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In 1981, Ross Booker graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University. He has been actively exhibiting professionally since the early 1990s and has undertaken 17 solo exhibitions and participated in over 20 group exhibitions.

Booker has been a finalist in several art prizes including: Outback Art Prize (Finalist 2021, Honorary Mention 2020); Redland Art Award (2018); Milburn Art Prize (2016-2018); Cathedral of Saint Stephens Art Prize (Winner 2014); Alice Art Prize (2014); Lethbridge Art Prize (2013); and the Sunshine Coast Art Prize (People's Choice Award 2012).

His work is held in the collections of the Queensland Children's Hospital, the Wesley Hospital Brisbane, and the Mater Hospital Brisbane.

He is the subject of a 2013 monograph about central Australia titled Out from Alice - painting and drawing in central Australia (ArtHives, Brisbane).

Onespace and Ross Booker would like to thank:

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Directors, John Stafford and Jodie Cox

john@onespace.com.au

jodie@onespace.com.au

Business Development & Communications, Taylor Hall

taylor@onespace.com.au

onespacegallery.com.au

4/349 Montague Road
West End QLD 4101 Australia
+61 7 3846 0642

Wed to Fri: 10am–5pm | Sat: 11am–5pm

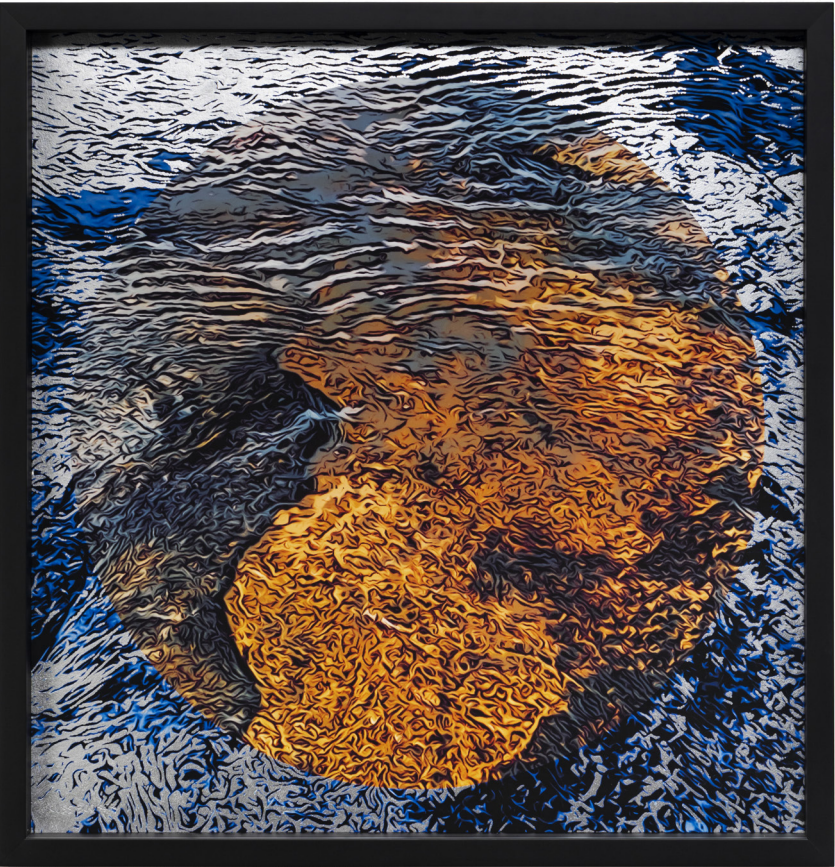
Partnered with



Cover: Ross Booker, *Reflection 04*, 2023, Archival digital print, acrylic pigment pen, and silver pen on paper (framed), 63 x 63 x 4cm. Photo: Louis Lim. Courtesy of the artist and Onespace.

Above: Louis Lim. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace.

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Ross Booker, Hydrosphere

8 September - 7 October 2023

In The Hydrosphere

Twelve years ago, I acquired an artwork by Ross Booker bearing the title *Illara Creek*, NT for my collection. It's a landscape, abstracted yes, but definitely of rock, earth, air and sky... there is a spatial depth, a far horizon, a patch of sky. Years on, this piece continues to mesmerise, intrigue and transport me.

Historically, Central Australia has been Ross Booker's beloved source of creative regeneration. On return to his Brisbane studio, he would build a body of work from memory, drawings and photographs until the time came to re-charge and head back out to replenish the creative crucible.

