Ghost States | The Cross Art Projects

Painting will always be my primary passion; however, since I first had the opportunity to try printmaking at art school, the process of transferring ink to paper has held a certain fascination.

Over the years, I have been able to nurture my curiosity by arranging occasional printmaking workshops with master printmaker Basil Hall at Basil Hall Editions (BHE).

Basil introduced me to the wonders of creating images in print when he was the printmaking lecturer at the Northern Territory University, in Garramilla/Darwin.

Many years later, I started thinking about wanting to do more printmaking. I reached out to Basil, because I wanted to work with him again. By then, Basil had relocated to Braidwood, NSW. The BHE studio is now based in Kamberri/Canberra, ACT.

I began with an etching workshop at Braidwood in 2015, and since then, the subsequent collaborations with Basil have become an integral part of the story of my printmaking journey.

The selection of collagraphs in Ghost States are from my most recent experiences at the BHE studio with Basil and assistant printmaker Kari Gilbert.

I see this work as the culmination of the confidence I have developed from time spent in the printmaking studio and being comfortable to simply have fun and to explore playing with colour and form.

The beauty of the collagraph process is that I discovered it enabled me to work in a way that felt very similar to how I like to paint, using elements of chance, intuitiveness and variability, responding to each layer before deciding on the next step, with the intention of producing imagery that is layered and textured.

In making the collagraphs, I experimented with using different patterned handmade papers to make torn or cut stencils, positioning them on the inked printing plate intuitively.

As always, the inspiration is drawn from the natural landscape, especially rocks, my Indigenous heritage, art materials, and different places and experiences that live on in my memories.

The leaf shape in several of the prints references the leaf of the Pin Oak Tree.

The Pin Oak is a deciduous tree that is native to North Eastern America. It is popular to grow in residential gardens and to use in landscaping because the oak tree has a beautiful shape, gives excellent shade and provides habitat and food for wildlife.

I had observed the leaves last year when I was at a printmaking residency at the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

I thought the distinctive shape of the pin oak leaves was fantastic. They were completely different to the trees and plants I was used to seeing in North Australia. I wanted to use the shapes in my work to remind me of the oak trees and the beauty of the landscape I saw there.

Karen Mills, 2025