

22.96

*receding*





We acknowledge the the Kabi Kabi and Butchulla people, the Traditional Owners of the land on which this work was inspired and created.

We thank them for caring for the land and waterways and extend this gratitude to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of all lands, waterways and communities with deep respect for their elders past, present and emerging.

Images: Leeroy Todd Film and Photography for the majority of these images in this catalogue

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22.96 | *receding*

**Miriam Innes**

**Joolie Gibbs**

**Leeroy Todd**

Exhibition launched  
Gympie Regional Gallery  
14 February - 15 April 2023







## Miriam Innes

I was raised on a farm with a river nearby, my parents reminded me often of the dangers that lurked there, I had listened to stories of tragic events and yet the lure and curiosity was ever present.

The river is a place of learning and growth, where parents teach their children, where family memories are created, fun in watering holes, boating, canoeing activities and learning to throw a line, where we seek out tranquillity and peace.

However, late in February 2022, detrimental rainfall replaced the trust, calmness and harmony with threat and fear. The Mary River was helplessly undergoing an enormous metamorphosis, uncontrollable swelling and bringing a quiet destruction in its wake.

I began to observe the river throughout its transfiguration, the process of rising and falling, the final dusting of the landscape with silt carried from upriver and the environmental altering which took place beneath the floodwater. I was lured back when the water receded; it was then I found myself immersed and captivated.

I reached out to Leeroy Todd and Joolie Gibbs to create a dedicated team with their own unique relationships to the river. With similar mind sets and concepts, we worked towards creating a positive experience for the community, new impressions and provoking positive thoughts reflective of the Mary River.

Within the gallery space I intend to recapture the scene of immersive intrigue I felt when first revisiting the riverbed after the flood. With the intent to focus on the beauty and fascination I felt in that scene of destruction.

Finally, working together with Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee (MRCCC) to include interactive components which will be an additional educational element around endangered species in the exhibit.

My focus and practise has always been concerned with finding the beauty in the mundane, the positivity in tricky situations and creating artwork which reaches out to include all members of a community.

### Miriam Innes

Detail image of *Lower Mary Street*, 2022  
Charcoal, silt, graphite on polymer.

Detail image of *Amamoor General Store*, 2022  
Charcoal, silt, graphite on polymer.





## Bio

Pursuing beauty in unassuming places, Miriam Innes has a history of depicting urban settings and locations as her subject. Sharing her experience of place with a specific focus on encounter and escapism, while utilizing an inclusive approach. With recent encounters of natural disasters, Innes seeks positive ways in her practise to understand and accept a new and everchanging destruction, in both the urban and rural environments. She has exhibited widely across Australia and Internationally, including the U.S, Europe and Asia. Innes is a consistent finalist in numerous prizes, some of her awards include Abu Dhabi Evision Media's Emerging Artist Award, People's Choice Award for the Lyn McCrea Memorial Drawing Prize and Local Artist at the Du Reitz Art Award. Private collections include the United States, South Korea, United Arab Emirates, Ireland and Australia.

Miriam Innes, *Dickabram Bridge*, Box no. 19, 2022, 19 x 15 x 15cm,  
Box: Metal, glass. Insert: charcoal, silt and graphite on hand cut polymer.

Detail of *36 m square*, 2023  
3 m x 3 m x 3 m. Frame: Steel, Exterior: Handcut polymer.





# Joolie Gibbs

I have been fascinated with the effects of floods on our natural environment since arriving in Gympie nearly 30 years ago. I was raised in Hervey Bay so the Mary River has been connected to me for some time. In fact, I was born in the year of the 1955 flood.

I have photographically documented the debris on Kidd Bridge fenceline in Gympie for several floods starting back in 2011, and this was the basis of my Masters of Art and Visual Art final exhibition 'Flood Language' in 2013. I repeated this in March and May 2022.

I find inspiration and awe from the great expanses of water in floods, to the insects struggling to find ground on the rising waters edge, to the debris on the fence lines when the waters recede.

