

# Country In Mind

The art of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists made about Country is a modern resounding expression of spiritual, cultural, social, and geographical connection. For First Nations people the term 'Country' is used as an expression of the relationship between an individual and their ancestral lands and seas. Connection to Country is inherent: we are born to it, it is how we identify ourselves, it is our family, our laws, our inheritance, and our legacy. This reciprocity between land and people is sustained by the environment and cultural knowledge, and how this manifests for an individual or collectively depends on associations passed down through family and community.

The diverse Australian continent, from the tropical wetlands in the far north, through to the vast expanse of desert terrain at the centre and out to coastal and riverine environments, all once sustained Aboriginal populations. As the climate and natural environments varied across the land so did resources and the cultural practices that arose from interactions with Country reflect this. Throughout Aboriginal Australia, the religious philosophy of the land and the Ancestors provides answers to fundamental questions of creation and existence and hence, the meaning of life. Aboriginal knowledges belong to an integrated system of learning that is inextricably tied to the land. Everything is part of a continuum, an endless flow of life and ideas emanating from Country.

Aboriginal artworks that tell stories of Country are a dynamic and evolving continuation of this culture where ancient traditions inform living practice. Over time, the material substance of modern painting has changed and so too has the way it has influenced the visual expression of artists and communities. Marks that were once made in sand are now painted on canvas or board with acrylics or transferred from the body onto strips of bark. Although these modern paintings are individual, they continue to reaffirm the identity of Aboriginal people in the spiritual and temporal world: they stay contained within an indigenous worldview where tradition can be revisited and adapted through contemporary art.

The artists in this exhibition represent the land as the link between spirituality, culture, language, family, law and identity. In their work Country is the centre of an ontological compass from which knowledge systems evolve but stay inextricably tied to place. The exhibition focuses on works primarily from the USC Art Collection by Aboriginal Australian artists who explore their individual creativity within the bounds of custom, tradition, and law along a continuum of cultural and spiritual connection with their Homelands.

## Curator

**Christopher Bassi** is an Australian artist and curator of Meriam, Yupangathi (Torres Strait and Cape York) and British descent. Bassi's practise is informed by ongoing concerns with intersections of place, belonging and the entangling of racial and cultural identities.

## Artists

Nyuju Stumpy Brown, John Bulunbulun, Lydia Burak, Jukuna Mona Chuguna, Timothy Cook, Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori, Birrmuyingathi Maali Netta Loogatha, Susan Marawarr, Laurie Marburduk, John Mawurndjul, Horace Munmilli, Ivan Namirrkki, Esther Giles Nampitjinpa, Nyurapayia Nampitjinpa, Mitjili Napurrula, Phyllis Ningarmara, Naata Nungurrayi, Lena Nyadbi, Gloria Tamerre Petyarre, George Hairbrush Tjungurrayi, Thuganmu Arnold Watt, Terry Ngamandara Wilson and Nyapanyapa Yunupingu.

## Exhibition lenders

The De Deyne Family

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this exhibition may contain images, names, and voices of people who are deceased.**



A USC Art Gallery exhibition developed as part of **Connecting Stories**, an initiative of Creative Arts Alliance as part of the Regional Arts Services Network and is presented in partnership with Blaklash Creative and the SEQN Regional Gallery Network.