Country in mind
Five contemporary Aboriginal artists

Country in mind presents recent painting and sculpture by artists Kuntjil Cooper, Alkawari Dawson, Mabel Juli, Garry Namponan and Rusty Peters. Drawn from three regions of Australia – western Cape York, the East Kimberley and the western desert – the exhibition brings together artists across generations, media and cultural nations. The interrelated themes of Dreaming, country and selfhood surface repeatedly in the work of the selected artists and are the conceptual drivers for their practice. Country in mind proposes that distinctive elements of personal expression and interpretation are core ingredients in these artists' work.

Wik artist Garry Namponan’s figurative timber sculptures of camp dogs, dingos and birds are life-size representations of figures of potent religious and spiritual significance. These archetypal figures stand for drama-filled creation narratives of personal importance. Gija artist Mabel Juli also focuses on the central characters of her Dreaming narratives to produce ochre paintings that waver between overt figuration and symbolism. Juli’s psychologically-charged motifs embody the unseen character of place. Using the classic formal strategies of positive and negative space, fellow Gija artist Rusty Peters paints both his traditional country and broader metaphysical themes in his monumental and lyrical paintings.

Displayed in the adjacent gallery are vivid acrylic paintings by Ngaanyatjarra artist Alkawari Dawson and Pitjanjatjara artist Kuntjil Cooper, both from the small desert community of Irrunytju in Western Australia. Dawson and Cooper combine individual approaches to materials and picture-making with well-established strategies of concealment and revelation. Each artist's intimate relationship to country is enacted in stylistically divergent ways: the loose fluidity of Dawson’s gestures is countered by the schematic divisions of colours and forms in Cooper’s mind-maps of country.

Each with an individual approach to materials, process, scale and iconography, the artists in Country in mind offer us artworks that combine traditional knowledge and beliefs with emotional and intellectual responses of the present.