Through the trapped debris I can see an indication of the good and bad land practices upstream, and give thought to the reason we have fences to start with - to keep animals in, and unwanted guests out. A marking of territory, a colonial response to ownership of property, and a giant sieve in floods.

In this exhibition I have focused on the Category 3 weed Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*), which travels freely downstream, having been evacuated from dams and other streams when normally it is not allowed to be released into the environment. Who knows where it will stop?

The debris hanging on the fenceline of Kidd Bridge was collected, rinsed, rinsed, rinsed, cooked, rinsed, rinsed, beaten, poured, pressed and shaped to become the substrate of the large, fragile, sculptural handmade paper work *Water hyacinth*. Mud collected was also used in the 9 metre wall piece *In and Out of Control*, which starts on the right with the water hyacinths. Parts of the documented fenceline feature in the 11 metre concertina book *Fenceline*, giving an indication of the debris.

Floods are messy, smelly, and they tend to linger in more ways than one.

I thank Dion Channer, papermaker extraordinair, Christine Hall, photographer, and Dr Andi Sparkle, for their generous assistance in realising my work.

## Joolie Gibbs

Detail images of *In and Out of Control*, 2022  
900 cm x 130 cm

Botanical inks (Gympie Messmate, Red Kamala, Eucalyptus, Iron bark) and flood mud on 300gsm Arches

Detail images of *Water Hyacinth*, 2022  
300 cm x 300 cm

Handmade paper from Mary River flood debris, wire, mixed fibers, sisal





## Bio

From making the models for 'tick, tock, what's under the clock today' for Playschool (NZ), tombstone art, graphic design, paste up artist, tutor, set design, community artist, desktop publisher, papermaking and basketmaking to Director of the Gympie Regional Gallery for 23 years, Gibb's 40 plus years in the creative industries has been varied and interesting.

Completing her Masters of Art in Fine Art (MAVA) at the Queensland College of Art, Brisbane, reconnected her with her art practice, taking it in new directions of environmental focus, which she has keenly been discovering since retiring from the paid workforce in 2021.





## Leeroy Todd

Gympie has special significance to me; I was born and raised here and have strong connections with the place. I left in my early twenties with my wife and after 10 years we returned to Gympie to be close to family and to continue growing our own. Gympie, its people, the community and my family encouraged me to launch and establish myself in a career as a photographer and filmmaker, a challenging path but very rewarding working within the community.

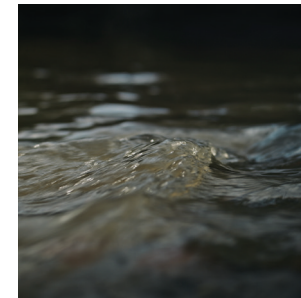
I have witnessed the Mary River flood many times through my life, but the flood in February 2022 was astonishing by the sheer volume of water that descended upon the landscape, town and surrounding areas. My automatic response was to capture and document what was happening through the lens. I was cut off on the Southside of town like so many others, bridges and roads impassable but the change I was witnessing around me from the Mary River left me in disbelief.

Day by day I captured footage that unnerved me, my thoughts were with the people and businesses that were immediately affected, so many community members without homes and businesses under flood water.

Being apart of '22.96 I receding' meant that I could share what I had witnessed and captured during later February and into March. The project was already underway without my realising it. I felt it was important historically to the community and it was well timed when Miriam Innes approached me to be apart of it.

I began to document the work she and artist Joolie Gibbs were creating for the project. I also began to be a part of their process, gathering silt and offering technical assistance when required.

**Leeroy Todd**  
Images taken of the February 2022 flood from around the Gympie region.





## Bio

During Todd's eight years so far into his creative journey, photography has been his initial passion, documenting people and events. He started out in the news and editorial industry freelancing for the local newspaper while working on events like the Gympie Music Muster, Du Reitz Art Awards, Winton Outback Festival, Stanthorpe Apple and Grape Festival along with a number of other music festivals. His photographic journey also led him to becoming a filmmaker, which followed into a love for creating documentary style stories.

