



BACKGROUND

SALT WATER

COUNTRY

IMAGE South Stradbroke Island
South-east Queensland, Australia.
Photo: Jo-Anne Driessens.

NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL TOUR FOR NEW EXHIBITION OF INDIGENOUS ART

Evocative images of the coast, sand and sea and their cultural importance are the subject of *Saltwater Country*, an internationally travelling exhibition of new Indigenous art from Queensland that traces the cultural connections between some of Australia's most acclaimed artists and their saltwater country.

This exhibition explores the cultural connections between artists and their coastal country. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists are known for their connections to 'country', less understood are equally strong connections to the sea and waterways on the coastal edge.

It is this unique story that Queensland Indigenous artists share within *Saltwater Country*, an important exhibition that captures and presents an image of Australia that is distinctive, culturally vibrant, beautiful and evocative.

Saltwater Country includes acclaimed Australian artists Judy Watson, Fiona Foley, Michael Cook (star of the 2014 Biennale of Sydney), Alick Tipoti, and new talents Megan Cope and Ryan Presley.

Saltwater Country was exhibited at Gold Coast City Gallery, Queensland from 19 July to 31 August 2014, and travels to deliver its unique message to the Embassy of Australia, Washington DC, USA (October to December 2014) and then Utrecht, The Netherlands (January to April 2015) to AAMU, Museum of Contemporary Aboriginal Art.

It returns to Australia to show at Manly Art Gallery and Museum, Sydney (May–June 2015) and then embarks

on a national tour through QLD, NSW, VIC, SA and WA (2015–17). *Saltwater Country* is curated by Michael Aird and Virginia Rigney, and was developed in partnership by Museums & Galleries Queensland and Gold Coast City Gallery.

Co-curator Virginia Rigney said, "The saltwater country is a place of bounty and these places facilitate movement and contact, with tidal and seasonal flows structuring the rhythms of the day and the year, with dramatic times of flood and storm bringing renewal and change. The coastal edge is also currently charged with concerns over environmental change, pollution and human impact. In making artworks about these issues artists are redefining the practice of caring for this meeting point between land and sea."

Michael Aird, whose traditional country includes the Gold Coast added, "Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art practice is different to that of the earliest artists who emerged from the western desert. This exhibition captures the distinctive cultural and creative experience of Queensland. It will give international and national audiences a richer appreciation of the diversity of Australian contemporary practice."

SALT WATER COUNTRY

SALTWATER COUNTRY ARTISTS

Vernon Ah Kee
Michael Cook
Erub Arts
Rosella Namok
Laurie Nilsen
Ryan Presley
Ken Thaiday
Ian Waldron

Daniel Boyd
Megan Cope
Fiona Foley
Mavis Ngallametta
Napolean Oui
Brian Robinson
Alick Tipoti
Judy Watson

TOUR DATES

Gold Coast City Gallery, QLD | 19 July to 31 August 2014
Embassy of Australia, Washington DC, USA
October to December 2014
AAMU, Museum of Contemporary Aboriginal Art, Utrecht,
The Netherlands | January to April 2015
Manly Art Gallery and Museum, NSW | May to June 2015
2015–17 National Tour: QLD, NSW, VIC, SA, WA

KEY THEMES

Saltwater Country is an exhibition that features imagery of some of Australia's most beautiful coastline, interpreted by artists utilising their strong cultural connections to these areas in Queensland.

Australian Indigenous art is known for its connections to the land and place of birth of the artists. The term 'country' is used to express this reflection of connectedness. However there exists an equally strong cultural connection between Indigenous individuals and the sea. This exhibition looks specifically at the bond between artists and the coast in Queensland.

Queensland's varied coastal geography of beaches, mangroves, headlands, river systems, isolated islands and coral reefs have shaped the history of white Australia and, well before that, Indigenous cultures. *Saltwater Country* is the site for these rhythms of plenty and trade, they facilitate movement and contact between groups, and have tidal and seasonal flows that are expressed in the rhythms of day and year.

Saltwater Country and the coastline itself is also a contested place. Historically the beaches of Australia were the site of first contact between the colonisers and the Indigenous inhabitants. More recently the coastline is a place charged with concerns about environmental changes, human impact, pollution and political concerns about Australia's treatment of asylum seekers.

In recent years many of Australia's most powerful and internationally critically acclaimed artists have emerged from Queensland. Vernon Ah Kee, Fiona Foley, Michael Cook and Judy Watson have produced artwork with political overtones that have exposed little known aspects of Australia's history.

Winner of the 2014 Bulgari Art Award Daniel Boyd, and Torres Strait Islander artists Brian Robinson and Alick Tipoti, express Australia's colonial past in a dynamic and contemporary way, utilising historical interactions with the peoples of the Pacific islands.

The artworks in *Saltwater Country* redefine the practice known as 'caring for country', creating new insights and relevance for a wide and diverse audience. The unique individual and community narratives drawn from these artists' saltwater country connections create an engaging entry point for all audiences, many of whom may have their own experiences of Queensland's coastline.

Accompanying the exhibition is a fully illustrated catalogue and a digital platform featuring interviews with the artists and educational resource material.

FURTHER INFORMATION, IMAGES & INTERVIEWS

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Exhibition developed
in partnership by



Exhibition supported by



IMAGE (Above) South
Stradbroke Island, south-east
Queensland, Australia. Photo:
Alex Chornitz.

Saltwater Country is a travelling exhibition developed in partnership between Museums & Galleries Queensland and Gold Coast City Gallery. Curated by Michael Aird and Virginia Rigney. *Saltwater Country* has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body; and is supported by the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory governments. This project has received financial assistance from the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland's Backing Indigenous Arts program. The project is supported by the Australian Government through the Australia International Cultural Council, an initiative of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; and by the City of Gold Coast.