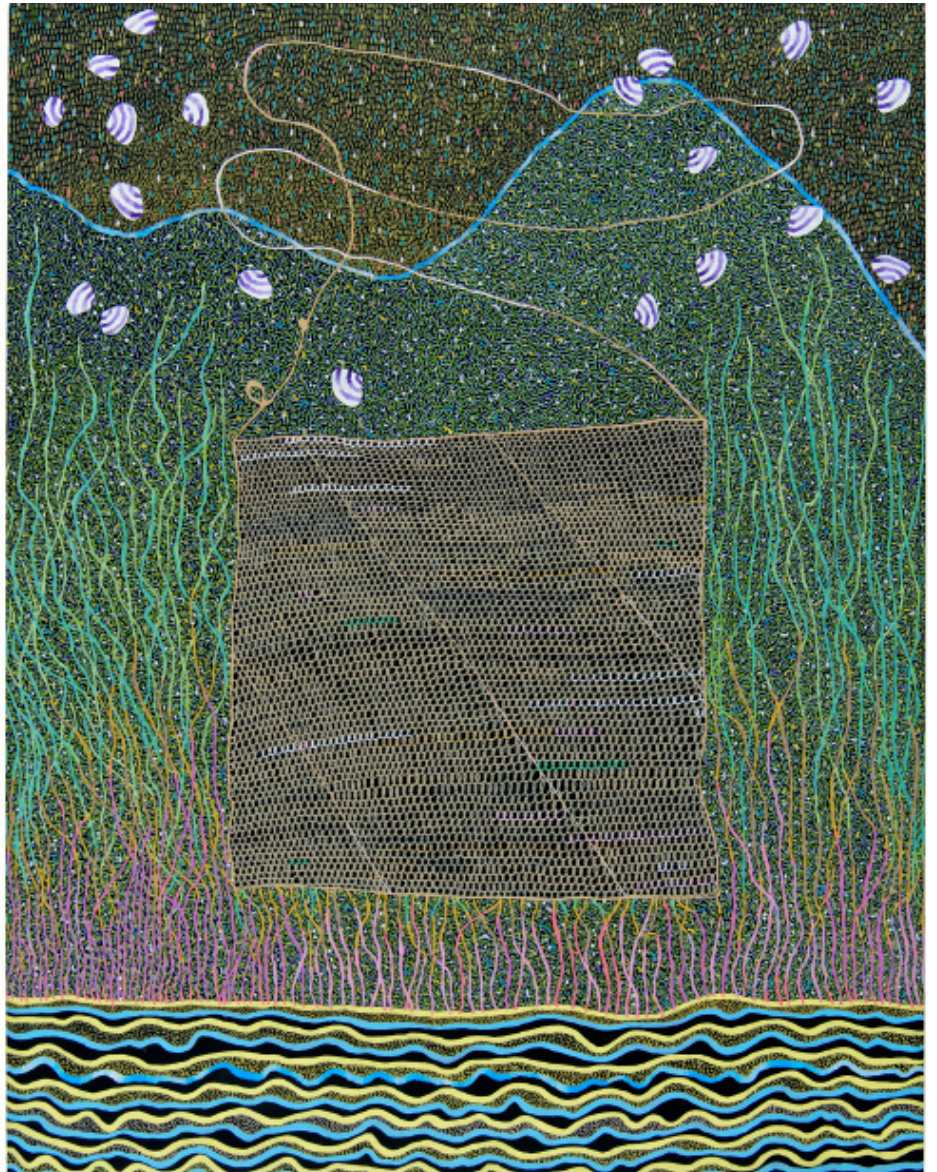


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Elisa Jane Carmichael, *For the women in my life, past, present, future*, 2017, Synthetic polymer on canvas.
Photo: Mick Richards.

