Particulate Matter: A fossil fuelled future?

THE CROSS ART PROJECTS
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ALISON CLOUSTON & BOYD | JACKY GREEN | ILTJA NTJARRA ARTISTS: BENITA CLEMENTS RICKY CONNICK SELMA COULTHARD VANESSA INKAMALA GLORIA PANNKA MERVYN RUBUNTJA HILARY WIRRI BETTY NAMATJIRA WHEELER | FIONA MACDONALD |

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PHOTOGRAPHY: SILVER SALT PHOTOGRAPHY
COVER ARTWORK: VANESSA INKAMALA, UNTITLED, 2020, WATERCOLOUR ON ARCHES PAPER, 54 X 35 CM, (#113-20)
BACK INSET ARTWORK: FIONA MACDONALD, MENGZ GALIZEE, 2020, INSTALLATION VIEW (WINDOW PAINTED BY STEVE SMITH)

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At the end of 2019, much of Australia’s east coast (NSW and Victoria) and the Flinders Ranges and Kangaroo Island (SA) went up in flames. The Black Summer collapsed the tyranny of distance: the far from here became intimate as smoke crawled into every set of lungs, near or far, as “particulate-matter”, particles that are small enough to enter and damage human lung tissue. For months, Australians breathed air pollution up to 26 times above levels considered hazardous to human health. Climate emergency is now a thing that envelopes and entraps us all.

We are a continent of orange sunsets, dead rivers and dying koalas, black oceans and bleached coral; a laboratory of the crisis that we confronts contemporary existence. Particulate Matter confronts the alienation of traditional lands for bauxite mining at Yirrkala in Northern Territory. The petition offered non-Indigenous Australians a rare opportunity to understand the creation and maintenance of the region, with its complex relations of Indigenous ownership, custodianship and obligation: a living tradition of land care, stretching back 60,000 years, or the “eternal present” of the Indigenous Dreamtime. While the 1963 petition was unsuccessful in the short term, it provoked the Federal Government’s 1976 Land Rights (NT) Act which galvanised the homelands and art centre movements.

Critical engagements by artists matter deeply as they can enable change of mind, heart and legislation. Traditions of witnessing and mass interventions—from the riot of hand-made signs in school children’s climate protests, to chatty Knitting Nanas and the spectacular choreography of Extinction Rebellion—all help us to understand and challenge the complexities of politics, state and corporate propaganda, and heavy-handed laws—from the “push-back” Intervention to mass incarceration of Aboriginal people.

The artists in Particulate Matter have called for action against ecocide. They represent three distant but linked areas of fossil fuel exploration and development: Central Australia and the Great Artesian Basin, one of Australia’s most significant hydrogeological entities, Barkly Tableland and the Gulf of Carpentaria and Galilee Basin in central Queensland. In the Northern Territory, Jack Green and other Yanyuwa, Garawa, Marra and Gudanji artists take on the McArthur River Mine—the world’s largest open-cut lead-zinc mine owned by the transnational mining corporation Glencore which operates across 18 countries—and fracking.3 In parched Central Australia, Mervyn Rubuntja’s ‘No Fracking’ camel points to the stupidity of water-intensive fracking. Both Jack Green and Mervyn Rubuntja are custodians and leading voices. In Queensland a broad group of artist-activists have raised awareness about open cut and underground coal mining in the vast Galilee Basin. Together with many artists they memorialise each dying species, loss and ruin, and the destruction of a Dreaming storyline. Jack Green’s radiating lines or stripes convey, simultaneously, energy and meditation; the land is breathing.

1 In the Northern Territory a huge prisons industry locks-up mostly Indigenous people. In 2018, 84% of adult prisoners in the NT were Aboriginal, despite Aboriginal adults accounting for 25.9% of the NT’s adult population. Figures for young people are much worse (almost 100%).

2 McArthur River Mining (MRM) mines one of the world’s largest zinc and lead deposits. The mine is south-west of the town of Boodaoolaal and exports through Bing Bong leading facility on the Gulf of Carpentaria. Established as an underground operation in 1995, MRM controversially converted to open pit mining in 2006. In 2007-08 they built a 6km diversion of the river. The current mine life extends to 2036. Waste discharges and impact reporting is “self-monitored”. Rehabilitation is by MRM (e.g., planting seedlings). Remediation defaults to the NT government.


