



# A CHANGING ECOLOGY

19 February to 16 May 2021 | Foundation Gallery, Artspace Mackay

An Artspace Mackay, Mackay Regional Council Exhibition



The staff of Artspace Mackay acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we live and work, the Yuwi People. We extend this acknowledgement to all Aboriginal members of the Birri Gubba Nation and pay respects to Elders past and present, and to the young emerging leaders. We acknowledge the important protocols of the Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander communities across the Mackay region.

# Foreword

The Mackay Regional Council art collection was commenced in the late 1980s by the Mackay City Library with a gift of 28 hand-coloured lithographs by 19th century naturalist artist John Gould (1804 – 1881). This was followed by the acquisition of three engravings from *Joseph Banks' Florilegium*, focusing again on the early history of Australia and its flora and fauna. In the eighteen years since Artspace Mackay opened, the Art Collection has grown substantially to include many contemporary Australian artworks, in particular works of art by emerging and established contemporary Australian Indigenous artists exploring issues pertaining to Australia's First Peoples.

*A Changing Ecology* brings together items from the art and libraries' heritage collections and works by contemporary Australian Indigenous artists in dialogue about the changing cultural and environmental ecology of Australia, and specifically Queensland and the Mackay region. It provides a moment to reflect on historic, idealised representations of our natural environment and the lasting impact of colonisation on First Nations people.

Whilst there is much for our audiences to take from *A Changing Ecology*, its curation is a vital undertaking for gallery staff in questioning our role as a public collecting institute on Yuwi country. The exhibition is a reminder to us all to continue to reflect on our art collection meaningfully, to find new ways to tell the story of our place and to draw connections between the past and the present. It is through this process that we keep our art collection alive and relevant. I commend the Artspace Mackay curatorial team for their rigour in researching and bringing *A Changing Ecology* to light.

Tracey Heathwood

**Gallery Director**, Artspace Mackay, Mackay Regional Council

COVER IMAGE: **William GEORGE HARVEY** b. 1888 Mackay d. 1961 Mackay; **Robert Christie HARVEY** b. 1889 Mackay d. 1966 Blackheath NSW, *W.G. and R.C. Harvey photograph collection* 1910-20, glass plate negatives. Mackay Regional Council Libraries Heritage Collection. Donated by Ian K. Harvey 1993.

OPPOSITE: **Jenna LEE** Larrakia, Wardaman and Karajarri peoples, b. 1992 Canberra ACT. *HiStory book* 2020, Hand-pressed recycled paper, and Solander box, 30 x 24.5 x 40.5 cm (closed). Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Purchased through the Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal Fund 2020.



**JOHN GOULD** (author) b. 1804 Lyme Regis UK d. 1881 London UK

**HENRY CONSTANTINE RICHTER** (illustrator) b. c. 1821 Brompton UK d. 1902 London UK

*Onychogalea unguifer* (nail-tailed kangaroo) 1845-63, hand-coloured lithograph, with gum wash, image: 27.0 x 40.0 cm; sheet: 36.7 x 54.5 cm. Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Donated by Wilson & Company, Stock and Sharebrokers 1987.

# A CHANGING ECOLOGY

Since colonisation, a European lens informed by desire to discover and conquer the exotic Australian landscape has been a commonly held understanding of this country's cultural and environmental history. This gaze removed living subjects from their natural environment in a race to gather knowledge from the so-called new world. Drawing from Mackay Regional Council's rich collecting history, *A Changing Ecology* brings together items from the art and libraries' heritage collections to explore the idea of colonial wonder—as both a celebration of the Australian landscape as well as a method used to displace its long human history. In this context, historic items and works by contemporary Indigenous artists respond to the changing cultural and environmental ecology of Australia, and specifically Queensland and the Mackay region. This dialogue acknowledges a more rounded understanding of what it means from Artspace Mackay's perspective to exist as a public collecting institution on Yuwi country of the Birri Gubba Nation.