That was Ross Booker BC (Before COVID). The COVID years saw his creative wanderlust curtailed, brought closer to home, confined by the Queensland border. The works of 2021's Resurfacing being the product of this confinement.

Then in 2022 a medical imperative required a further truncation of the circumference of Booker's pilgrimages. This leads us to follow his purposeful entanglement of line through the years: from the desert, under the escarpment and over the mudflats to locate him now on to a small pontoon on the edge of the Brisbane River—Maiwar. This expanse of water is the predominant source of the *Hydrosphere* works, and a mere minute's walk from Booker's home studio.

His works begin with him obsessively taking photos of the river with his iPhone. This action is the first distillation of the water on its way to the studio-cum-laboratory and its ultimate interrogation at the hands, heart and mind of this remarkable artist.

Booker creates multimedia transformations of the tonal play of light on water, using a colour separation process that achieves both an optical depth of field (see *Reflection 04*) and, conversely, a compression of volume (see *Meditation 06*). His fractionating of the layers and tonal values equates to a miraculous dissecting of water, as he splits it into unexpected colours and fluorescents, evoking Booker's childhood memories of his cherished fluoro Textas.

These shifting laminae are at their most apparent within the *Reflection* series of works, whereby the addition of ripples of painted line on the Perspex cover, mirror light-play on water, causing a visual shimmer and destabilisation as you move towards and around the picture plane.

With the larger *Meditation* works on paper, there is an alchemising of water's inherent fluidity to a molten viscosity or, at its extreme, a tempering into recessive mountain chains. The artist comments:

I'm fascinated by the mutable nature of water, the topographical nature of wave forms, and the many nuanced impressions that are left in its wake on my memory. The undulating surface of water is the ultimate symbol for the ungraspable nature of existence. It is both phenomenological, and eternal— never still, always evolving through constant change.

This notion of the numinous emanates from the triptych *Belonging*, ostensibly a homage to childhood memories of the Richmond river.



It is a given that creativity needs and thrives within constraints. In this instance, that confinement has manifested itself as the 'Hydrosphere'. His altered perception, like a river tributary flowing around obstacles and forming new paths to the sea, reshapes his process of making and the characteristics of the marks themselves.

Michelle Dawson

Lightly suspended on drafting film, this central piece's translucence and subtle, breathe-like movement evokes the ineffable nature of memory and existence while its large-scale and altar-piece format cannot help but conjure a sense of the spiritual and transcendent as we stand before it.

Back in the corporeal world, the question arises, how do we define these works? Just as Booker transmutes water, so his oeuvre resists categorisation as drawing, painting, print or photograph. Elusively, they exist somewhere in- between.

What is not open to interpretation is the recurrent motif of the circle. Instantly, they are planetary, a small galaxy suspended within the gallery, just as our own watery blue marble spins us about in space.

Yet, although these works feel planetary, universal and macrocosmic, they are also somehow microcosms, suggestive of a droplet of water under a microscope, the homing in on a chemical composition. Or even a Petri dish... the way the mark-making becomes microbial, writhing, hinting at the first stirrings of a new life form in the making.

There has been an uncanny prescience in Booker's turning to the circle with this body of work. In this past year, the artist has faced a daunting health challenge—detached retinas in both eyes—leaving him with impaired vision.

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The circle has taken on the significance of a Mandala for me—the concentrated attention of meditation—the single point of focus. Over time it's become the embodiment of the ever-expanding imagination, and the infinite possibilities necessitated by adversity.

Throughout the years of knowing Booker's work, I have watched his practice and source of inspiration grow and shift with the vicissitudes of life. Some things have remained constant—certainly, his engagement with nature as the wellspring, his almost childlike fascination with, and enthusiasm for, creative exploration and his excitement with new techniques and technologies. And as much as it twists, turns and morphs, his capacity to hypnotise us draws us in with his interlaced layering of line and multiplicity of media, as unique and circular as the iris of the human eye.

Michelle Dawson

Born in New Zealand, artist Michelle Dawson moved to Australia in 1985. She has been a finalist in many major art prizes, including The Portia Geach Art Award (Highly Commended), The Hurford Hardwood Portrait Prize (Highly Commended), and The Wollumbin Art Prize. In addition to her professional art practice, Michelle teaches at the Byron School of Art.