onespace

Karen Mills

When the spear grass turns to golden brown

10 July – 5 September2026

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Exhibition Dates: 10 July – 5 September 2026

Opening Event: Saturday 18 July, 5 – 7pm | Artist Talk, 4 – 5pm

Gallery Hours: Tuesday to Friday, 10am – 5pm, Saturday 12pm – 5pm

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Artist statement:

The work in this exhibition celebrates my love for the climate and natural environment of Garramilla/Darwin, in the Northern Territory. The work represents my interpretations of the colours, shapes and forms that I observe and enjoy experiencing on Larrakia Country, where I live and make my art.

In the tropics of northern Australia, the native spear grass, grows tall and green during the Wet Season months, from around October to April. By March, the stalks of the spear grass dry out, the heads turn brown and begin flowering. The Larrakia People, the traditional owners, of Garramilla /Darwin, call this season, Mayilema, the Speargrass Season.

The changing colour of the grass is a sign that the Dry Season is approaching. The air shifts. The skies become clear and blue. The wind blows and the dried-out grass, bends and gets knocked over. The magpie geese lay their eggs. It is my favourite time of year.

I am a descendant of the Balanggarra People, of the Oombulgurri and Forrest River Reserve, in the East Kimberley, Western Australia. I am a member of the Stolen Generations. Growing up in a non-Aboriginal adoptive family, completely disconnected from my Aboriginal family, culture and country, I will always carry a permanent sense of loss and uncertainty about where I belong, despite making family and cultural connections since becoming an adult.

Nevertheless, after many years of being on Larrakia Country, and becoming part of my husband's large extended family, this is where I feel at home and made my peace with how life has turned out.

Karen Mills, Spear grass (2026). Courtesy of the artist and Onespace.

Karen Mills

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Karen Mills, Tarnanthi 2025. Photo: Michael Jaluru Torres. Courtesy of Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.

Karen Mills is a Garramilla/Darwin-based artist and descendant of the Balanggarra people, of the Oombulgurri and Forrest River reserves in the East Kimberley, Western Australia. Mills' practice investigates themes of identity, connection and disconnection with her heritage and the timeless relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples maintain with their ancestral Country despite recent histories of dispossession and displacement. Her abstract paintings are generally landscape-based, described by the artist as 'lyrical landscapes of memory'. These works capture a sense of the rich history and connection to the land, hidden beneath layers of sediment.

Mills' work has been widely exhibited both nationally and internationally. Her recent exhibitions at Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne, include *Land is Life* (2025); *Alcaston Gallery at the Alexandra Club* (2025); *All About Artists: Mind Mapping Country – Collectors' Exhibition* (2024); *Clay* (2023); *Unfold* (2022); *All About Art 2022: Annual Collectors' Exhibition* (2022); *Karen Mills: Forsaken Interiors and Other Contemplations* (2019); and *Karen Mills (*2019). Other recent exhibitions include: *Too Deadly: Ten Years of Tarnanthi* (2025–26) at the Art Gallery of South Australia; *Shifting Grounds* (2024) at the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia; *Old Tracks New Roads – Mapping Country* (2023) at the RACV Art Collection, Melbourne; *Sydney Contemporary* (2022) at Carriageworks, Sydney; *Tarnanthi: Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art* (2021–22) at the Art Gallery of South Australia; and *Sydney Contemporary Presents 2020* (2020) presented by Alcaston Gallery (Online art fair).

In 2024, Mills undertook an artist residency at the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia. In 2019, she was a finalist in the Guirguis New Art Prize at the Art Gallery of Ballarat.

Mills' work is held in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia; Parliament House Art Collection; RMIT University; Australian Catholic University; and the Art Gallery of South Australia, as well as private collections in Australia, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United States.

Karen Mills is represented by Alcaston Gallery in Naarm/ Melbourne.

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Larrakia Country shifts and changes throughout its seven seasons; plants shoot and grow, fish run, fruits ripen, waters swell and recede. As each season arrives, signals are seen across land, sea and sky. Karen Mills has spent seasons of her life with the seasons of Larrakia Country. She observes the heralds within nature and through her artistic practice honours the Country she has made home.

When the spear grass turns to golden brown celebrates the splendour of Larrakia Country during its transition from the monsoon to the cooler, drier months. Speargrass is a marker of this change. The tall flowering grass is prevalent across Larrakia Country and intersperses the landscape in bursts of colour; first as young, tall greens before maturing to burnished hues of golden brown that bow over with the final heavy rains. Being on Larrakia Country means being attuned to the dance of the speargrass and the Country itself.

The newest works in the exhibition are Karen's paintings of Knuckey Lagoon, a beautiful, overlooked nature reserve on the outskirts of Garramilla / Darwin. In these works, Karen masterfully distils the colours of Larrakia Country undergoing its change into the Dry Season. The golden brown of drying speargrass is present, while the shade of blue evokes memories of clear blue skies only present during the Dry Season. Karen's works give you a sense of the Lagoon, of the significance of water and sanctuary within a sparse, semi-urban environment.