Many of the works in this exhibition can be understood through a duality of celebration and loss. The lithographs, published in *Joseph Banks' Florilegium*, illustrate the first Australian botanical specimens ever collected by Europeans. They mark the arrival of European intervention in the Australian ecology and the beginning of modern, colonial Australia. A pivotal moment in the art collection's history, these were the very first artworks collected by then Mackay City Library. Depictions of iconic east coast Australian fauna by Henry Richter for John Gould's *The Mammals of Australia* tell of foreign scientific collecting from the 1800s. They reveal an anthropological gaze that privileged meticulous renderings of living specimens donned with Latin scientific names, reproduced in drawing for the purpose of study. Subjects were removed from the natural environment to best aid in documentation, as commissioned naturalists raced to gather knowledge from the so-called new world. The visual legacies of Banks and Gould remain cherished in Australian collections, yet they expose a particular exoticised method

of viewing this living country that led to lasting impacts for its ancient Indigenous civilisations.

To quote Professor Bruce Pascoe in *Dark Emu*, his ground-breaking re-reading of the earliest documents of First Contact in Australia, “Many readers of the explorers’ journals see the hardships they endured, and are enthralled by their finds... but by adjusting our perspective by only a few degrees, we see a vastly different world through the same window”.<sup>1</sup> Embracing this sentiment, contemporary voices reflect on the impact of colonial scientific collecting on views of living Australia, including First Nations people. *HIStory book* by Larrakia, Wardaman and Karajarri artist Jenna Lee literally reworks a classic British children’s book that recounts the arrival of Lieutenant James Cook in Australia into paper vessels reminiscent of those of her ancestors. Placed inside a Solander box (named for naturalist, Dr Daniel Solander, who travelled with Cook and Banks on the Endeavour voyage in 1770) the blank sheets of paper represent for the artist her ability to rewrite Cook’s story as her own.

The exhibition’s titular work, *A changing ecology* by Danie Mellor, gives voice to the lasting impact of colonisation on First Nations people, exploring the destruction of cultural identity through changed ecosystems. Created in consultation with Yuibera elders of Mackay, Mellor’s birthplace, he responds to ecological identities of this region. Scrutinising the introduced tradition of botanical drawing, the work depicts iconic non-native species of Queensland including the pineapple and sugarcane to highlight colonial impacts on local ecosystems. In Mellor’s signature blue and white palette, interspersed with full-colour native birds, wallabies and a seated figure, it both adopts and challenges the European gaze, particularly the historical association with botanical collecting that viewed flora and fauna, alongside Indigenous peoples, through the lens of the exotic. Both Lee and Mellor speak to the myopia inherent in understandings of European ‘discovery’ of Australia, acknowledging that colonisation continues to have a lasting impact on both Australia’s natural environment as well as First Nations peoples.

Drawing from the Mackay Regional Council Heritage Collection, Mackay cane farmers and ornithologists William and Robert Harvey produced a



*CL annis: mutetur: Oecologia*

**Danie MELLOR** Mamu, Ngagen and Ngajan peoples, b. 1971 Mackay,  
*A changing ecology* 2012, pencil, pastel, paint, and wash on paper, sheet: 95 x 145 cm;  
frame: 118.0 x 167.5 cm. Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Commissioned by  
Mackay Regional Council, BHP Billiton Mitsui Coal and Artspace Mackay Foundation 2012.



**William GEORGE HARVEY** b. 1888 Mackay d. 1961 Mackay;  
ROBERT CHRISTIE HARVEY b. 1889 Mackay d. 1966 Blackheath NSW  
*W.G. and R.C. Harvey photograph collection 1910-20, glass plate negatives. Mackay  
Regional Council Libraries Heritage Collection. Donated by Ian K. Harvey 1993.*

major photography collection documenting flora and fauna of this region in the first decades of the twentieth century. The original glass plate negatives, now an obsolete technology, capture the natural environment. Staged still lifes with often plain backgrounds in a continuation of that particular method for the scientific gaze. Their subjects remained isolated, adhering to the view that flora and fauna were best understood through decontextualised, detailed representations. The Harvey brothers' desire to capture and collate information, as also invoked by Banks and Gould, had a practical purpose, yet the delicate staging and composition can also be appreciated as fine art photography. Read through another lens, these depictions of their direct surroundings also indicate a strong connection to the natural environment as a result of their farming practices.

