

It used to be in sand. It still is. And in ochre. And on cave walls. On stones. On bodies.

Storytelling. Powders with water, spread across surfaces. Grass woven into tools, into stories, into holders, into traps.

Country cannot be reduced to land. It is not owned by us; it is a part of us. It nourishes us when we nourish it.

The ocean was not something to only enjoy. It was food, it was life, it was home. It was not filled with plastics so small the eye could not see. It flourished. It provided. It created. When people took, it was with responsibility.

The land was not tossed and turned until it could no longer be recognised. It was not forever green or brown. It rested, it changed, it moved through states. Wet and dry, wet and dry. Abundance and scarcity. Growth and death. A time to gather. A time to burn. A time to leave.

We know that fires in nature are not just something to destroy the world. It is something that helps regrowth, it is something that keep us safe. The notion of fires as destruction and only destruction has never been ours. Fire was read, understood, cared for.

A river could slow. A fire could burn. A grass could dry. A tree could rest. They were part of the cycle. It is understood that a cycle means a return. It understands that something must rest before it grows. It understands that taking also means giving back. Balance.

But the world built over Country does not understand this concept. It sees stillness and calls it lazy, calls it a waste. It sees water and sees what can be consumed. It sees earth and searches for what’s underneath. Country has been given worth, a monetary value that never used to exist.

Country nourishes; it does not get nourished here.

Access to Country, to stories, to people is limited. Money, jobs, time is the focus. Not enough, need more, can’t exist to stop, to breathe, to tell stories. No more cycles. There is only one line on a graph: more, more, more. Not a circle, but an arrow going up, increasing, crushing those left behind.

An arrow does not return. It does not learn from the past. It does not see what it has destroyed. It only moves forward.

Culture is required to fit around a working week. Ceremony means taking cultural leave. Returning to Country, to people, to home, takes fuel, permission, accommodation, time. Access is shaped by a system that never sought to understand it.

Country has been changed; the landscape has changed.

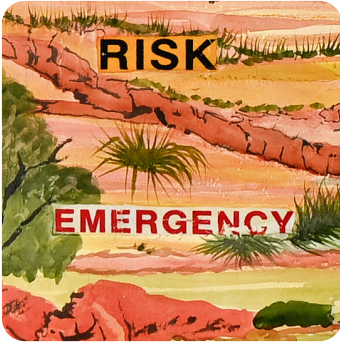
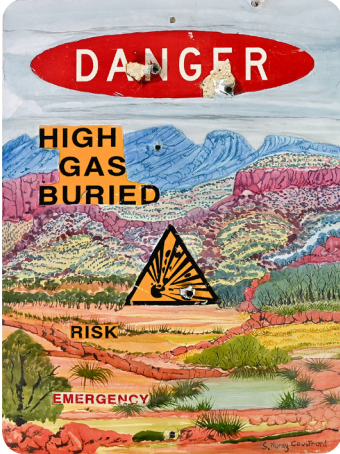
Now there are altered photos, made eerie, made to tell a story that you might not understand. You might feel uncomfortable, you might feel odd. It’s interesting, how feelings can be created from mere images. Perhaps this is unfamiliar. How does it feel to stand before an image and know that it does not have to explain itself?

Metal fences twist and bind, trap and subdue. Fish caught in line made of plastic and thread, pulling against the tide. Signs litter the road, the land.

Stop.

Danger.

Can’t go here anymore.



It used to be sacred. Now it’s forbidden. Sacred did not mean empty. Sacred did not mean unused. Sacred was for the right people and the right time. It was not a fence, a sign, a fine. It was not owned.

A shield sits, crafted from metal, shaped and sitting as if pulled from a tree. The material different, the technique different. And yet the same care, the same history, same ability to do so much, to protect, to love.



There’s metal, plastic, cloth on every surface now. Resources, refined and milled to the point of no return and then discarded in landfill. It will remain after every hand who has made, used and discarded it has gone.

And yet, what is landfill next to 65,000 years of existence?

No longer does it just work in grass, sand, ochre.

A basket, woven from our new histories: *The Koori Mail*. Holding stories, holding knowledge with the same stories that are spoken about the people. A technique passed down from person to person, generation to generation. The same way words on paper tell stories. The basket contains more than is seen.

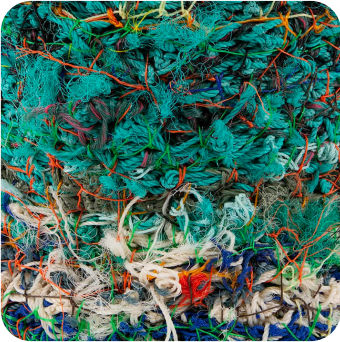


Look at it.

Hold it.

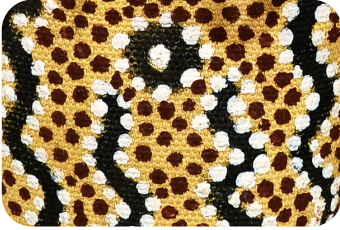
The thing is, people take it all. Trees, land, water. Ploughed, tossed, drained and transformed until nothing remains.

