

# GROUND SWELL

RECENT MOVEMENTS  
WITHIN ART AND TERRITORY



artbacknt.com.au



ACTIVIST TOOLKIT

Information correct at time of printing. Exhibition tour itinerary is subject to change. Please refer to Artback NT website for up-to-date information.

Maybe people will look at one of these paintings and think about what is happening to our country, to our land to our water and to culture.  
– Jacky Green –

**ISSUE ONE**  
Access – the availability of water  
Guaranteed access to reliable drinking water, strong river systems and healthy oceans is a critical concern for Northern Territory communities as we enter a drier, hotter and less certain climate future. From remote Aboriginal communities such as Yarralin, Ngukkur and Yuelamu to Darwin's rural outskirts, communities have begun experiencing water undersupply due to the ongoing impact of climate change, which has significantly impacted the current availability of water reserves.

## ISSUE TWO Contamination – the quality of water

Contamination of water caused by resource extraction is linked to the inappropriate disposal of waste products, chemicals and heavy metals produced during mining, irrigation and other industrial processes.

This can spread beyond the boundaries of immediate impact and leak into surface and groundwater, affecting wildlife and marine life through bioaccumulation in the food chain and vegetation.

**Artists have the capacity to bring about social and moral change ... challenging social ideals, norms and beliefs in a manner that shares new knowledge and encourages a reconsideration or reinterpretation of particular views and practices ... the impetus for change.**

– Lee Harrop –

**Water is essential for life. It shapes where and how we live, determines the availability of food ... and is crucial for healthy natural ecosystems. Water is the Earth's only self-renewing vital resource.**  
– Winsome Jobling –

The unpredictability of rain, combined with new development occurring in water catchment areas has resulted in groundwater aquifers not being sufficiently replenished for communities.

**ISSUE THREE**  
Drought, or a lack of new water replenishing our dwindling reserves, creates an ongoing issue of ground water intensifies as rainfall reduces and drought conditions ensue.

## Scarcity – the quantity of water

## ISSUE FOUR Culture – our obligations to water

Cultural imperatives and obligations, both social and spiritual, compel us to protect water. There are many places in the Northern Territory where water is not simply a vital resource but a living entity in itself, embedded in systems of spirituality, social organisation, healing and Law.

Obligations to preserve water are often obstructed by ignorance and consumption. The consequences are evidenced in the transformation of our ecosystems in drastic and permanent ways.

**I want to remind people that we all have custodial responsibilities to water because if we don't look after it, it won't look after us.**

**If we pollute water, we pollute ourselves.**

– Nadine Lee –

## GROUNDSWELL

### recent movements within art and territory

showcases the diversity, technical mastery and social importance of Northern Territory artists whilst foregrounding the wider role art plays in the process of mass social, political and cultural change.

The stirring momentum of the exhibition's title exudes from each of the works on display as the artists give voice to their concerns about water sustainability and its impact on our collective futures.

This Activist Toolkit has been created to highlight the key issues at stake. It provides simple, concrete tactics to equip you as an active participant moving within the same currents of change.

This is part of my ambition to re-imagine the curator as political organiser, which I discuss further in my essay available on the Artback NT website.<sup>1</sup>

When a problem emerges, so too does a unique opportunity to observe, to take stock, to reinvent.

This is what artists do all the time.

<sup>1</sup>artbacknt.com.au/show/groundswell-recent-movements-within-art-and-territory

### STEP THREE Have conversations to win

**Proactively initiating conversations** through a positive and open disposition **with a clear goal in mind** is one of the cornerstones of successful organising.

When we have conversations **to move each other from a place of inaction to action**, we feel empowered in our ability to challenge the status quo. Through our discourse, we help others to discover their power.

**Climate for Change** is a national organisation focusing on providing people with the tools to have better peer-to-peer discussions around climate change.

- find out** when and where the next Northern Territory event is [climateforchange.org.au](http://climateforchange.org.au)
- watch** *Puppets for Change: How to talk to your family about climate change over the holidays* [youtube.com/watch?v=5T6ruEx4bhg](https://youtube.com/watch?v=5T6ruEx4bhg)

### STEP FOUR Take it to the streets

Protests including marches, occupations, public speakouts and blockades are **consistent tactics** employed within the history of environmental struggle. Creativity has played a critical role in **public interventions** in the Northern

Territory, so too have inclusive cross-cultural approaches uniting the concerns of Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

Taking to the streets is **not a one-off event**, nor is it an immediate remedy. It requires a consistent and well thought out escalation sustained until the target is forced to sit up and act.

Affiliating under **national networks** and supporting **national days of action** can help organise protests in your local area.

- Global Climate Strike/Fridays for the Future** [globalclimatestrike.net](http://globalclimatestrike.net)
- School Strike 4 Climate Australia** [schoolstrike4climate.com](http://schoolstrike4climate.com)
- Culture Declares Emergency** [culturedeclares.org](http://culturedeclares.org)

### STEP ONE

## Join a group

### Contribute to something bigger than yourself.

When we reject the primacy of individual gestures to **move as a collective** we relearn cultures of cooperation, mutuality, consensus and solidarity.

By coming into our collective mode it becomes difficult to remain ignored by the apparatuses of power.

Climate action groups who would love your participation:

- Protect Country Alliance** [protectcountrynt.org.au](http://protectcountrynt.org.au)
- Environment Centre of the Northern Territory** [ecnt.org.au](http://ecnt.org.au)
- Seed Mob Indigenous Climate Network** [seedmob.org.au](http://seedmob.org.au)
- Climate Action Darwin** [climateactiondarwin.org.au](http://climateactiondarwin.org.au)
- Arid Lands Environment Centre** [alec.org.au](http://alec.org.au)
- Central Australia Frack Free Alliance** [dontfracktheterritory.org](http://dontfracktheterritory.org)
- Barkly Environment Group** @SovereignUnion1
- Top End Coasts, Marine Conservation Society** [topendcoasts.org.au](http://topendcoasts.org.au)

### STEP TWO

## Take your conversations wider

**Practice conversations** in your immediate networks of family, friends, workmates and community groups to build confidence.

Once you feel confident, take your conversations wider by **participating in doorknocks, public stalls and group conversations** with political representatives as part of your group.

Conversing in different situations enables us to step outside the echo chamber of our immediate context to **build alliances** over differences which are capable of future mobilisation.

**Face-to-face conversations** are best to gauge reactions and address any concerns directly.

You can learn the method of a structured conversation in

- Anger, Hope, Action** [cpsucsa.org/documents/tools/organising-my-workplace-documents/92-anger-hope-action/file](http://cpsucsa.org/documents/tools/organising-my-workplace-documents/92-anger-hope-action/file)

## Where to now?

### What can we do today so that tomorrow we can do what we were unable to do today?

– Pablo Freire –

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aims to inspire and empower you with useful information, to equip you with the tools to have agency in what may seem an overwhelming situation.

The exhibition is a call to action, a catalyst to shift individuals from a position of witness to a place of active participation.

I urge you to consider the suggestions within this tool kit as they are tried and true tactics for enacting real change. Take it home, share it, pass it on.

Together we can turn the tide to create something deeper than the sum of our individual parts.

**Carmen Ansaldo**, SPARK NT Curator

Additional resources can be found at [artbacknt.com.au/show/groundswell-recent-movements-within-art-and-territory/](http://artbacknt.com.au/show/groundswell-recent-movements-within-art-and-territory/)