BARKA, THE FORGOTTEN RIVER BADGER BATES & JUSTINE MULLER

> BROKEN HILL REGIONAL ART GALLERY





## BARKA, THE FORGOTTEN RIVER: A collaboration between Badger Bates, Justine Muller and the Wilcannia community.

If only nature were personified, perhaps we might be gentler on her.

Indigenous peoples across the globe looked after their environment in a sustained manner for thousands of years; nowhere was a system so sophisticated than with the first peoples of Australia. Within seconds relative to history, colonisation has brought with it, amongst other atrocities, a resource devastation that we now know to be cataclysmic – a tragedy of the commons.

Throughout time conventions, world summits, protocols have tried to protect her, our environment, our habitat, to little or no avail. At a local level, the exhaustion of the individuals fighting on their own ground, in this case to save the Barka-Darling River, is palpable. Their exasperation is corporeal and it is on behalf of us all.

Poetic and political at once, the works of Badger Bates and Justine Muller reach to the past to inform the future, because all time is one. They speak of a correlation between the descent of the Barka-Darling and the dispiriting of a culture and its people whose name is eponymous to the river: the Barkandji.

Motivated by a deep concern for the collapse and neardisappearance of the Barka-Darling River – something that will have ripple effects Australia-wide – works in the exhibition by Badger span the past two decades combined with Muller's more recent responses to the region and its people. They take the form of ceramics, leadlight, lino print, wood and steel sculpture, and painting, in addition to a multi-media installation.

The sickness of the Barka River is the sickness of a mother, a sister, a father or a brother. The Barka is now teetering on a precipice, a point of no return. She has been calling and crying for attention for so long her throat is dry, her mouth cracked. Badger and Muller ask us to listen, and act. Their works are not of despair, they are works of strength, compassion and resilience, and through them they invite the rest of Australia to partake in a story that is no longer local but global.

## Ineke Dane

Curator







Left: Darren Whyman 'Horse', 2018 - Proud Barkandji man Right: Tammy King, 2018 - Proud Barkandji woman



Left: Lesley Harris 'Uncle Waddy', 2018 - Proud Barkandji man Right: Monica Kerwin 'Aunty Mon', 2017 - Proud Barkandji woman



Detail: Fragile River, 2018, engraved Mussel Shell

























Detail: River of Hope, 2018, River clay footprints, sand and found objects sourced from the Barka around Wilcannia





# **BADGER BATES**

Badger Bates (William Brian Bates) was born on the Darling River at Wilcannia in 1947. He was brought up by his extended family and his grandmother Granny Moysey who spoke several Aboriginal languages and knew many traditional songs and stories. With his grandmother he travelled the country learning about the language, history and culture of the Barkandji people from the Darling River, or Barka.

Badger is an established artist using the mediums of linocut print, wood, emu egg and stone carving and metalwork. His art often reflects the motifs, landforms, animals, plants and stories of Barkandji country and the Barka (the river). He mixes the traditional and contemporary to create a style that portrays a strong sense of identity and association with the land and waters. His art is an extension of a living oral tradition and is an important way of interpreting, renewing and handing on that tradition.

Badger's work has been acquired by the National Gallery of Australia, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Manly Art Gallery, UNSW Galleries, Monash University, Mildura City Council, Flinders University Print Collection, NSW Parliament House, Federal Parliament House Art Collection, The Australian Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney), in addition to regional art galleries and private collectors. In 2015 Badger won the esteemed Outback Art Prize with the collaborative work Caillin and Tunjili – Steamers Point Wilcannia with Jodie Daley.



## **JUSTINE MULLER**

Justine Muller was born in Sydney in 1981. She completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts at the National Art School in Sydney 2007. Muller is represented in both state and private collections, including the Macquarie Bank Group Collection and Sydney City Archives State Library. Group exhibitions include: the Art Gallery of New South Wales Dobell Drawing Prize 2012/2013; Portia Geach Memorial Prize 2013 SH Ervin Gallery; Paddington Art Prize 2014/2017; City of Sydney 'Art and About' Festival 2014 at St James and Martin Place Stations; and The Moran Photographic Prize, Juniper Hall 2015/2018.

Muller's solo exhibition "Understanding my Country" was a feature of HeadOn Festival 2017. The same year she achieved recognition in The Guardian Australia's list of best and most important photos.





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