Descendants of Albert Namatjira (1902–1959), and his kin honour the ‘heritage of Namatjira’ by setting up Iltau Njjarra an art school and art centre in Mparntwe (Alice Springs) in 2003. Today it is independently governed by a board of senior artists and chaired by Mervyn Rubuntja. They extend the famous Hermannsburg school to film or performance (such as with BigHeart theatre group in 2015). These “intervention“ artworks, like the artists’ Sydney Biennale works, are drawn from their social commentary paintings, focussing on mining and climate change. In mid-2016, artists at Iltau Njjarra art centre invited artist Tony Albert to hold collage workshops in Alice Springs, confronting matters of mining and climate change. In October 2019, Santos was given the green light to start fracking in the Northern Territory’s McArthur Basin despite fierce resistance from environmentalists, health professionals and the local community. They call it ‘Developing the North’.

The artists say: This body of work explores the overlay of modernity on the traditional indigenous way of life. It delves deeply into the psychological process of alienation and the deep-seated need and determination to hold fast what has been entrusted by past ancestors. It is a reflection of the past and a window to the future. Intrusions

and uniforms may change, but ‘Tjina Nurn-ka, Pmarra Nurn-kha, Ila Ila Nurn-kha’/Our family, our country, our legacy’, does not.

Since that time, as Jack Green states about a painting: Government been working for a long time to push us Aboriginal people off our homelands. Many people end up in town with no job, no house and no family support. Being in town, whether it be Darwin, Katherine or Tennant Creek can be dangerous for Aboriginal people. In October 2019, Santos was given the green light to start fracking in the Northern Territory’s McArthur Basin despite fierce resistance from environmentalists, health professionals and the local community. They call it ‘Developing the North’.

The urgency of environmental emergency and destruction are evaded by our Federal government. Prime Minister Morrison, elected by coal donations money, calls for “resilience” while planning for more coal mines and destruction are evaded by our Federal government. Prime Minister Morrison, elected by coal donations money, calls for “resilience” while planning for more coal mines and destruction are evaded by our Federal government. Prime Minister Morrison, elected by coal donations money, calls for “resilience” while planning for more coal mines and destruction are evaded by our Federal government. Prime Minister Morrison, elected by coal donations money, calls for “resilience” while planning for more coal mines and destruction are evaded by our Federal government. Prime Minister Morrison, elected by coal donations money, calls for “resilience” while planning for more coal mines and destruction are evaded by our Federal government. 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gas fields) through the Amadeus Gas Pipeline to Darwin since 1986. The new high-pressure Northern Gas Pipeline has enabled Mereenie field, west of Alice Springs, to ramp up production, Palm Valley to re-open, and the opening of a new Dingo gas field south of Alice Springs. More exploration drilling underway—anywhere, anytime. The new high-pressure pipeline crosses the Barkly Tableland connecting to the Carpentaria Gas Pipeline near Mount Isa in Queensland.

In Queensland, billionaire Clive Palmer’s Waratah Coal (former China First) mine is four times the size of internationally controversial Adani coal mine. Waratah Coal has applied for a Mining Lease and Environmental Authority. Palmer donated more than $80 million to scare advertising and claims credit for Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s 2019 election win. The Environmental Defenders Office has launched a challenge on behalf of the owners/caretakers of Bimblebox Nature Refuge and The Bimblebox Alliance. While the fossil fuel industry remains the highest donor to major Federal political parties, a flourishing future is as unlikely. Gina Reinhardt’s donations extend to donating $5 million to extreme right-wing advocacy body the ‘IPA’ or Institute of Public Affairs, the “Voice of Freedom”. The decision by the High Court in the Timber Creek appeal launched by the late Mr Griffiths from Warringarri Arts in Kununurra, awarded Timber Creek native title holders $2.5m, partly for “spiritual harm”. It is cold comfort.

Over the Black Summer, author Richard Flanagan wrote from Bruny Island off the coast of Tasmania, “Australia has only one realistic chance to, you know, survive: Join other countries like those Pacific nations whose very future is now in question and seek to become an international leader in fighting for far stronger global action on climate change. But to do that it would first have to take decisive action domestically.” Flanagan dramatically introduces Danielle Celermajer’s idea of ‘omnicide’ to capture the scale and breadth of the killing. Celermajer, a Sydney academic specialising in multispecies justice, says that “More than ecocide, ‘omnicide’ is the killing of everything – human and more-than-human.”

Across our region from the Pacific to the Indonesian archipelago, there are pleas for Australia’s leaders to listen to the scientists.

Vale: Over the Black Summer we mourned 33 human deaths, 12.6 million hectares burnt to the ground causing over a billion animal deaths and over 100 species extinctions (in NSW alone over a thousand species are already extinct). The world lost 80 per cent of the Blue Mountains world heritage area and 50 per cent of the Gondwana world heritage rainforest. Property damage was 3,000 homes destroyed and 47,000 properties damaged.

