentor emerging Indigenous curators and continually supports artist at all stages of their creative practice.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Blak Dot Artists Market, Sydney Rd Street Party

Presented in collaboration with Brunswick Music Festival

Date: Sunday 3 March, 2024

Time: 12:00 pm to 6:00 pm

Location: Sydney Rd

FUTURE RIVER: International Women's Day

Presented in collaboration with Blak Dot Gallery, Brunswick Music Festival & Brunswick Mechanics Institute

Date: Friday, March 8, 2024

Time: 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm

Location: Counihan Gallery & Brunswick Mechanics Institute

Join us for a poignant and dynamic response to the exhibition, Future River: When the Past Flows. Delving into the Indigenous perspective that cities obscure the true essence of existence, this exhibition becomes a focal point for a special International Women's Day event during the Brunswick Music Festival.

Experience the profound exploration of the exhibition through compelling performances by MaggZ, SOVBLKPVSSY and Aseel. This collaborative event, bringing together Blak Dot Gallery, Brunswick Music Festival, The Counihan Gallery, and Next Wave, promises an engaging and immersive encounter with the intersection of art and Indigenous narratives.

Artist Talk & Readings

Date: Saturday 16 March, 2024

Time: 2pm

Location: Counihan Gallery, 233 Sydney Rd, Brunswick VIC 3056

Credits

Peta Clancy

Sound: Xain Milke, merri merri, sound installation, 8mins, 2024

Two Wallpaper images: "Courtesy of State Library of Victoria, Pictures Collection,"
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Digital collaboration: Les Walkling

Original postcards: Coburg Historical Society Inc

Coburg Historical Society Inc collects, preserves and provides access to historical documents, images, artefacts and promotes Coburg history. It maintains a state heritage listed bluestone cottage at 82 Bell Street, Coburg. For opening hours please see the Society's website.



Julie Gough

Image editor: Kelly M. Slater

Printer: ARCHIVALink

Maree Clarke

Represented by: Vivian Anderson Gallery

River Reed Canoe: Mitch Mahoney and Nicholas Hovington

Production team: Lucy Foster and Kenneth Suico

River Reed Film: Peter Pilley

Talent: Kerri Clarke, Molly Mahoney, Aron Clarke, Evie Clarke, Kylie Clarke, Matari Clarke, Peter Clarke, Sharni Karpany-Thomas, Indi Clarke, Maya Hodge, Sonja Hodge, Jacob Clarke, Alice Clarke and Eunice Sabanovic.

Acknowledgments

Brunswick Music Festival, Mechanics' Institute, Next Wave Festival, Monash University, Wominjeka Djeembana

Welcome & Opening performance: Djirri Djirri Dancers

Graphic Design: Andrew Chan

Proudly Presented by:

**Blak Dot Gallery in partnership with Counihan Gallery
& Arts Merri-bek.**



**PHOTO 2024
Official Exhibition**

Blak Dot supported by



Australian Government

Indigenous Languages and Arts

BLAKDOT. GALLERY

2024 | FEBRUARY | EDITION | 43

33 Saxon St., Brunswick (via Dawson St.)
www.blakdot.com.au | info@blakdot.com.au
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