

# Jacky Green

Born 1953, Soudan Station, Barkly Tablelands, Northern Territory

*Thanks to the Seán Kerins for assistance with the text and Waralungku Arts, Borroloola.*

I am a Garawa man. My country is in the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria.

I was born under a coolabah tree in one of the creek beds running out from the main creek at Soudan Station in the Northern Territory. The creek where I was born is in an old devil devil story for that country. We call the old devil devil Irinju. He lives under the ground and used to send his hand up out of the creek bed to pick wild oranges from a tree that grew on the hill, west of Soudan Station. When old devil devil was taking the oranges he was stealing them from another old fella from the area where the tree grew. He kept pinchin' them. That old fella kept wondering why his wild oranges were going missing all the time. To find out what was going on he decided to watch the tree. He'd count the oranges and then go back and see that some more had gone. He figured that old devil devil was pinchin' them. So he went to the wild orange tree and waited. It wasn't long until he saw old devil devil's hand come up out of the earth and take the wild oranges from the tree. Right away, that old fella, he got his stone axe out and cut the hand off the arm. The hand fell down and made a big hole, right there. When old devil devil pulled his arm back into the earth it was going everywhere, all over, waving back and forth. It was this action that made the creek bed and that's right where I was born in the elbow of Irunju, right there, in Wakaya Country.

When I was young there was no whitefella schooling for us Aboriginal kids. My school was the bridle and the blanket, learning on the pastoral stations where my father worked. Our future was set as labourers on whitefella pastoral stations. This is the reason I don't read and write. I'm not ashamed of this.

I was taught our law by my grandfathers, father, uncles and other senior kin from the southwest Gulf peoples; the Mara, Gudanji, Yanyuwa and Garawa. Knowledge came to me through our ceremonies, hunting, fishing and gathering and travelling through our country with the old people. We sing the country.

All my life I have fought hard for our land and culture. For the last thirty years I have been working with all the Aboriginal people of the southwest Gulf fighting to get our country back in our ownership and then to protect and care for it. There's lots of important sacred sites and song-lines throughout our country. Many of them are powerful places that have to be cared for, looked after the proper way.

After my days as a stockman I worked for the Northern Land Council in the Northern Territory. I am currently a director of the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation in Queensland, where I represent Garawa people.

In 2005 I started the Garawa and Waanyi/Garawa Ranger groups in the southern Gulf region. I did this because many Waanyi and Garawa people living on their homelands were forced to move back to the old mission in Doomadgee and other places when service delivery failed on the homelands. When the people moved off the country it was suffering from late-season uncontrolled wildfires.

The Northern Territory and Queensland Governments were trying to get on top of the wildfires but couldn't do it. It was when we got involved and started to do things our way and working with a few whitefellas who were helpin' us that we managed to stop the hot late-season wildfires and replace them with cooler early-season controlled fires.

The Garawa and Waanyi/Garawa Rangers won the Leighton Holdings Indigenous Award for our fire management, part of the Northern Territory Landcare Awards. This made us feel good. People could see what we are capable of when we have control over how things are done. No more of the top-down stuff.

## **Why I Paint**

I started painting so I can get my voice out. I want to show people what is happening to our country and to Aboriginal people. No one is listening to us. What we want. How we want to live. What we want in the future for our children. It's for these reasons that I started to paint. I want government to

listen to Aboriginal people. I want people in the cities to know what's happening to us and our country.

There's a lot of mining going on in our country. The mining companies are coming into our country and they aren't talking with us properly. They seem to just want us to agree to things their way. They might talk to one or two people but not to the *Minggirringi* (owners) and *Junggayi* (managers) for the places they want to explore or mine. Things are always rushed. It's always about someone else's plan for our country and not our own plans.

I've counted maybe six mining companies operating in our region. They are looking around for all kinds of stuff—gas, uranium, gold, diamonds, zinc. Some of them are destroying our country. You just have to look at the McArthur River mine. They are destroying an important sacred site that sits in that area. We are worried about the damage to the site and about leaks and pollution from run-off that might come down the river and go into the sea. These are places where we get food. There's lots of people dying and getting sick. We aren't saying that the mine is the cause of all this but it worries us that the sacred sites aren't being protected. We can't do what we are supposed to do and we feel there are consequences for this. It plays with our people's minds. It's not good for them. This is serious business. Why won't anyone listen to us?

I want the government and mining companies to know that we are still here. We aren't going anywhere. We aren't dead yet. We are still here, feeling the country.

### **Exhibitions**

Represented by Waralungku Arts, Borroloola, Northern Territory from 2008.

#### Solo

2014 Flow of Voices, The Cross Art Projects, Sydney.

2013 *Flow of Voices*, Arena Project Space, Melbourne.

#### Group

2013 Togart Award (finalist, painting) Chan Contemporary Art Space, Darwin.

2013 World Indigenous Network Conference Arts Hub.

2013 Waralungku Exhibition at Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair.

### **Employment & Professional Work History**

2014—Present: Regional Council Member, Northern Land Council, Darwin, Northern Territory.

Director (representing Garrwa), Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, Queensland.

2013—14 Chairperson of Committee (Garrwa Artists) Waralungku Arts, Borroloola, NT.

2008—present Senior Cultural Advisor, Garawa and Waanyi Garawa Rangers, Borroloola, NT.

2006—2008 Coordinator Garawa and Waanyi Garawa Rangers, Borroloola, Northern Territory.

1988—2005 Project Officer, Northern Land Council, Borroloola, Northern Territory (some years on and off between this time).

Project Officer, Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, Queensland.

1963—late 1970 Stockman on stations in the Barkly and Gulf of Carpentaria regions, Northern Territory. (Paid work from 1969)

### **Publications**

Green, J. Morrison, J. and Kerins, S. (2012), 'No more yardin' us up like cattle', in Jon Altman and Seán Kerins (eds.), *People on Country Vital Landscapes Indigenous Futures*, The Federation Press, Sydney, pp. 190—201.

Green, J (2012) 'Flow of Voices', Visual Essay, *Arena Magazine*, No. 124.