

# MARGARET ACKLAND

## VESTIGES

28 May - 15 June 2013



Margaret Ackland  
*Dreaming*  
oil on canvas  
120 x 120 cm



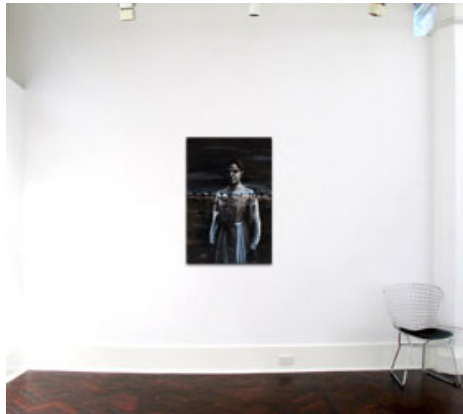
Margaret Ackland  
*Homeland*  
oil on canvas  
120 x 120 cm



Artworks in-situ on 3.7m wall



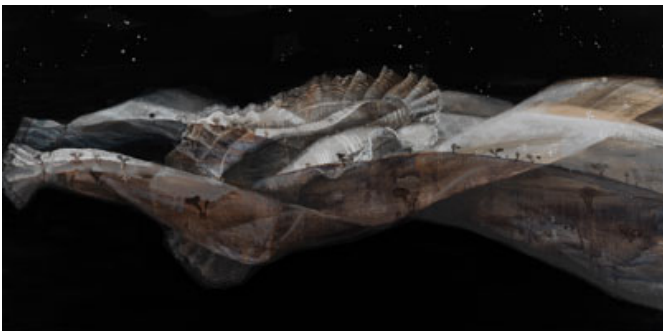
Margaret Ackland  
*Echo*  
oil on canvas  
113 x 76 cm



Artwork in-situ on 3.7m wall



Margaret Ackland  
*Revolution*  
oil on canvas  
120 x 120 cm



Margaret Ackland  
*Nightfall*  
61 x 123cm  
oil on linen



Artwork in-situ on 3.7m wall



Margaret Ackland  
*Vestiges*  
oil on canvas  
183 x 152 cm



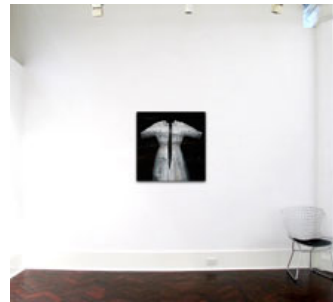
Artwork in-situ on 3.7m wall



Margaret Ackland  
*Map*  
oil on canvas  
75 x 75 cm



Margaret Ackland  
*Mirage*  
oil on canvas  
85 x 85cm



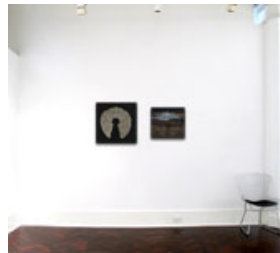
Artwork in-situ on 3.7m wall



Margaret Ackland  
*Unclosed Circle*  
60 x 60cm  
oil on linen



Margaret Ackland  
*Lace*  
45 x 50cm  
oil on linen



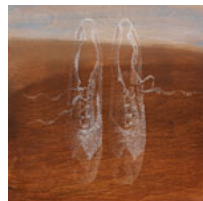
Artwork in-situ on 3.7m wall



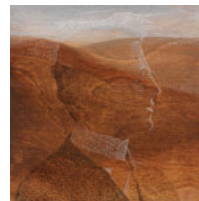
Margaret Ackland  
*Constellation*  
30 x 30cm  
oil on birch panel



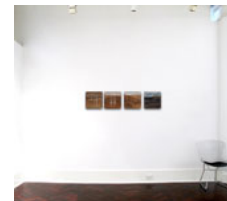
Margaret Ackland  
*Willow*  
30 x 30cm  
oil on birch panel