We honour our firefighters and vast crews of volunteers who communicated, healed and fed so bravely and those who travelled from afar to join in solidarity.


Opening Thursday 5 March 2020, 6pm
In the presence of Iltja Ntjarra artists Talks by: Meryn Rubuntja and Marisa Maher Guest Speaker: Dany Celermajer, Professor of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Sydney where she leads the Multi-species Justice Collective.

Workshop Watercolour Masterclass with Iltja Ntjarra Many Hands artists 5 March at The Cross Art Projects

Thank You Special thanks to the artists and to Bimblebox Art Project (Beth Jackson and Jill Simpson); Iltja Ntjarra Art Centre (Iris Bendor, Marisa Maher, Hubert Pareroultja & Koren Wheatley); Waralungku Arts (Katrina Langdon); historian Dr Seán Kerins and art historian Dr Caterina Moore; The Cross Art Projects: Belle Blau, Simon Blau, Phillip Boulten and Susan Gilligan; and the Stop the Intervention Collective or STICS (Sabine Kacha).

Presented with Iltja Ntjarra Art Centre, Alice Springs and Waralungku Arts, Borroloola
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A fossil fuelled future?
ALISON CLOUSTON
COALFACE 4 (l) &
COALFACE 5 (r), 2020
RECYCLED ALUMINIUM, WOOL, COAL
DIMENSIONS VARIABLE
FIDNA MACDONALD
MINING JERICH0, 2013
INKJET PRINT
62 x 46 CM

FIDNA MACDONALD
MINING GALILEE, 2020
IMAGE SOURCE: AERIAL PHOTO
BY PAUL HAMILTON OF ALPHA
COAL PROJECT TEST,
GALILEE BASIN, 2012
INSTALLATION VIEW
(WINDOW PAINTED BY
STEVE SMITH)
ALISON CLOUSTON & BOYD
COALFACE 4, 2020
VIDEO LOOP, 1.59 MINS
IMAGES AND SOUND RECORDINGS
FROM THE NATIONAL DAY OF CLIMATE
ACTION, FEB 2020, SYDNEY TOWN
HALL AND BUMBLEBEE NATURE REFUGE
(SITE OF PROPOSED COAL
MINE IN QUEENSLAND)
VANESSA INKAMALA. INSTALLATION VIEW.
“I wanted to show that even though this country is postcard perfect, it should still be acknowledged as the significant Indigenous cultural site that it is.”
“This place is called Anzac Hill in white man’s language, but we call it Untyeyetwelye.

It is a sacred women’s site for us, but unfortunately it is now a memorial site for soldiers of war. Growing up I always saw the Australian flag flying upon that hill, but never the Aboriginal flag.”
WATERCOLOURS BY BETTY NAMATJIRA WHEELER, HELARY WIRRI, SELMA COULTHARD, GLORIA PANNKA & BENITA CLEMENTS. INSTALLATION VIEW.
VANESSA INKAMALA
MINING WESTERN MACDONNELL RANGES
17 x 26 cm
WATERCOLOUR ON ARCHES PAPER
(#608-18)
WATERCOLOURS BY SELMA COULTHARD, BENITA CLEMENTS, RICKY CONNICK, JAKAMARA, MARVYN RUBUNTJA. INSTALLATION VIEW.
BeNITA CLEMENTS
HOMELESS
2020
WATERCOLOUR ON ARCHES PAPER
56 x 36 CM
(#71-20)
“We want to introduce to people in urban environments the beautiful landscape of the Northern Territory. At the same time, we want to raise awareness about the issues we are facing. We feel that there is a lack of consultation with traditional owners. If the authorities would only listen to us rather than investing in things such as mining on our country, which we strongly object to.”
Mervyn RUBUNTJA
CLOSING THE GAP
2020
WATERCOLOUR ON ARCHES PAPER
54 x 35 CM
(#72-20)
Jack Green. Installation View.
Jack Green
NGARRI YARRI (MY COUNTRY)
2019
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
61 x 94 cm
(#271-10)

Jack Green
OUR COUNTRY IS ALIVE AND
WHITEFELLAS DON'T WANT TO KNOW
2020
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
92 x 92 cm
(#29-20)
Jack Green. Installation View.
This Land is Ours - Four Clans
2019, acrylic on canvas, 50 x 74 cm (#249-19)

Garrwa, Gudanj, Marra and Yanyuwa been here forever. We all tied in through ceremony and Dreaming tracks. Marra (top left) are saltwater people hunting turtle, dugong. They dance the Buffalo dance. Yanyuwa (top right) are saltwater people too, hunting; turtle and dugong out around the islands. Gudanj (bottom left) and Garrwa (bottom right) tied in to the Dreaming Track that runs from Garrwa Country in to Gudanj Country. There are a lot of powerful sacred sites that need to be looked after by us with song and ceremony. We gotta keep em safe. We all got spirit people in our Countries. They watching, looking; out, seeing what’s happening. This land is ours, it’s not for whitefellas to destroy while they tryin; to make a buck. Us four clans gotta stand strong together.