Also identifying this human impact and connection to the Australian ecology, Fiona Foley's gouaches speak to First Nation people's ongoing cultural connection to country. In contrast to the so-called objective scientific views of flora as captured by Banks or the Harvey brothers, Foley's fluid gouache mangrove pods are depicted by the artist to symbolise her childhood on K'gari (Fraser Island), her ancestral Badtjala home, collecting flotsam and jetsam along the shoreline. The painted items represent the ongoing, personal connection between cultural identity and country. Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander artist Dylan Mooney's works also speak of ongoing connection to country in defiance of intergenerational displacement. His research in anthropological archives in Australia and the United Kingdom have helped him to identify traditional wooden shield designs of his Yuwi ancestors which he has reproduced to scale in his watercolour drawings. On the verso, the shields are accompanied by line drawings of important cultural places on country representing the unbreakable bond between landscape, nature and his people. These landscapes represent the loss of the shields from their place of origin, reflecting on the implications that colonial exploration, and ways of viewing First Nations people's material culture as collectable 'artefacts,' are an ongoing legacy of European taxonomy.

Continuing this dialogue about human relationships with the land, and ongoing implications of this on identity and environment, Ellis Rowan's

*A Flower Hunter in Queensland & New Zealand* recounts the early botanical illustrator's experiences traveling through Mackay on her way to Far North Queensland. She recalls her first encounter in town and meeting a person of Melanesian descent, introduced to her as part of the large sugar cane labour force of Mackay. Australian South Sea Islanders are another group that have been subject to colonisation, something contemporary Chinese-Australian artist Pamela See explores in *Mackay*. Through intricately carved silhouettes, this work tells of Queensland's heavy reliance on the forced indentured labour of South Sea Islander people, referred to as blackbirding, in aid of the late nineteenth century sugar and cotton industries. The 1895 photo album *Views of Mackay*, shown alongside *Mackay*, is open to an enigmatic group portrait of dark-skinned, white-shirted men in a rainforest setting, with one white figure in the foreground. The image is a combined industrial and pastoral view of the early 20th century, representing two elements contributing to Australia's remarkably changed cultural and environmental ecology.

Together, these representations of flora and fauna, alongside works addressing the relationship Indigenous and non-indigenous Australian people have and continue to have with the natural ecosystems, form a dialogue about modern Australia. This dialogue informs the past about the present, and the present about the past, allowing for a fuller understanding of this country of colonial exploration and the Australian identity. All visual representations of the Australian ecology that appear in this exhibition can be viewed through more than just the colonial lens. As Professor Pascoe asserted, "it is a slight shifting of perspectives that can cultivate respect for the multiple cultural legacies of this country." <sup>2</sup>

Lauren Turton

Curator, Artspace Mackay, Mackay Regional Council

#### ENDNOTES

1 Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture*, Magabala Books, Broome, 2018, p. 3

2 *Ibid.*



**Fiona FOLEY** Badtjala people, b. 1964 Maryborough QLD.  
*Flotsam and jetsam #24* 2019, gouache and graphite on paper  
21 x 29.8 cm. Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Purchased 2020.



**Pamela SEE** b. 1979 Brisbane

*Mackay* 2020. Cotton rag and thread, bagasse, and acid-free glue, book: 33 x 32 x 5 cm; paper cut-out: 39 x 33 cm. Winner, Mackay Regional Council Regional Artists' Book Award 2020. Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Purchased through the Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal Fund 2020.