Todd's work in filmmaking has developed to creating videos for business, events and tourism clientel. This also began a personal project called *Creative Unique*, which is an ongoing series documenting local unique and interesting artists and their artforms.





# Flood Knowledge

by Professor Ross Woodrow, BA (Qld.) MPhil (Syd.) PhD (Syd.)  
Queensland College of Art, Griffith University

The title “22.96 | receding” has particular potency for people who live in Gympie, given that until February 27, 2022, the key flood marker in the Mary River topped out at 21 metres, the highest mark recorded in one hundred years. It is not for nothing that classic Queensland houses were built on ironbark posts or stilts with an average height from ground level to the tip of the roof at around 7.5 metres. Everyone knows that a river in flood higher than three stacked Queenslanders is a monster. Official river heights are measured at a fixed point to give empirical or comparative value that can be extrapolated to any point on the flood plain. The only heights that really matter for most people living in the flood prone areas of Gympie, Brisbane or any other Australian city or town, is their record or memory of the highest silt tide mark left by the receding muddy waters of past inundations. Collective or public legacy markers of past floods are generally avoided, although Maryborough is among the few exceptions, with a large steel sign “The Floods” next to a didactic display and a historical flood-height marker on the side of the Bond Store Museum in the Heritage precinct at the centre of the city. [1]

The positioning of the Bond Store so close to the Mary River was determined simply by its purpose to receive all the barrels, bales and other taxable goods unloaded from ships docking at the wharves. Today looking up at the highest mark of 41 feet or 12.3 metres, recorded in 1893, which almost reaches the roofline of the building, and the other major inundations of 1955, 1974 and 2013 is sobering enough. Speculations on the power of human resilience are nonetheless tempered by recognition of the attendant blind faith in technology to conquer the forces of nature. Empowered by the infallibility of mathematical calculation, mechanical time keeping, navigation and knowledge from freshly created topographical maps, the colonial architect and builders of the Bond Store in 1864 could not conceive of asking the “illiterate” Indigenous owners of the land they had occupied for millennia, how high up the tree-line the river flooded. Such questions, before siting buildings, would have possibly saved one hundred and fifty years of flood anxiety here and across other regions of Australia.

In cases of land and water management, the complementary, and often superior, knowledge of First Nations culture is now being recognized, but flood knowledge is still a most contested field because the mitigation costs are increasing, and the floods are more destructive and frequent. Political debate around rebuilding versus relocation will continue with the environmental scientists and hydrologists battling for implementation of sustainable solutions. However this flood project only indirectly engages those political, pragmatic and empirical issues since it presents new insights that are only available through the expressive power of art. Flood inundations have become a familiar part of Australian life through direct experience or on the nightly television news which attempts to humanise the aerial or fly-over shots with interviews in front of, or beneath, the mud meridian line across the internal wall of a retail shop or domestic living room. Artists are more interested in what can be revealed out in the field, literally in the case of the three artists in this exhibition, who at various stages all collected the floods signature silt as a powerful evidential medium.

Making sense from mud is however only one mode in this project which includes almost the full range of available visual mediums including drawing, sculpture, photography, video, installation, digital or generative art, papermaking and the artistbook. For any artist, the command of a process always plays a crucial role in the successful reception by an audience. The added interest here is the attempt by each artist to share this engagement with, and awareness of, process so viewers become conscious of an active physical event rather than a mere documentary record. The depiction of floods over the past centuries in Australia has become standardised and as I suggest here is governed by a belief that nature can be mastered by the technological superiority of humanity. Artists have always played a key role in the interpretation and application of new technology as much as they have offered visual interpretation of the natural and constructed or carpentered world.



Like many exhibitions that offer something new, this reflection about a flood also contains a dialogue about art. The symbolic and metaphoric images and objects these artists have made are different by type and intention to those collected by families directly impacted by the flood. Those profoundly important personal photos and significant broken or intact mnemonic objects serve a memento or memorial function. In that guise, they can also function in a public historical museum with sufficient narrative and contextual support.

