

ARTBACK NT PRESENTS A SPARK NT EXHIBITION  
CURATED BY CARMEN ANSALDO

# GROUND SWELL

RECENT MOVEMENTS  
WITHIN ART AND TERRITORY

**With accelerating momentum, contemporary artists are shifting the conceptual focus of their practices to address the intensifying crisis of global ecological degradation.**

**Alongside scientists and environmentalists, artists have historically presented as some of the first responders to this crisis, bearing witness to its effects through creative expression.**

***Groundswell: recent movements within art and territory* showcases a selection of artistic responses to creeping changes to the Northern Territory's water supply.**

**“Assembling a travelling exhibition centred on this unavoidable reality is to unambiguously question the role of art within the process of change – urgent, revolutionary change.**

**Rediscovering how to move together as a collective force is our sole option if we are to adequately confront the most pressing and dangerous questions of our livelihoods.”**

**Carmen Ansaldo, SPARK NT Curator**



Niall Barrington, *Running Out*  
 (detail), 2019, mixed media.  
 Photographer: Helen Orr



## SYNOPSIS

Spanning geographies from the Top End to the Central Desert, **Groundswell: Recent movements within art and territory** brings together a selection of Northern Territory based artists, diverse in aesthetic, but united in their concern for issues of water security. For some of these artists, concerns for water have always been a conceptual touchstone. Others have only recently turned their attention to the subject, compelled by a mounting crisis. For all, the urgency of the situation demands a broad audience.

Curator Carmen Ansaldo, driven by an activist's passion, draws our attention to this mounting groundswell, harnessing visual culture to agitate for the paradigm shift we so desperately need if we are to preserve our most precious resource into an uncertain future. Identifying four key issues of concern for water sustainability – access, contamination, scarcity and culture – Ansaldo acknowledges a growing artistic movement while foregrounding the wider role art plays in the process of social, political and cultural change.

Reimagining the curator as political organiser, her aim is to equip audiences with the tools and the motivation to become active participants in effecting change on environmental issues. This is an exhibition curated with audience engagement central to its public ambition.

For more information about the exhibition visit: [artbacknt.com.au/show/groundswell-recent-movements-within-art-and-territory/](http://artbacknt.com.au/show/groundswell-recent-movements-within-art-and-territory/)



Jacky Green, *White Fellas, Gas Pipelines, Killing Country*, 2019, synthetic polymer paint on canvas. Photographer: Helen Orr

**“Maybe people will look at one of these paintings and think about what is happening to our Country, to our land, to our water and to culture.”**

**Jacky Green, artist**



## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Increasingly contemporary artists are drawing attention to the escalating global ecological crisis through a range of creative forms including activist exhibitions, performance protests, culture jamming, grassroots community outreach and sustainable arts practices. Community arts activist Arlene Goldbard refers to this frontline positioning as evidence of the artist's status as an 'indicator species' sensitive to the shifts and changes impacting our social and environmental realities.

*Groundswell: recent movements within art and territory* evidences such sensitivities showcasing a selection of powerful responses to creeping changes to the Northern Territory's water supply. Curator Carmen Ansaldo charts these changes by grouping artistic responses thematically into the prevailing resource issues of: **access** concerned with commercial projects that threaten ecosystems and the ownership rights of water; **contamination** the disposal of waste products and the effects on groundwater; **scarcity** the drying of aquifers effecting availability of drinking water and **culture** the obligations that come with caring for Country.

Artists in the exhibition respond to these themes in a varied and considered manner through moving image, visualised data, sound recordings, painting, printmaking, ceramics and sculpture. Borroloola artist **Jacky Green** campaigns against water hungry projects condemning the colonising roots of this corporate extraction that are ruining the ecosystems of his homeland. **Lee Harrop** takes the mineral extraction industry as her focus. Merging art and science, she utilises visual data and geological core samples to draw attention to excessive

water usage in drilling exploration practices. Ceramicist **Mel Robson** creates casts of the skeletons that have perished within drought ravaged geographies and maps these locations onto their fragile surfaces. Larakia elder **June Mills** invites us to join us in her climate change flash dance project. **Kelly Lee Hickey's** cyanotypes map the impact of settler culture on claypans close to Alice Springs, while **Niall Barrington** maps some of the worst instances of water contamination in the Northern Territory. **Winsome Jobling** creates a *momento mori* series of climate changed landscapes encased in antique frames. **Sarah Pirrie's** seductive watercolours cleverly expose the impact of consumer culture on Darwin coastlines, while **Nadine Lee** considers the healing properties of water as a fundamental component within Larrakia ceremony and implores us not to take this precious resource for granted.

A call to action as much as an exhibition experience, *Groundswell* engages profoundly with a pivotal and pressing issue of our time as artists give voice to their concerns about water sustainability and its impact on our collective futures. Positing questions and sparking conversations it seeks to inform a wider plan of action. As such it asks audiences to become a tangible instrument of change and contribute to turning the tide on climate catastrophe by becoming involved where they can.

Jeremiah GarIngarr, *Bukem*, 2017,  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas. Photographer: Helen Orr



## AUDIENCES

Audience engagement is central to Ansaldo's project and in this sense the exhibition becomes a collective arena, a call to action and a catalyst to engage and empower audiences to effect change.

