

Presented by  
*The Mill*

Curated by  
*Marika Davies*

*18 July*

—  
*16 September*  
*2022*

*The Mill Adelaide*  
154 Angas Street,  
Adelaide SA 5000

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**Natalie Austin**

**Memory  
of Water**

Natalie Austin

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was born in Port Augusta,  
South Australia, in 1964

# About Natalie Austin

**She is a descendant of the  
Antikirinya, Southern Kokatha  
and Yankunytjatjara peoples.**

Austin was taught to paint by her mother and has been painting for over twenty years. Her work was featured in the Malka Art Prize at Yarta Purtli in 2022 and 2020. She has contributed to the Tarnanthi Art fair at Tandanya from 2017-2019. Other exhibitions include 'Our Mob' at the Adelaide Festival Centre and the 2008 'Ripples in the Sand' exhibition at the Port Augusta Cultural Centre, 'Coast to Coast' at Fischer Jeffries for SALA, and the Sydney International Art Fair 2019.

and now lives in Coober Pedy.



# Artist Statement



The exhibition is mostly about Coober Pedy, where I come from and where I grew up. I usually do my artwork with the white dirt, the brown dirt and the colours of the opal. These paintings also have the wildflower colours that come out after a big rain, it's very pretty.

The first painting is about water, about the creek. But the group of paintings are about connection to the country.

My inspiration is my mother, she was with the Coober Pedy kupa piti kungka Tjuta who protested the nuclear waste dump in the 90's. She's been painting most her life and she's 89 now.

She taught me to paint, and it is something that I share with my daughter and my niece. They sit and watch me paint and do their own thing.

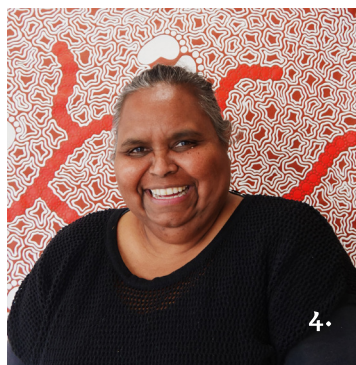
Marika Davies is a great help, she's given me the opportunity to exhibit including in Malka [arts prize at Yarta Purtli, Pt Augusta]. She is a lovely person to work with. It helps to have someone to push me in the right direction. I paint and she organises things to get my paintings out into the world.

I'm excited to be able to show the works in Adelaide. I'm happy to have the works shown and share about my country and the colours and the stories.

## Curator

### Marika Davies

Proud Wangkangurru woman Marika Davies is an artist and independent curator currently living and working in Port Augusta. Her career developed through her passion for art and its history, and wanting to give back to her community who have nurtured her passion and cultural growth. Marika is a talented storyteller, finding new ways to tell stories through curating, painting, jewellery making, photography, radio and film. She has been mentored by Tarnanthi Festival Director Nici Cumpston OAM and Port Pirie Regional Art Gallery Director Ursula Halpin. In 2018-19, Marika undertook a curatorial internship for VIETNAM: ONE IN, ALL IN, with Country Arts SA. In 2019, Marika attended the Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair as part of the Aboriginal Curators Program and Symposium. Marika is co-director / co-writer for short film Mulka Man, which was screened at Nunga Screen, 2020. She co-wrote Dusty Feet Mob: This Story's True and filmed Full Circle | Marika Davies | indigITUBE.



## Essay Writer

### Ali Cobby Eckermann

Ali Cobby Eckermann is a poet, and currently works as the Arts and Cultural Facilitator for Country Arts SA & Regional Council of Goyder. She identifies with the Yankunytjatjara / Kokatha from the north west desert country of South Australia. Ali was born in 1963 on Kurna country, within the confines of the Cate Cox Baby Home. Through adoption she was raised on Ngadjeri country, with the Eckermann family, on a farm property at Hart. Ali was a guest of Sydney Writers Festival 2010, and she has featured on Radio National's Poetica program. Her 27-poem monograph Little Bit Long Time was published in 2009 by the Australian Poetry Centre in their New Poets Series. She has written poetry collections, verse novels and a memoir, and has been shortlisted for or won several literary awards. In 2017, she won the international Windham-Campbell Literature Prize for Poetry. She has travelled extensively, performing her poetry.

1: Natalie Austin, Colours of Country, Photo: Chloe Metcalfe

2: Natalie Austin, On Country: Walkabout on Country, Photo: Chloe Metcalfe

3: Natalie Austin painting, courtesy of Arts Ceduna

4: Curator Marika Davies with Natalie Austin's work Red Opal I, Photo: Chloe Metcalfe

Design & layout by Lachlan Stewart of small room



# Memory of Water

Essay by  
Ali Cobby Eckermann

For most of us our mothers play a significant role in our lives. Natalie Austin shares that her mother has been the biggest influence in her life. As a child Natalie grew up watching her mother painting in the family home, the flicker from kerosene lamps casting a warm ambience whilst listening to stories spoken about country and culture. A deep understanding was seeded in that girl. Natalie is a grandmother now and this is her first solo exhibition.

The deep love of art defines Natalie's work. In her creative state she reminisces of memory drawn throughout her life. Again her formative years come to the foreground, memories of going hunting out bush with her family, noodling for opals amongst the Coober Pedy iconic landscape, walking through the desert and enjoying the many hues of nature. All these memories are honed through cultural perspectives of Natalie's Antikirinya heritage and layered by her journey from child, teenager, young woman and mother to grandmother. There is a deep understanding of life here, a life lived in remote and regional Aboriginal Australia. While Natalie paints her mind goes back to what she has seen in her life.