# A CHANGING ECOLOGY

## LIST OF WORKS

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### FIONA FOLEY

Badtjala people, b. 1964  
Maryborough QLD

*Flotsam and jetsam #23* 2019  
gouache and graphite on paper  
29.5 x 42 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art  
Collection. Purchased 2020.

*Flotsam and jetsam #24* 2019  
gouache and graphite on paper  
21 x 29.8 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art  
Collection. Purchased 2020.

*Flotsam and jetsam #25* 2019  
gouache, aquarelle and graphite  
on paper  
21 x 29.8 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art  
Collection. Purchased 2020.

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### JOSEPH BANKS

(commissioner)  
b. 1743 London UK d. 1820  
London UK

### SYDNEY PARKINSON

(principal artist)  
b. 1745 Edinburgh UK d. 1771  
Panaitan Indonesia

*Plate 313: Dendrocnicte moroides,  
Endeavour River, Australia* 1980-90  
from *Banks' Florilegium* 1768-84  
hand-coloured engraving, edition  
100/100  
plate: 45.7 x 30.5 cm;  
sheet 74.5 x 58 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art  
Collection

*Plate 7: Viola hederacea, Botany  
Bay, Australia* 1980-90  
from *Banks' Florilegium* 1768-84  
hand-coloured engraving, edition  
89/100  
plate: 45.7 x 30.5 cm;  
sheet 74.5 x 58 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art  
Collection

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### JOHN GOULD (author)

b. 1804 Lyme Regis UK d. 1881  
London UK

### HENRY CONSTANTINE

RICHTER (illustrator)  
b. c. 1821 Brompton UK d. 1902  
London UK

*Cucus brevicaudatus (short-tailed  
cuscus)* 1845-63  
hand-coloured lithograph, with  
gum wash  
image: 32.0 x 52.0 cm;  
sheet: 37.0 x 54.7 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art  
Collection. Donated by Wilson &  
Company, Stock and Sharebrokers  
1987.

*Echidna setosa (hairy echidna)*  
1845-63  
hand-coloured lithograph, with  
gum wash  
image: 32.0 x 52.0 cm;  
sheet: 37.0 x 54.7 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art  
Collection. Donated by Wilson &  
Company, Stock and Sharebrokers  
1987.

*Onychogalea unguifer (nail-tailed  
kangaroo)* 1845-63  
hand-coloured lithograph, with gum  
wash  
image: 27.0 x 40.0 cm;  
sheet: 36.7 x 54.5 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art  
Collection. Donated by Wilson &  
Company, Stock and Sharebrokers  
1987.

*Stenorhynchus leptonyx (sea leopard)*  
1845-63  
hand-coloured lithograph, with gum  
wash  
image: 32.0 x 52.0 cm;  
sheet: 37.0 x 54.7 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art  
Collection. Donated by Wilson &  
Company, Stock and Sharebrokers  
1987.

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### DALE HARDING

Bidjara, Ghungalu and Garingbal  
peoples, b. 1982 Moranbah QLD

White collared 2015  
found collars, rawhide, thread, brass  
130 x 45 x 3cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art  
Collection. Purchased 2016.

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### WILLIAM GEORGE HARVEY

b. 1888 Mackay d. 1961 Mackay

### ROBERT CHRISTIE HARVEY

b. 1889 Mackay d. 1966 Blackheath  
NSW

*W.G. and R.C. Harvey photograph  
collection* 1910-20  
glass plate negatives  
Mackay Regional Council Libraries  
Heritage Collection. Donated by Ian  
K. Harvey 1993.

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## JENNA LEE

Larrakia, Wardaman and Karajarri peoples, b. 1992 Canberra ACT

*HiStory book* 2020

Hand-pressed recycled paper, and Solander box  
30 x 24.5 x 40.5 cm (closed)  
Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Purchased through the Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal Fund 2020.

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## MARIA EMMA MCBURNEY

b. 1852 Sydney d. 1935 London UK

*Acalypha plant leaves* c. 1880  
watercolour and pencil on paper, mounted to card  
27.5 x 26.1 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Donated by Lorraine and Simon McConnell 1980.