Connecting Waves

a saltwater woman living on desert country

Elisa Jane Carmichael

5 July - 5 August 2017

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Connecting Waves: a saltwater woman living on desert country



Elisa Jane Carmichael, *Adder Rock, under the paperbark, pandanus and banksia*, 2017, synthetic polymer on linen, 210 x 112cm. Photo: Mick Richards.

Elisa Jane Carmichael creates across a breadth of media, including painting, weaving, textile design and fashion. She is a Ngugi woman from Quandamooka country (Minjerribah [North Stradbroke Island] and Moorgumpin [Moreton Island]), and currently Gilimbaa Artist in Residence in Alice Springs. She graduated with a degree in Fine Art from Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, in 2008, and will be awarded a Master of Fine Art (Fashion) from Queensland University of Technology in 2017. Last year, she collaborated with Judy Watson on *tow row*, the 2016 Indigenous Sculpture Commission permanently installed at the front door of Brisbane's Gallery of Modern Art. *Connecting Waves* is her third solo exhibition in Brisbane. All artworks discussed were produced in 2017.

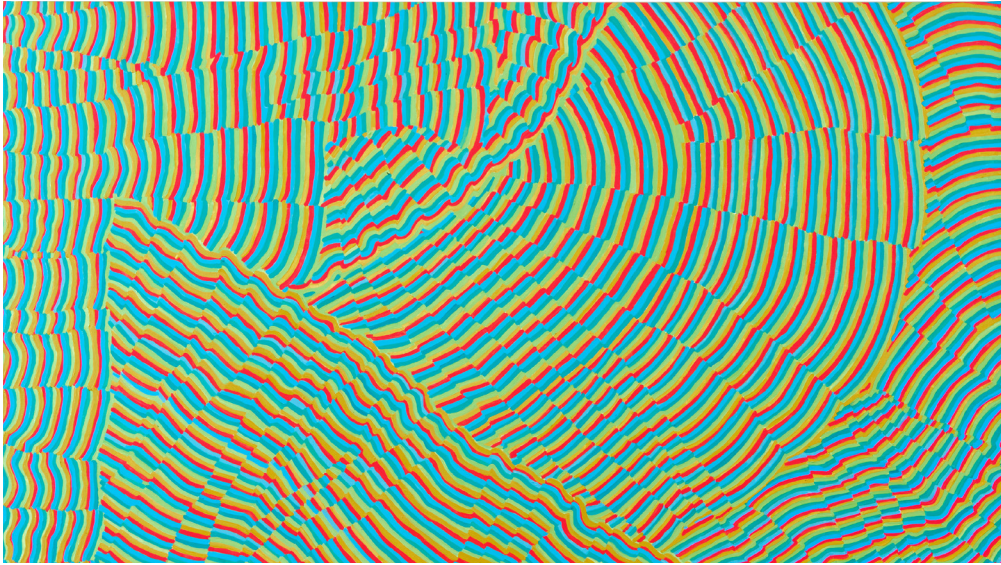
Louise Martin-Chew (LMC): You are currently working in the desert in Alice Springs, an environment as inland as your country Quandamooka is coastal. What impact has this change of location had on you and your work?

Elisa Jane Carmichael (EJC): The space and landscape here is vast and has earthy tones, and there are gum leaves on the ground; it is country with an overarching dryness. Immersing myself in the water really highlighted the difference between my country and this land. In saltwater country, the water is clear: both beaches and lakes have clarity. *Ormiston Gorge/ Brown Lake* is about my first experience of feeling comfortable in freshwater here. While other waterholes felt foreign, murky and brown, at Ormiston Gorge, the water is similar to that at home. The painting is about my experience of swimming in freshwater in the desert (the red section) and in saltwater (the blue and brown). It is painted in acrylic, with the watery appearance created using tonal shading (lots of white). It refers to the movement of water, with Brown Lake (represented by the blue and brown) more circular and expansive, while the desert lake spirals inward.

LMC: *Connecting Waves* draws on two broad themes that are inextricably linked in your work. These include place (your saltwater country and its contrast to the desert) and family.