Water is a feature that many outsiders do not associate with the desert regions. Natalie recalls watching large rainclouds filling the sky, the ensuing rainstorms soaking into the desert sand and the rehydrated fields of wildflowers as far as the eye can see. Like the opal, water sits between the spheres, creating regular patterns that reveal to a well-trained eye. This is a thrilling vista for all who have witnessed this, and one that Natalie holds dear to her heart, because her mother taught her to see these spheres of influence. Other vibrant memories are from time spent along the far west coast of South Australia where she is a member of Ceduna Arts.

Natalie embeds this memory of joy into her painting. The environmental world is layered here too. Natalie remembers the natural diversity of colour after rain as the brown earth of creeks and dams turn to pastel hues and vibrant rainbow colours as varied as the opals that attract tourists from around the world. These memories are as important as life, when one's homeland is rejuvenated and reflecting the beauty of life.

Natalie Austin is a well known South Australian painter and her work has been included in many exhibitions. She is excited and glad for this opportunity to showcase her artistic talent. She credits her mother as her biggest inspiration and is proud this legacy continues within her children. Peer into these paintings and find the joy.

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6: Natalie Austin, *Camping along the Creek*, courtesy of Yarta Purtili

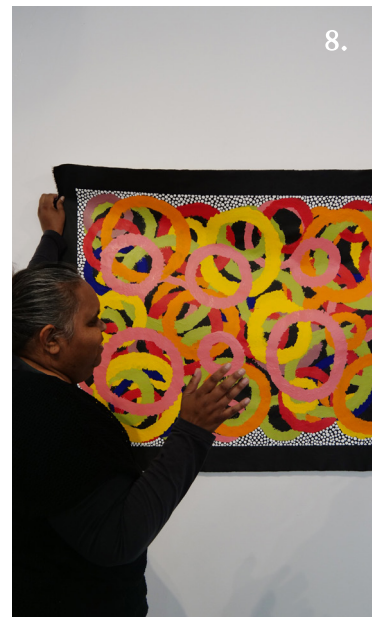


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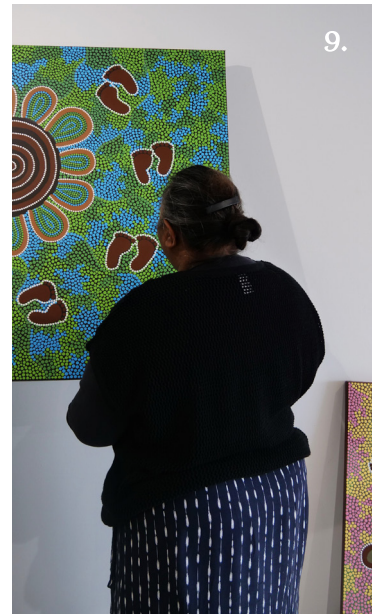


7: Natalie Austin, *Wildflowers II*, Photo: Chloe Metcalfe

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8: Curator Marika Davies with Natalie Austin's work *Opal Painting*, Photo: Chloe Metcalfe

9: Curator Marika Davies with Natalie Austin's work *Wildflowers II*, Photo: Chloe Metcalfe

## Curatorial statement by **Marika Davies**

Natalie Austin's 'Memory of Water' is an important exhibition. The paintings are about being on Country and being with family. She shows the opal fields and the desert, as well as the desert flowers that bloom after rain. You can see the white throughout all the paintings, which is the colour of the stone layer that holds the opal in the earth. The colours that Natalie has used are the colours in the veins of the white stone, the glistening of the opal. This is part of Natalie's Country, her family's Country. Connection to Country is not just what is on top, it's also what is underneath. People think of Opal as being about making money, but it is so much more than that. Digging the holes to make mines disrupts Country.

Natalie's mum is 89 this year, and has been a major influence on Natalie. I would love to see her be able to come and see Natalie's exhibition, and see what Natalie learned from her on a wall in a gallery space, and the sense of pride that both Natalie and her mum would have. Natalie took on the skill of painting from her mum and has been painting for close to 30 years. That's how kids learn, from their elders and parents. Your parents are your first teachers. Natalie is a grandparent now and for her children and grandchildren to be able to see her first solo show could inspire the next generation of Natalie's family.

As a curator it is important to be able to showcase our region, Port Augusta and the mid North. Natalie has been painting for a very long

time and she is really happy to have a solo. Audiences can come in to The Mill from anywhere and realise that this artist is just a 3 or 4 hour drive up the road from Adelaide. You can see the painting, the colours and the shapes in the gallery, and you can visit the landscape and see the story of the Country.

It's really important to see First Nations Artists share their work. There are brilliant artists out there that should be recognised. After contacting Natalie to invite her to exhibit, the first issue was getting materials to her. It's a low socio-economic region and artists can't just go into the shop and buy quality materials. Ursula at Port Pirie Regional Gallery helped with some materials and Ku arts came with more. Access to materials is an issue throughout the region, there are artists that have artworks that they're ready to make, but they don't have access. And often what they can get are cheap canvases that easy break, which really devalues the artworks. This region produces world class artworks, and it's such a great thing to work as an independent Curator with artists, and collaborate with a gallery like The Mill, and with support from Ursula and Ku Arts to create opportunities to upskill and make the incredible works they are ready to make.

I knew of Natalie when I was 16 and just starting out. Then I connected with her last year, I am now 42 and I finally get to work with her - it was just meant to happen!