Fishing line and wire, cut when it becomes a problem. Polluting oceans and water ways. Captured like fish. Gathered. Bound. Woven. Unnatural colours of neon blue and orange and yet, it holds a natural history now. A story. A basket made of ghost-net. One recycled, not cut away to never be seen again. A vessel made from what endangers fish. The material unable to change its history can now be forced to carry another.



Look what we can do. We will make culture with your materials. We will bend what should not bend, break what you call unbreakable. We will create with the rubbish that you leave on this Earth and we will make you see it. We will make you face it.

Shoes, holding red dirt in the laces that would normally coat our feet. It tells a story, now it holds knowledge, paint and design. Yet, notice the dirt. Where did it come from? Where does this story belong? Something that we never used to use now has a use for us.



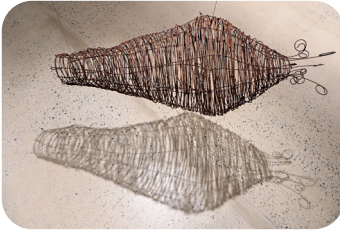
You didn’t break Country or culture or storytelling or people.

Resilience is always a theme. Survival too. They admire it while not wanting to name what they had to be resilient against. What had to be survived. You cannot turn our endurance into a personality trait. You cannot make the violence disappear through praise, through pride.

Metal, twisted and turned into a form that once trapped fish. Knowledge remaining in shape, even if the material has changed. The hands still remember how to gather, bend and bind. Made to carry the memory of what used to be created to provide.

We shouldn’t have to experience the world you made.

But look what we have done with what you forced.



Tin cans, holding your version of food, of nourishment, now holding our version of storytelling. Colours of the earth now upon it, in paint, in rust. Is this irony or a return? To see the colours that this metal has been extracted from once again surrounding it. A story being told once more.



Country remains in ochre and sand and grass and ocean. But also, in steel and newspaper and plastic and tin. Country is carried through people. It enters what we touch, what we shape and what we refuse to throw away.

Country remains. Even when you change it.



Blak works from Flinders University Museum of Art

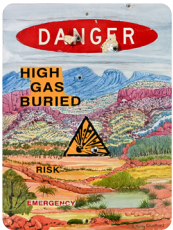
20 July–
18 September
2026

Un-discipline



HAYLEY MILLAR BAKER (born 1990, Narrm / Melbourne, Victoria), Gunditjmara / Djab Wurrung, *Untitled (The theft of the White men's sheep)*, from *A Series of Unwarranted Events*, 2018, inkjet print on cotton rag, edition 1/5, 84 x 103.8 x 4.4 cm. Collection of Flinders University Museum of Art 5999.

All images courtesy FUMA



SELMA NUNAY COULTHARD (born 1954, Mparntwe / Alice Springs, Northern Territory), Arrernte / Luritja / Western Aranda, *Urrampinyi (Tempe Downs), West of Alice Springs, NT*, 2023, watercolour pigment on repurposed road sign, 60 x 45 x 2.4 cm. Collection of Flinders University Museum of Art 6082.



SONYA RANKINE (born 1970, Tarntanya / Adelaide, South Australia), Ngar-rindjeri / Ngadjuri / Narungga / Wirangu, *Nothing has changed 1–3*, 2021, newspaper, waxed embroidery thread, PVA glue, 3.2 x 8.8 x 4.8 cm; 3.6 x 15.4 x 8.3 cm; 16.6 x 26 x 25 cm. Collection of Flinders University Museum of Art 5954–5956.



PETER JAPANANGKA BLACKSMITH (c.1915, Winneke, Northern Territory– 1991), Kartangarruru, *Painted sandshoes*, c.1990, synthetic polymer paint on found canvas shoes, 9.4 x 22 x 25.5 cm. Gift of Dr. C. Nicholls, 2004. Collection of Flinders University Museum of Art 4221.



DANIE MELLOR (born 1971, Mackay, Queensland), Ngadjon / Mamu / Jirrbal, *How I wish you were here*, 2008, reclaimed steel, 79.4 x 38.4 x 7.5 cm. Collection of Flinders University Museum of Art 4563.



NANCY NAAWI (born 1958, Waiben / Thursday Island, Torres Strait Islands, Queensland), Meriam Mir, *Ghost-net vessel*, 2016, woven ghost nets, plastic twine, 29.1 x 33 x 33 cm. Collection of Flinders University Museum of Art 5757.



UTA UTA TJANGALA (c.1926, Dovers Hills, Western Australia–1990, Mparntwe / Alice Springs, Northern Territory), Pintupi, *Paint tin*, 1981, synthetic polymer paint on paper and tin, 17.3 x 7.6 x 7.6 cm. Gift of Emeritus Professor JVS Megaw, 1981. Collection of Flinders University Museum of Art 1701.



ALI COBBY ECKERMANN (born 1963, Tarntanya / Adelaide, South Australia), Yankunytjatjara / Kokatha, *Fish trap*, 2014, fencing wire and netting clips, 57 x 152.5 x 59 cm. Gift of Emeritus Professor JVS Megaw and Dr Ruth M Megaw, 2014. Collection of Flinders University Museum of Art 4958.