The expectation in visiting an art gallery is that art objects will have some degree of aesthetic autonomy and to achieve this they will synthesize the personal and private to communicate a more universal symbolic understanding. In making art, as the three artists in this exhibition demonstrate, the personal is extended by an investment in the application of critical observation and thinking, hundreds of hours of skilful and innovative drawing, fabrication, experiment and image creation. The success of a particular work or the complexity of its metaphoric or expressive impact is often only measured by its ability to escape description in words, because ultimately the core mission of all visual art is to extend human understanding beyond the limits of science and language.

Each artist was allocated one of the three gallery spaces that make up the Gympie Regional Gallery. It is most appropriate that the work by Joolie Gibbs occupies the ground-floor long gallery, Gallery Three, since her production is most directly or indexically connected to the flood, given the mediums used are largely made up of natural flood debris mostly collected from fence lines bordering the Mary River.

The large rectangular dimensions of the upstairs Gallery One is closest to the enduring perception of a white-box for gallery display and the perfect container for the kaleidoscopic collection of boxes created by Miriam Innes. These aluminium and glass boxes differ from the usual museum vitrines or display cases in that the drawings they contain become the source of shadow bridges and other structures that fall across the gallery walls and floor in an inescapable reminder of the importance of bridges and their fate during flood.

#### Miriam Innes

Detail images of non-endangered and endangered species of the Mary River. Giant barred frog, Mary River cod, Mary River turtle, Pinkeye mullet, Queensland lungfish, 2023. 21 x 15cm, charcoal, graphite on polymer.



Being a recent arrival to the region has beneficially tempered the local familiarity with inundation with a sense of wonder at the transformations and surprising juxtapositions floods bring.

In Gallery Two, Leeroy Todd presents a video installation that acts as explicit witness to both the sights and sounds of the flood and its aftermath.

The rich complementarity of the three very different approaches to the same significant destructive flood event presents an integrated exhibition which is unified by an inescapable environmental thematic. Namely, the vital questions over the degree to which humans accept, resist or adapt to demands of increasingly changing eco-systems.

Charcoal has become the signature medium for Miriam Innes, evoking for her memories of the 'bog oak' found near her childhood home in Ireland. In her work to date, the primal black powder of charcoal has acted as a counter foil representing nature in imagery where the intricate interlocking geometry of the built environment took centre stage and human presence was excluded.

Walking into a room-sized installation of Miriam's deserted New York streetscapes, rebuilt on paper from the ash of charcoal, is not menacing, as might be imagined, but energizing.[2] No doubt this is because of the oddly comforting effect complex geometry has on the human brain, which recent neuroscience has attempted with some success to explain.[3] Bridges and flood are an ideal combination for Miriam as they represent the ultimate contest between geometry and organic form. In Gympie the vitality of the river often wins and negates the purpose of structural forms, cutting the city in two. The river in flood, is most often described as a living or vitalist malevolent entity that creeps, swells or surges and recedes or retreats to its benevolent state, although Miriam's art is not restricted by these personifications. Using a medium concocted from flood silt collected from various sites Miriam uses a durable waterproof, synthetic paper, produced from recycled plastic, that can also be cut and shaped.



The contours of bridges and other built structures are revealed by cutting free the outlines to cast shadows in and outside the glass boxes. The constructed and natural fuse in a superb synthesis of light and shade, substance and shadow.

Growing up in Gympie, Leeroy Todd has seen the Mary River flood countless times but on recent occasions he has been empowered to give his vision qualified value. He has now created a substantial body of work in photography and film that has established his reputation for capturing the unique or essential character of people and places. His critical photo and video documentation of the 2022 inundation had begun before he was approached by Miriam Innes to collaborate on the project after which his thinking expanded to make this a more meta-analysis of the process by including a record of the production of his collaborators.

