



ALIGHT

Nicola
McClelland

4 April – 25 May 2025

ALIGHT

Nicola McClelland relocated to Mildura/ Latji Latji Country on the banks of the Murray River in 2021. Her daily walks along the river under the endless blue sky activate new ways of seeing in an environment filled with movement, colour and light. In her studio, specific observations, drawings and photographs of river-life form the initial layers of these paintings. Through an intuitive process, including direct and indirect looking, she superimposes shapes, colours, lines and textures; a dialogue unfolding between her images and forms, and the unique riverine environment. This process oscillates between internal and external realms, allowing new and unexpected imagery to arrive.



Luminous Evening, 2023. Acrylic paint and mixed media on canvas, 63.7 x 78.7 cm.



Timeless and Recurrent, 2024. Acrylic paint and mixed media on canvas, 91.5 x 91.5 cm.

ONE: THE RIVERINE ENVIRONMENT

A beautiful clear blue-skied day stretching to infinity draws me along. A single majestic eucalypt with pure white bark stands firmly on the riverbank, reaching for the sky. Pure light reflects off the river's surface. Stillness expands to encompass the whole world that lies within this reach of river.

Three pelicans, with their broad wingspan, fly directly above the wide river, coursing downstream. The flute song of pied butcher birds carries imagination skywards, then it shifts to the whistling of a kite that cuts through the air. From its island nest touching the sky, the kite dives fiercely to catch a fish, piercing the water's surface. Agile welcome swallows ignite the air with their dynamic movement, making circular patterns, leaving momentary traces of metallic blue-black, grey and rusted orange.

Kookaburras announce their presence, as parrots, cormorants, and ducks move in and out of my vision. A lone pure white egret perches elegantly on the footbridge of the lock, surveying the scene. Water rushes and swirls in great circles as the butterfly gates of the lock open, and eventually close again.

I pass by wide ancient eucalypt trunks and the luminous green of their sun-pierced leaves. Under their canopies a gentle breeze reveals a vast palette of blue- and grey-greens. I am stilled by these ancient trees beside this wide, eternal river.

The whole world is held within this reach of river.

TWO: PAINTING

The cycle of daily walks over the past four years loops from my studio to the river and back again (5 km). At times I go further afield, into the more interior landscapes of the Mallee, away from the river. However, the initial source material for these paintings is drawn from the riverine environment within a kilometre of this gallery.

Life pulses through this landscape, and the experience of and feeling for it are intensely visceral. The temperature and climate amplify everything; nature is so beautiful drenched in light. Moving through the riverine environment, I alight upon elements that resonate with me. Over time, this cycle of walks is like a continuous following of the circumference of a circle. With each cycle new observations are made and insights form. Specific images, sounds and feelings become embedded within me.

Perhaps initially I was an observer, but now I am fully participating, capturing aspects of the essence of this place through photography, drawing, sound recordings and writing. In my studio, I begin to fix this experience by transferring and incorporating this material into the initial layers of the canvases.

Through further layering, the particular details of this place become less apparent, but their essence pushes to the surface. I am not directly painting the riverine scene, more the effect and sensations it produces. I stand back, wait and begin to see new connections form on the canvas, responding by layering paint, colour, shapes, lines and textures. Through an intuitive process, a language of images and forms evolves, moving between both inner and outer realms. The paintings both contain this reach of river and transcend it, opening out to something beyond.



Lock 11, 2024. Acrylic paint and mixed media on canvas, 54 x 54 cm.



Riverine Emanations, 2025. Tyvek, paper and mixed media, Dimensions variable.

Riverine Emanations

Concave and convex structures emerge through reforming maps of several reaches of the Murray River near Mildura on Latji Latji Country, stretching from Psyche Bend through to Lock Island and beyond. Nicola amalgamates these maps with images of abundant river life, including photographs, drawings and paintings.

The forms have nest-like qualities of strength and fragility as they hold elements of the precious and finite natural world. Some of these structures recede while others move forward. The ambiguous forms offer different perspectives, angles of vision, posing open questions.

I would like to thank the people who have generously supported me to realise this exhibition:
Helen Bongiorno, Donata Carrazza, Carl Daamen, Reuben Daamen, Justine Henry, Fran Keenan,
Nicole Kinleyside-Tiller, Kevin Toohey, Judy Woods, Luci Marcuzzo and the staff at Mildura Arts Centre.

I would like to acknowledge the First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee, The Latji Latji, Ngintait and Nyeri Nyeri as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Country on which we are.

I pay my respects to the Elders past and present of First Peoples of Millewa-Mallee and the ancient connection they hold with their Country.



Confluence: Blue Curve, River's Edge, 2023. Acrylic paint and mixed media on canvas, 64.5 x 54.5 cm.

NICOLA McCLELLAND BIOGRAPHY 2025

Nicola McClelland is an Australian artist who studied at Central Saint Martins in London and the VCA, Melbourne. Her practice is diverse and includes sculpture, installation, and painting.

Nicola has worked and lived in many places including West Africa, India and Europe. In each new place she responds to the setting and to salient contemporary issues ranging from climate change to migration. Using a process-driven, materials-based approach to art practice, she allows new ground and new geographies to emerge through her work.

Living and working in Mildura on Latji Latji Country for the past four years has been an exceptional experience for her, shifting her practice from one that was predominately three-dimensional and installation-based, into

the field of painting. Responding to the unique environments and geographies of this place has generated a new way of making and seeing.

She has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions and collaborative projects in Australia, the United Kingdom, Italy and Germany, including: the Tate Exchange, Liverpool, Platforma Festival, UK, and Venice Biennale fringe events. She has been a finalist in a wide range of art prizes across Australia. These include the Incinerator Art Award (Art for Social Change and Artecycle), the Hutchins Prize and the Alice Springs Art Prize. In recent years she has exhibited at several galleries in Sydney and Canberra. Her work is held in the La Trobe University Collection and private and corporate collections nationally and internationally.

ALIGHT

Nicola McClelland

Mildura Arts Centre
4 April – 25 May 2025

Open daily, 10am – 4pm
199 Cureton Ave Mildura VIC 3500



Mildura Rural City Council



MILDURA ARTS CENTRE



Booklet design: Justine Henry. Artwork, text and photography: Nicola McClelland.
www.nicolamcclelland.com | Instagram: @nicola.mcc

Cover image: Nicola McClelland, *Alight*, 2024. Acrylic paint and mixed media on canvas, 79.5 x 79.5 cm.