Ansaldo states her ambition to reimagine the curator as political organiser with the naked aim to shift audiences from a "position of witness to a place of active participation". To this end, rather than an academic catalogue, Ansaldo provides audiences with an Activist Toolkit which highlights the key issues at stake and provides simple, concrete tactics to equip audiences with pathways and tools to become active participants moving within collective currents of change.

*Groundswell: recent movements within art and territory* has completed a successful tour through the Northern Territory where associated audience engagement programs involving environmentalists, scientists and water specialists alongside artists were over-subscribed, sparking lively debate and building community awareness. Participating artists are available for public programs subject to funding or there is the alternative to draw on relevant local participants to respond to the works on display and discuss the themes within a local context.

For school audiences there are numerous platforms for engaging across diverse curricula areas and the exhibition will be accompanied by bespoke education

materials for use within the exhibition space, as well as an activity trail for families and young children.

**"I want to remind people that we all have custodial responsibilities to water because if we don't look after it, it won't look after us. If we pollute water, we pollute ourselves."**

**Nadine Lee, artist**



Sarah Pirrie, *You've got to crack*, 2020, watercolour and pencil on paper.  
Photographer: Helen Orr



Sarah Pirrie, *Hydrostatic Quench*, 2020, watercolour and pencil on paper.  
Photographer: Helen Orr



Sarah Pirrie, *Alumina Groundswell*, 2020, watercolour and pencil on paper.  
Photographer: Helen Orr



## PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

*Groundswell: recent movements within art and territory* showcases the work of nineteen artists from remote and regional towns and communities across the Northern Territory.

Ruby Djikarra Alderton, Niall Barrington, Lindy Brodie, Jonathan World Peace Bush, Aly de Groot, Jeremiah Garling, Jacky Green, Lee Harrop, Kelly Lee Hickey, Winsome Jobling, Tarzan JungleQueen, Maicie Lalrara, Nadine Lee, June Mills, Patricia Phillipus Napurrula, Sarah Pirrie, Mel Robson, Andrick Ross, Jennifer Taylor

**“Artists have the capacity through their artwork to bring about social and moral change. For example, challenging social ideals, norms and beliefs in a manner that shares new knowledge and encourages a reconsideration or reinterpretation of particular views and practices. That alone, I argue, can be the impetus for change.”**

**Lee Harrop, artist**



Mel Robson, *Ingress Egress*  
*Regress* (detail), 2019, slip  
cast porcelain with decals.  
Photographer: Helen Orr



Mel Robson, *Ingress Egress*  
*Regress*, installation view, Northern  
Centre for Contemporary Art, 2019,  
slip cast porcelain with decals.  
Photograph: NG Photographics





Maicie Lalara, *Yilkwa-Monster Fish*, 2019,  
ghost net, marine debris and bush dye string.  
Installation image



Nadine Lee, *Healing*, 2019, muslin, mica and  
driftwood, installation view, Northern Centre for  
Contemporary Art. Photograph: NG Photographics



Carmen Ansaldo, SPARK NT  
Curator speaking at the opening of  
her exhibition *Groundswell: recent  
movements within art and territory*,  
Northern Centre for Contemporary  
Art. Photograph: NG Photographics

## ABOUT THE CURATOR

**Carmen Ansaldo** is a writer, activist and arts worker based in Darwin, Northern Territory.

She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Painting) from the Queensland College of Art and a Bachelor of Arts, Honours (Extended major in Art History) from the University of Queensland. She has worked and studied internationally in Long Island, USA and Berlin, Germany. Her research analyses the intersection between visual arts and political engagement with a focus on First Nations art practices and remote and regional arts development.

Ansaldo has worked in remote and regional art centres within the Northern Territory and Western Australia, as well as major arts institutions such as the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory and Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art. Her arts journalism has featured extensively in national and international print and online publications over the past fifteen years including *Art Monthly*, *Eyeline*, *Artlink*, *Ocula* and *The Guardian Australia*. Most recently, she represented the Northern Territory within the profession of arts journalism at the 58th Venice Biennale as part of the Australia Council's Emerging Artworkers Program. She currently works for the City of Darwin and organises the Darwin Free University.

As a collaborator, Ansaldo works with artists, activists and community members to critique and expand upon current relationships between the arts, politics and culture within the epoch of climate catastrophe. *Groundswell: recent movements within art and territory* is her debut curatorial project.



## SPECIFICATIONS

### Objects

14 x 2D works

6 x 3D works

4 x audio visual works

1 x sound piece

### Installation

Running metres – approx. 50 metres

### Inclusions

All exhibition labelling – including artwork captions, artists' statements and didactics

Some dedicated exhibition furniture –  
2 x wall shelf, 2 x plinth, 1 x acrylic case

Some AV equipment – 2 x small monitors, 2 x headsets, 1 x speaker

Support documents – comprehensive installation manual, comprehensive media kit

Audience engagement materials –  
Activists Toolkit, bespoke resources for schools and families

### Cost

\$3,000 plus GST (freight included)

### Contact

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*Groundswell: recent movements within art and territory,*  
Northern Centre for Contemporary Art.  
Photograph: NG Photographics