EJC: The first painting I did was *Adder Rock, under the paperbark, pandanus, banksia*. I started that painting on Stradbroke when I was thinking about coming out here to the desert, planning my journey: it is a crowded image, and I remember my thoughts and issues not giving each other any space.

The other work was made in Alice Springs. I realise that the saltwater is with me wherever I go. *Galahs at my Grandma's house, galahs at my house at eastside Alice Springs* is about the contrasts but also the connections between the two. Family has been on my mind because my Mum [Sonja] has been sick. She will be fine ultimately, but was diagnosed with cancer just before I left the island. I have been visiting throughout her treatment, and making work there too, which is part of dealing with my emotions.



Elisa Jane Carmichael, *Living on freshwater land*, 2017, synthetic polymer on canvas, 100 x 158cm. Photo: Mick Richards.

The woven bowls titled *Vessels* are made with sea rope. The women here use raffia, while Mum (who is studying weaving) uses ropes collected from our shorelines on Minjerribah. I began combining materials, and the colourful Coolamons are about carrying saltwater with you. The bowl called *For Mum* – made from Yunngaire (fresh water swamp reeds, traditional Minjerribah weaving material) – includes Mum's hair, my sisters' [Freja] hair and my hair, woven into string. It symbolises that although we are in different places, we are always intrinsically together.

The big canvas with the black base, *For the women in my life, past present, future* combines place and family. It is about being in this place and thinking of my Mum. At the bottom of the painting are the reeds which grow in the freshwater swamp, and the top part is a layer of sand on the shoreline with Eugarie shells. Women used to collect Eugarie shells and put them in the bag which is shown in the centre that features traditional Quandamooka weave. This work is about describing the way I carry country with me, about who I am and the way I make artworks from the past and the present.

LMC: There are two self-directed portraits titled *Carrying Home* in *Connecting Waves*, which also speak to place.

EJC: In the saltwater image, I wear a woven dress depicting the Aboriginal flag and emerge, a saltwater woman, from the ocean at Home Beach. The fish trap extends my thinking about our women and how they would gather food in the beach environment, but also describes the change inherent in being an Aboriginal woman today, in times which remain difficult. The neck and head pieces I wear in the desert image are also my work. The adornment on my body is made from materials from Minjerribah. The base of the neck piece is made of paperbark, sea grass, and different shells, and the support for the neckline is our traditional weaving fibre.

LMC: What's next on the agenda for you?

EJC: After *Connecting Waves*, I am showing a new fashion collection at Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (14–16 July). It includes woven work and fabrics from my paintings. I will return to Alice Springs after that. The organisation Gilimbaa is supporting my life and work there. I am documenting my creative journey and processes, life as a saltwater woman in desert country. At the end of the year, it will be made into a documentary, with the *Connecting Waves* exhibition part of my record. The documentary will also be called *Connecting Waves*, and is aimed at young people who want to be artists, particularly those living away from home.

Elisa Jane Carmichael was interviewed by Louise Martin-Chew on Friday, 2 June 2017.

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Elisa Jane Carmichael, *Carrying Home*, 2017, Photographic print on paper. Photo: Freja Carmichael and Jasper Coleman.

Elisa Jane Carmichael, a Ngughi woman from Quandamooka country (Moreton Island/Moorgumpin and North Stradbroke Island/Minjerribah), and currently Gilimbaa's Artist in Residence in Alice Springs. Inspired by her life in these two places, the works in *Connecting Waves* combine materials from both.

Connecting Waves is also proudly part of the 2017 Quandamooka Festival, which runs from 1 July to 30 September 2017. Festival Curator Avril Quail, who is responsible for the programming, says, "this year's Festival is all about celebrating culture, country and people".

Carmichael's woven and sculptural fabrics will also be shown at Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (14–16 July 2017), and a documentary about her life in the desert, also titled *Connecting Waves*, will be completed at the end of 2017.

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