

CAIRNS ART GALLERY

13 SEP –
23 NOV 2025

TANIA MAJOR *KOWANYAMA – WHEN RAIN FALLS, WHEN EARTH SLEEPS*

ARTWORK LABELS



Tania Major, *Kowanyama, When Rain Falls,
When Earth Sleeps* is supported through
Cairns RSL Club Artist Fellowship Awards

Tania MAJOR

b.1981

Kokoberra

Rain-Maker

2025

acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

This painting also highlights the role of birds in Kowanyama Country as messengers and callers of weather. The Galah, soaring into the clouds, carries song and spirit upward, summoning the rains that bring the land to life again. The movement of the birds serves as an omen, teaching people when the wet season will come, when the rivers will rise, and when renewal will sweep across the landscape. *Rain-Maker* honours the deep connection between land, sky, and living beings, showing how even a single wingbeat can influence the cycles of Country.

Sleep Beneath – The Unseen Life Waiting Below

2025

acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

This painting depicts the hidden activity of Kowanyama Country during the dry season, focusing on tracking long-necked turtles beneath dried swamp beds tracking '*Min-chel*'. The painting highlights deep knowledge of the land, where observation and understanding of natural cycles support survival and connection.

Shooting Star: Sky Dreaming

2025

acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

Shooting Star: Sky Dreaming reflects the deep bond the people of Kowanyama share with both Sky Dreaming and Earth Dreaming. Sitting around the fire at night, we would gaze into the sky. When an immense shooting star streaked overhead, the final spark would guide us, indicating which part of Country and which families faced serious illness or danger. This artwork expresses the intimate dialogue between the sky and the earth—a relationship where observation, stories, and care link the cosmos to the land, allowing knowledge to pass between them.

Flood-Plain Dreaming – On the Way to Duck-Hole after Bush Fire

2025

acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

This painting speaks to the resilience and memory held within the land. The floodplains of Kowanyama Country bear the stories of past seasons, fire, and water, acting as a living archive of cycles and renewal. After bushfires, the journey to Duck-Hole shows how Country restores balance: new growth appears, water flows back, and animals follow paths carved into the earth. *Flood-Plain Dreaming* celebrates the land's capacity to remember, heal, and sustain, reminding us that Country is both a teacher and a caretaker, preserving its stories in every form and feature.

McLeod Swamp – On the Way to South Mitchell

2025

acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

This painting captures the seasonal cycles of McLeod Swamp in Kowanyama Country. In the dry season, the land rests; with the onset of the wet season, life bursts forth—wallabies fatten, turtles return underground, and the floodplains are transformed. As people travel to South Mitchell, Country itself guides them, signalling the right moments for hunting, ceremony, and care. The work celebrates these cycles of life, the wisdom of the land, and the deep relationship between people and Country.

When the Dew Falls

2025

acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

This painting captures the quiet transition between night and day in Kowanyama Country. The landscape becomes a living colour palette, where soft earth tones meet luminous highlights, reflecting dew on grass, shifting light, and the land's subtle rhythms. This work celebrates the delicate balance of life, memory, and renewal, honouring the intimate connection between people, Country, and the fleeting beauty of nature.

Swallowed by the Rainbow

2025

acrylic and spray paint on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

This painting reflects the Kowanyama story in which the Rainbow Serpent bestows knowledge and power. Passing through the Serpent marks a rite of passage, representing the loss of innocence and the awakening of self-awareness and healing abilities. The healer, upon being swallowed, is reborn and purified by meat ants, drawing a parallel to the Night Hawk — the first of the Kunjen People to perform *puri puri* black magic. The work explores themes of transformation, the journey from spirit to healer, and the enduring strength found in cultural wisdom. It also illustrates how the elements of land, sky, and water guide these processes, for Country itself signals the moments and places where such passages must occur.

Papier-Mâché Dilly Bag – Under the Wings

2025

papier-mâché, raffa and paint

Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

This dilly bag symbolizes the care and guidance of elders, taking the younger generation under their wings. It reflects the responsibility of story-keepers to give knowledge, culture, and care. Crafted from recycled materials, the work honors resilience, sustainability, and the enduring connection between people, Country, and the cycles of life in Kowanyama. Each element carries meaning, celebrating the passing of stories, culture, and responsibilities from one generation to the next.

Papier-Mâché Dilly Bags – 3 Birds on Top

2025

papier-mâché, raffa and paint

Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

This dilly bag features three birds perched on top, symbolizing guidance, connection, and the cycles of life. The birds represent the watchful presence of elders, the care of Country, and the responsibility to pass on stories and cultural knowledge. Crafted from recycled materials, the work celebrates resilience, sustainability, and the enduring relationship between people, Country, and culture in Kowanyama. Each element embodies the importance of giving, learning, and nurturing the next generation.

Papier-Mâché Dilly Bag – Baby Collomon

2025

papier-mâché, raffier and paint

Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

This dilly bag celebrates the Baby Collomon. Its shape mirrors a collomon, symbolizing the next generation and the continuity of culture. The work emphasizes the importance of sharing stories, passing on knowledge, and embracing our responsibility to give. The two birds sitting on opposite sides, looking in, represent guidance, care, and the watchful presence of elders as the younger generation learns. Crafted from recycled materials, the piece honors resilience, sustainability, and the enduring connection between people, Country, and the cycles of life in Kowanyama.

New Ghost

2025

papier-mâché, recycled materials, paint

Courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

New Ghost explores the spiritual landscape of Kowanyama, where the living and spirits coexist. The 'new ghosts' (*oroleb*) are the recently deceased, lingering until rituals release them, while the 'old ghosts' (*inyiw-inyiw*) are Dreamtime beings who guide, warn, or unsettle the living. Stories of place spirits, like *pam ning*, reveal both danger and protection. The work reflects the rituals, respect, and knowledge that sustain balance between people, Country, and the spirit world.