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*Untitled* c. 1880  
watercolour on card, mounted to card  
47.9 x 37.2 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Donated by Lorraine and Simon McConnell 1980.

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*Untitled* c. 1880  
watercolour on paper, mounted to card  
48.8 x 33.6 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Donated by Lorraine and Simon McConnell 1980.

## DANIE MELLOR

Mamu, Ngagen and Ngajan peoples, b. 1971 Mackay

*A changing ecology* 2012

pencil, pastel, paint, and wash on paper  
sheet: 95 x 145 cm;  
frame: 118.0 x 167.5 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Commissioned by Mackay Regional Council, BHP Billiton Mitsui Coal and Artspace Mackay Foundation 2012.

*The untrammelled country explored (the naturalists)* 2007  
pencil, crayon, wash, and paper collage on paper  
sheet: 71.0 x 101.0 cm;  
frame: 86.5 x 122.0 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Donated by the artist 2009.

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## JOHN HENRY MILLS

b. 1851 UK d. 1919 Mount Britton QLD

## ALBERT RECKITT

b. 1829 Boston UK d. 1905 Mount Britton QLD

*Views of Mackay* 1895  
leather-bound photo album  
Mackay Regional Council Libraries Heritage Collection.

## DYLAN MOONEY

Yuwi, Torres Strait Islander, Australian South Sea Islander peoples, b. 1995 Mackay

*Away from country I* 2021  
watercolour and pencil on paper  
sheet: 167 x 75.6 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Purchased 2021.

*Away from country II* 2021  
watercolour and pencil on paper  
sheet: 167 x 75.6 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Purchased 2021.

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## ARCHIE MOORE

Kamilaroi people, b. 1970 Toowoomba

*Ghost ship (HMB Malthesia)* 2008  
Holy Bible, mirror, wood, string, paper, ink, and putty  
27.0 x 41.0 x 6.5 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Purchased 2011.

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## ANNIE PRING MARTEN

b. 1851 London UK d. 1924 Hertfordshire UK

*Mt Spencer (four views)* 1872-73  
watercolour  
plates: 10.5 x 15.5 cm;  
sheet: 25 x 30.3 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art Collection

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*The garden, Winterbourne* 1873  
watercolour  
25.6 x 35.5 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art  
Collection

*Entrance to Pleystowe Station*  
1873  
watercolour  
8.5 x 13.5 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art  
Collection

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## ELLIS ROWAN

b. 1848 Longwood VIC d. 1922  
Macedon VIC

*A Flower Hunter in Queensland &  
New Zealand* 1898  
hardcover book  
Mackay Regional Council Libraries  
Heritage Collection. Purchased  
2020.

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## PAMELA SEE

b. 1979 Brisbane

*Mackay* 2020  
Cotton rag and thread, bagasse,  
and acid-free glue  
book: 33 x 32 x 5 cm;  
paper cut-out: 39 x 33 cm  
Winner, Mackay Regional Council  
Regional Artists' Book Award  
2020. Mackay Regional Council Art  
Collection. Purchased through the  
Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal Fund  
2020.

## UNKNOWN ARTIST

*Pioneer River* 1888  
watercolour on cartridge  
8.0 x 14.0cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art  
Collection.

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## JUDY WATSON

Waanyi people, b. 1959  
Mundubbera QLD

*A preponderance of aboriginal  
blood* 2005  
etching, chine-collé, and carbon  
ink, edition 6/40, from the folio  
'On a Roll' of thirty-three prints by  
various artists.  
image: 29.5 x 21.2 cm;  
sheet: 41.7 x 29.6 cm  
Mackay Regional Council Art  
Collection. Donated by Impress  
Printmakers Studio Inc. 2005.



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FREE ENTRY 10am-5pm Tuesday-Friday  
10am-3pm Saturday and Sunday  
(Closed Mondays)



A Changing Ecology Exhibition Catalogue



\$2.00