Margaret Ackland  
*Imprint*  
30 x 30cm  
oil on birch panel



Margaret Ackland  
*Shadow*  
30 x 30cm  
oil on birch panel



Artwork in-situ on 3.7m wall



Not the Way Home  
Artist Profile ISSUE 18



## VESTIGES

Margaret Ackland's latest body of work is literally the residue of layered experiences which began with an artists' trip to the University of NSW Research Station at Fowlers Gap in 2011. Overwhelmed by the vastness and aridity of this landscape north of Broken Hill, Ackland sought a way into its mysteries through the relics of human experience – both indigenous and western – which are scattered about like flotsam and jetsam on the site.

Ackland's practice has previously dealt with the relics of human experience, albeit a more urbane and contained version. Known for her exquisite rendering of historical garments, her images represented the inanimate in animated form – the memory of the body and traces of its movement inscribed into her imagery of the clothing. In this new body of work, she reinvents and extends this approach – the imprint of the body extends into the imprint of the landscape – to offer a multi-layered reading of the Fowlers Gap experience and its unceasing evolution in memory.

Our perception of landscape is, more often than not, informed by our experience of its representations rather than by direct experience of its physical reality. The desolate red ochre terrain at Fowlers Gap conjures a half-remembered melange of images from the canon of Australian landscape painting – Russell Drysdale's elongated figures in a drought-ravaged outback; Fred Williams' dry ground punctuated with charred blotches; Michael Nelson Tjakamarra's aerial dreamings, or Dorothy Napangardi's maps of the songlines of indigenous people – are some of the images which crowd the mind when one is called on to imagine outback Australia. Confronted with the physical reality of the outback, Ackland acknowledges the jostling of these versions of landscape and the accompanying power relations each represents.

An initial source of inspiration for Ackland came from some faded photographs of William Thomas Campbell and family. They constitute an historical display in one of the present buildings at the station which Campbell established at Fowlers Gap in 1900. His wife Fanny Maud bore him eleven children, four of whom were born at the station, and their daughter Elizabeth Maud married John Marks in the first wedding celebrated at the station in 1918. These images inform some of the work, but Ackland also found herself thinking about the original indigenous inhabitants and the experience of dislocation the arrival of the Campbells created for them. Their history is not so neatly catalogued, but is nevertheless present and available through oral traditions in the area.

Dislocation emerges as the underpinning theme as Ackland explores this distinctive red ochre landscape through a refracting cultural prism. Visual tropes from different cultures are fused to reinforce this notion of dislocation – hailspots on dainty muslin morph into indigenous dot painting; the willow pattern from shards of broken china overlays the burnt earth; and undulating hills of pin-tucked voile sit as a veneer over horizon lines of scrubby trees. Everywhere are human stories from half-understood cultures intersecting, but insistent beneath the human drama is the unyielding burnt biscuit landscape.

Ackland's depiction of incommensurable cultural values in this landscape is deft. For instance in an image like *Dreaming*, Ackland gives us the dark immensity of the night sky dotted with stars and dreamings; and beneath these cavernous heavens an equally vast dry country. Superimposed over this powerful space is a semi-transparent image of a young family. Decked out in their Sunday best, awkwardness writ large in their expressions and posture, they seem to be posing for a studio photograph. How incongruous they appear in this mighty space. With a clever fusion of two immediately recognisable visual codes – the photographic studio portrait and indigenous dot painting – Ackland brings the conflicting cultural histories into sharp and poignant focus along the horizon line. It runs through the paternal eyes – his vision for the future collides with the star dust of another culture's dreaming.

*Vestiges* documents Ackland's ongoing response to her experience at Fowlers Gap. Mobilising the peculiarly feminine sensibility of her earlier practice and adapting it to an often masculinised genre, she has found a fresh and distinctive way into representing the outback Australian landscape. This body of work is testament to thoughtful consideration of vestiges – vestiges left over from an earlier time at Fowlers Gap; and vestiges left over from Ackland's 2011 trip.

Elin Howe, March 2013