By commemorating Knuckey Lagoon, Karen pulls attention to a vital freshwater wetland that is so often only briefly glimpsed while travelling along the bustling Stuart Highway. Her work is a reminder of how Country is everpresent and how each place has its significance if only the care and attention is given.

Karen has a talent for observing and honouring Country through her paintings and prints. Her approach of slowly creating layers while contemplating and remembering people and places leads to works about Country that feel full of memory and multifaceted in meaning. From rich clay and ochre studies to the layered renderings of the fleeting, glimmering tidal rock pools, Karen paints Larrakia Country with the love of someone who is living off her own Country and now feels at home and held by this place.

Rebekah Raymond
Arabana, Kala Lagaw Ya, Wuthathi,
descendent of survivors of the Stolen Generations

Karen Mills

Spear grass and Sky at Knuckey Lagoon, 2026

Pigment and ochre bound in synthetic polymer paint on linen, 80 x 100cm (framed)

$12,000

Photo: Fiona Morrison. Courtesy of the artist and Onespace.

Karen Mills

Spear grass at Knuckey Lagoon, 2026

Pigment and ochre bound in synthetic polymer paint on linen, 80 x 100cm (framed)

$12,000

Photo: Fiona Morrison. Courtesy of the artist and Onespace.

Karen Mills

Tidal Rock Pools at East Point, Garramilla – Darwin, 2023

Pigment & ochre bound in synthetic polymer paint on linen. Diptych, individual panel: 56 x 175cm (framed)

$16,000

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery.

Karen Mills

Untitled: Rock Flats at East Point (i) + (ii) 2023

Pigment and synthetic polymer paint on linen. Diptych,
individual panel: 41 x 66 x 4.5cm (framed)

$12,000

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery.

Karen Mills

Untitled No. 1 (Clay Series), 2023

Pigment & ochre bound in synthetic polymer paint on linen. Diptych: 53 x 43cm (framed)

$6,000

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery.

Karen Mills

Untitled No. 2 (Clay Series), 2023

Pigment & ochre bound in synthetic polymer paint on linen. Diptych: 53 x 43cm (framed)

$6,000

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery.

Karen Mills

Untitled No. 3 (Clay Series), 2023

Pigment & ochre bound in synthetic polymer paint on linen. Diptych: 53 x 43cm (framed)

$6,000

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery.

Karen Mills

Untitled No. 4 (Clay Series), 2023

Pigment & ochre bound in synthetic polymer paint on linen. Diptych: 53 x 43cm (framed)

$6,000

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery.

Karen Mills

Untitled 1, 2025

Print on Paper. Paper: 39.5 x 35.5 cm | Image: 24.5 x 24.5 cm

Unique state

$500

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery.

Karen Mills

Untitled 2, 2025

Print on Paper. Paper: 39.5 x 35.5 cm | Image: 24.5 x 24.5 cm

Unique state

$500

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery.

Karen Mills

Untitled 3, 2025

Print on Paper. Paper: 39.5 x 35.5 cm | Image: 24.5 x 24.5 cm

Unique state

$500

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery.

Karen Mills

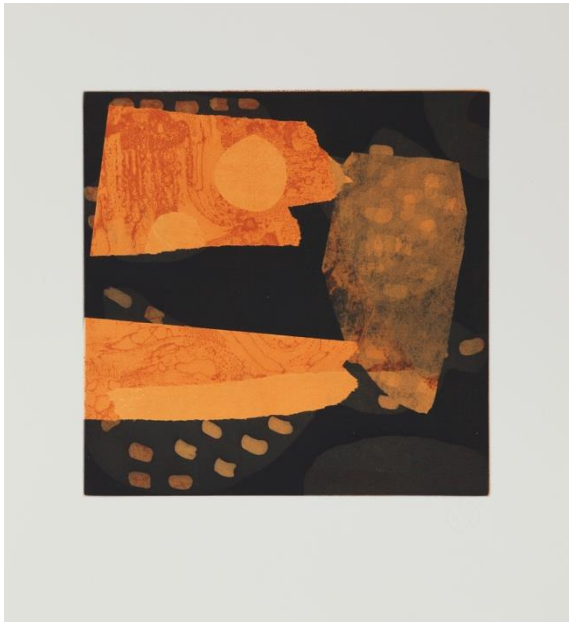
Untitled 4, 2025

Print on Paper. Paper: 39.5 x 35.5 cm | Image: 24.5 x 24.5 cm

Unique state

$500

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery.