Leeroy's choice of a multi-screen video presentation is significant since he works against the persistent trend in press photography to favour the aerial view captured by helicopter or drone. The resilience of the mythic thinking associated with the Biblical flood, goes some way to explaining why a Google image search for floods in Gympie, or in any other Australia city, reveals an almost exclusive selection of aerial or panoramic overviews of the widest expanse of water. The repetition of such images tends to elide the multiple individual tragedies that characterise catastrophic local floods and certainly conceals the extent of the devastation and transformation below the surface of the muddy water. Leeroy Todd does create drone or aerial images, but he has spent most of his time exploring the ground level action before the deluge and after, in that once "underwater" zone.

Apart from the Biblical allusion, the popularity of the aerial view of floods continues the human obsession with a bird's-eye view of the world which manifests in images created by artists in Classical Europe, ancient China and Australia. [4]

It appears that the current popularity of drone photography has reactivated the use of the term bird's-eye view which was made redundant decades ago when cameras were taken into the stratosphere beyond the habitat of any bird and "eye in the sky" signified the ultimate technologized human eye of the spy satellite. Incredible as it seems, before Gympie was established as a settlement or the Bond Store in Maryborough was built, it was already accepted that human mastery of technology could replicate the bird's power of flight and photograph its vision. Ironically, the evidence is a lithographic caricature by the French artist Honoré Daumier (1808 - 1879) which he meant to be an amusing dismissal of photography as art. Published in 1862, and captioned Nadar Elevating Photography to the Height of an Art, it shows Nadar taking one of his aerial photographs from a hot-air balloon over Paris.[5]

Leeroy Todd perfectly fills the role of witness as a professional photographer embedded in the local community. Joolie Gibbs has systematically and sensitively examined the Mary River in flood through the prism of creative practice. If there is such a thing as creative visual forensics, Joolie is its exemplary practitioner. Since 2012, after the water had receded from several major floods in Gympie Joolie has documented what was collected in the fence lines on both sides of the Kidd Bridge in Gympie. In the resulting work, process and outcome deny easy divisions between document and source, evidence and medium, creating a unique entanglement of poetic interpretation and environmental message. Joolie's first use of a fence line as sifter of flood debris resulted the 2013 exhibition Flood Language in Brisbane.[6] Further exhibitions followed, refining that interpretation of flood graffiti.

In more recent years Joolie has moved to other environmental themes while continuing to develop her drawing practice with a characteristic mix of exquisite observational line work and daring experimentation with sustainable natural mediums.





Her botanical inks are sourced from trees that grow in the wallum habitat and outside her studio, for example.

After three Gympie floods in the early part of 2022, including the record breaker of February 27, Joolie returned to her visual barographic fence line and although the variety and scale of the skeletal and surviving insects were as expected she was shocked at the increasing amount of noxious weed, particularly *Salvinia* and Water Hyacinth, among the debris. The unprecedented height of the flood meant that it reached into untapped dams, ponds and waterways to flush out water hyacinths whose original purpose was largely decorative but is mostly destructive for native species. Moving water is the broadcast medium for hyacinths with their trailing root systems only thwarted by a wire fence line, giving Joolie plenty to work with as medium and subject.

Joolie must get some release from her increasing antipathy towards this weed during the hours of gathering, crushing, beating, boiling and pulping it with the other flood debris grasses into paper. The contemplative concentration and deliberation evident in her drawings and constructions exemplifies the passion that motivated them, while expressing a counter balance to the thoughtless environmental neglect that leads to a decorative pond in a flood plain being filled with water hyacinth. The way Joolie has so constructively exploited the language of the Mary River in flood is different to the usual critical interpretations of inundations, yet words are inadequate to explain this visceral imaginative projection of an insect's world view.

The flood knowledge contained in the work by each of these artists is not a mystified or secret knowledge associated with, or constructed through, ritualised practices. Nonetheless, the material and experiential nature of the three installations means that only by visiting this exhibition will the art be fully appreciated and understood.