Our Country is alive and Whitefellas don’t want to know
2020, acrylic on canvas, 92 x 92 cm (#29-20)

Glencore, the company that owns McArthur River Mine, talk about the mine being in the middle of nowhere, at great distances from the places the Whitefellas fly in from to work there. But it’s not in the middle of nowhere. McArthur River Mine sits in our country, right amongst a network of sacred sites and cultural places that give us life. Miners are always trying to get up close to our people, pick them off one by one. They like to get photos of their people shaking Aboriginal people’s hands. They are always busy trying to make things look good while they poison our land and damage our sacred places.

Sacred Country
2020, acrylic on canvas, 66 x 62 cm (#2-20)

In 2006, Whitefella miners, with the support of their governments, diverted McArthur River and dug a huge open cut pit in the bed of our river. Then they started building a massive waste rock dump to hide their deadly waste in our Country. The miners waste will be here for thousands of years. They did this to us right in the middle of Sacred Country, right where the Snake Dreamings are, where the Jabiru, the Barramundi, Dingo and Turtle Dreamings are. They cut our Dreaming tracks and threaten our culture and our futures as Aboriginal people.

Our Dreaming is Our Life
2019, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60 cm (#403-19)

The old man, claps his boomerangs and sings the song that travels with the Dreaming track of the Old Snake that travelled from the east to the west, before turning south east and going into the ground. Old Snake went right into the ground, right where McArthur River Mine is now trying to dig him up. Nearby are other sacred sites, the Garbula tree and the Turtle. Not too far away is the Barramundi Dreaming and the Jabiru Dreaming. These Dreaming’s are powerful, they give us life, we come from them when we born and go back to them. Today whitefellas have trapped them all in the lease of McArthur River Mine where the mining company keeps digging and digging down in to the Old Snake and leaving behind a toxic waste rock pile. Once this Country at McArthur River was full of food, easy for families to go hunting bringing back wallaby, goanna, good food like that. But not today because the mine is destroying our Country, its food and sacred places.
My Country used to look beautiful before miners pushed their way in and started digging it up and leaving their toxic waste behind for our children to deal with. When we were all living on Country there used to be wallaby drives where men would get behind the wallabies and drive them toward the hunters hiding and waiting for the prey. This was the time before white people came to shoot our people so they could take our land. After this terrible time, when things settle down a bit, some old drovers used to come to Borroloola and pick up some of the old men who could show them where the water holes were for the cattle on their trip towards Queensland.

At the top of the painting are two Whitefellas they represent both sides of politics who direct money into Aboriginal communities. This money doesn’t really go to us Blackfellas it goes to the white dinosaurs that have captured our organisations. They like to look after themselves, make sure they are all good. They like to sit in their offices and make us have to climb up to them. At the bottom of the painting are two more Whitefellas, they been hearing from their mates, ‘Good money to be made in Aboriginal communities’. ‘Beauty,’ they say, ‘get me a job mate’. All the while we are watching this, even the spirits in the Country are watching, and waiting for things to change.

Government been working for a long time to push us Aboriginal people off our homelands. Many people end up in town with no job, no house and no family support. Being in town, whether it be Darwin, Katherine or Tennant Creek can be dangerous for Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people are always getting moved along, always watched, always told you can’t be here. Once when people were drinking they could sit in the park, under the trees out in the open where they could be seen and feel safe. But these days Aboriginal people aren’t allowed in the parks when they drink. The parks are for white people, they like to keep them nice and green. Being pushed out of these places makes it unsafe for Aboriginal who can’t drink in a hotel, kept out because of no shoes or because the bouncer doesn’t like the look of ya. People are pushed into the scrub to drink. They pushed out where no one can see them. It’s not safe drinking on the side of the creek where a croc might get you or to a place where you might get murdered. Government and councils don’t care about making it unsafe for Aboriginal people as long as their green parks look good for white people.
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A fossil fuelled future?

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