Karen Mills

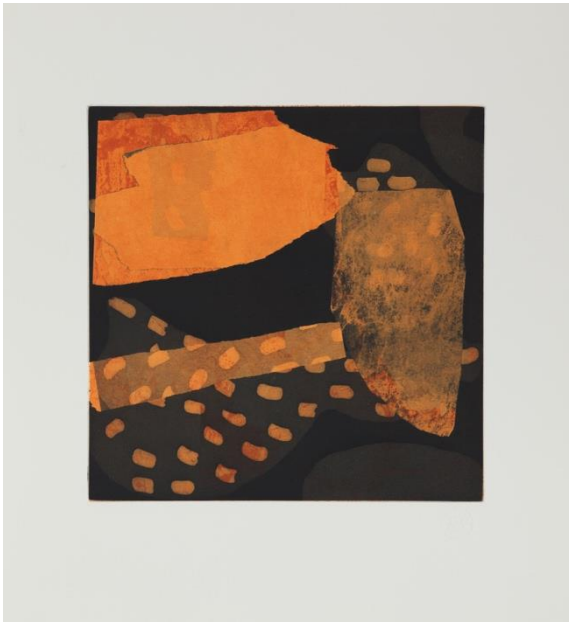
Untitled 5, 2025

Print on Paper. Paper: 39.5 x 35.5 cm | Image: 24.5 x 24.5 cm

Unique state

$500

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery.



Karen Mills

Untitled 6, 2025

Print on Paper. Paper: 39.5 x 35.5 cm | Image: 24.5 x 24.5 cm

Unique state

$500

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery.

Karen Mills

Untitled 7, 2025

Print on Paper. Paper: 39.5 x 35.5 cm | Image: 24.5 x 24.5 cm

Unique state

$500

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery.

Karen Mills

Untitled 8, 2025

Print on Paper. Paper: 39.5 x 35.5 cm | Image: 24.5 x 24.5 cm

Unique state

$500

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery.

Karen Mills

Untitled 9, 2025

Print on Paper. Paper: 39.5 x 35.5 cm | Image: 24.5 x 24.5 cm

Unique state

$500

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery.

Karen Mills

Untitled 10, 2025

Print on Paper. Paper: 39.5 x 35.5 cm | Image: 24.5 x 24.5 cm

Unique state

$500

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery.

Onespace is a Brisbane-based gallery that presents and sells contemporary art, including work by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.

We curate an exhibition program exploring diverse themes and media, showcasing emerging, mid-career and established artists whose works inform, stimulate and challenge. Onespace welcomes you to engage with the artists and artworks we exhibit.

Onespace is uniquely located adjacent to Maiwar (Brisbane river) beneath the Spice Apartments near the Go Between Bridge in South Brisbane. We are proudly surrounded by the dynamic buzz of the Queensland cultural precinct that is significant to this area of Brisbane.

Director, John Stafford: john@onespace.com.au
Director, Jodie Cox: jodie@onespace.com.au
Gallery Manager, Demi Conrad: demi@onespace.com.au
Gallery Assistant, Poppy Saines: poppy@onespace.com.au
Project Manager & Artist Liaison, Tamika Grant-Iramu: tamika@onespace.com.au

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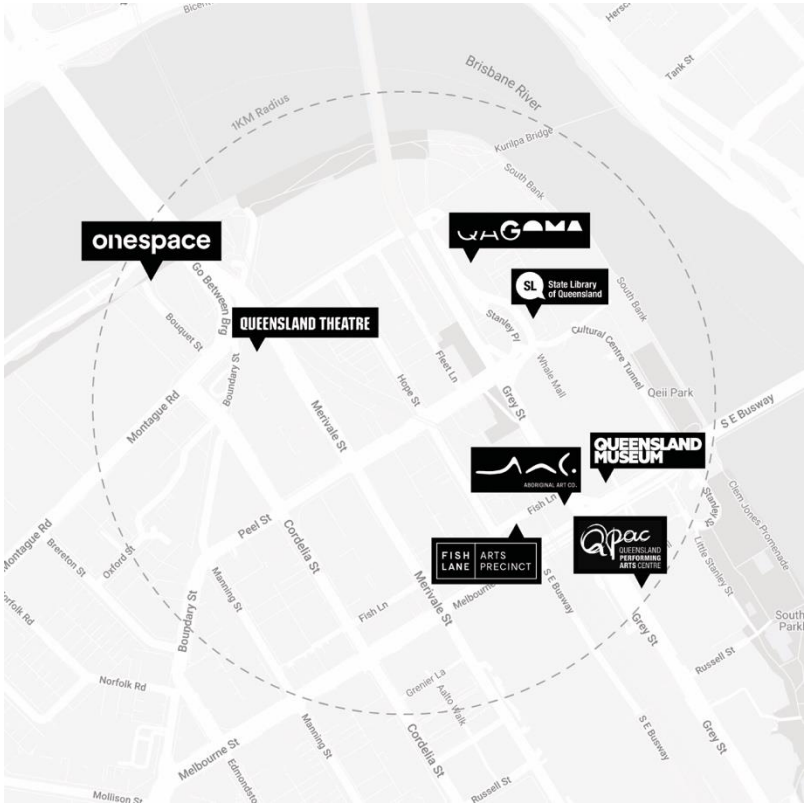
Onespace Gallery Hours:

Tuesday to Friday 10am – 5pm, Saturday 12pm – 5pm

25A Bouquet Street, South Brisbane Q 4101 Australia



Onespace acknowledges the traditional custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to the land, waters, culture and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Onespace also acknowledges Karen Mills' representative gallery, Alcaston Gallery, Naarm / Melbourne.