#### Endnotes

1. The most startling national example is Maitland where 100 metal flood markers were installed on power poles around the city in 1982 denoting the high points of the famous 1955 flood. Maitland City Council initiated a public art project in 2021 seeking "digital placemaking specialists to create a connected series of unique, location specific, innovative and captivating interpretive experiences to acknowledge the significant impact of flooding events across Central Maitland on the Maitland community and the identity of the city." Part of the brief was to highlight the significance of the few remaining flood markers. See <https://www.maitland.nsw.gov.au/document/activate-maitland-beyond-the-flood-levels-eoi>
2. I visited the exhibition *New York rambling* by Miriam Innes at the Logan Art Gallery. The show ran from 24 Jan to 7 Mar 2020 and went on to other venues; the Noosa Regional Art Gallery in 2021 and the Brunswick Street Gallery, Melbourne in 2022.
3. For example: Barbara Stafford *Echo Objects: The Cognitive Work of Images* Univ of Chicago Press 2008. I'm aware that bird's eye view was always only viable as a metaphor, because such views do not match the optical array seen by birds. Although all birds have binocular vision only a few species have binocular stereopsis and this is radically different to vision in human animals.
4. I'm aware that bird's eye view was always only viable as a metaphor, because such views do not match the optical array seen by birds. Although all birds have binocular vision only a few species have binocular stereopsis and this is radically different to vision in human animals.
5. Nadar was the pseudonym for the French photographer and caricaturist Gaspard-Felix Tournachon (1820 – 1910). The famous lithograph was published in *Souvenirs d'Artistes* in 1862 and *Le Boulevard*, 25 May 1863. For a reproduction see: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/364205>
6. The exhibition *Flood Language 2013* at the Queensland College of Art Webb Gallery, South Bank Brisbane was the culminating exhibition for a Masters research project by Joolie Gibbs. This work with variations and additions was then shown at four other venues in Southern Queensland over the following four years. These included; Gatakers Artspace Maryborough, Noosa Regional Gallery and Gayndah Regional Gallery.

**Joolie Gibbs**

Detail images of *Fenceline* 2023.  
approx. 11 metres, Digital images on 300gsm.





## Message from the Mayor

It is difficult to imagine that 12 months has passed since the second highest flood in living memory swept through the Gympie region. Although we have not overcome all the challenges that come with disaster, the path to recovery has been etched with silver-linings of generosity, community comradery and resilience.

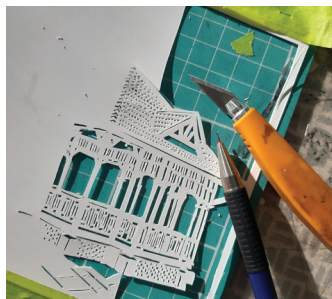
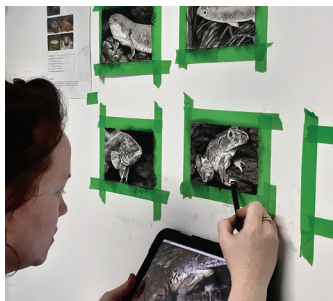
22.96 / receding is a brilliant example of both resilience and comradery, and I congratulate the artists on delivering a challenging yet locally and nationally relevant exhibition. This series of works is valuable in demonstrating the power that the arts has for reflection, conversation and developing a strong sense of identity within a community.

I encourage you to take this opportunity to explore the Mary River through the eyes of these three significant artists: Miriam Innes, Joolie Gibbs and Leeroy Todd.

Mayor Glen Hartwig







## Special thanks to:

### Regional Arts Fund

This project was made possible by the Australian Government's Regional Arts Fund, provided through Regional Arts Australia, administered in Queensland by Flying Arts Alliance.



### Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee (MRCCC)

The project was delivered with the support of MRCCC. MRCCC is a non-profit, non-regulatory community organisation, formed in 1994 to address issues facing the river on a whole of catchment basis, involving all those who have a stake in the river system.



This project was delivered in partnership between Gympie Regional Gallery, curator and artist Miriam Innes, and artists Joolie Gibbs and Leeroy Todd.



