

Shifting Ground

Prints by Indigenous Australian Artists from the Basil Hall Editions Workshop Proofs Collection 2002–2023

We acknowledge the Monacan People as the custodians of the land in and around Charlottesville, Virginia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are respectfully advised that this publication contains the images and names of the deceased.

Shifting Ground

by Jessyca Hutchens

What would it mean to create Indigenous histories of printmaking? Histories that would not only describe the key figures and timelines and scenes of printmaking but would also turn to how printmaking has and is being Indigenized. To make use of the verb Indigenized in this context is not to seek to define a recognizable aesthetic or a singular cultural movement. It is a reading of the medium through a multitude of vastly different cultural contexts across Australia to understand how Indigenous artists use and transform the medium and how, in turn, engagements with printmaking shape wider artistic and cultural practices. With print practice really taking off from the 1990s, and accelerating over the last two decades, Indigenous printmaking in Australia has become a diverse, experimental field of art production that is greatly in need of further interrogation from Indigenous perspectives.



2. Photograph of Basil Hall and Butcher Janangoo Cherel at Mangkaja Arts painting the etching plate for his print *Girndi*, 2008. Photograph courtesy of Basil Hall.

^{1.} Cover image: Janangoo Butcher Cherel, Girndi, 2008.

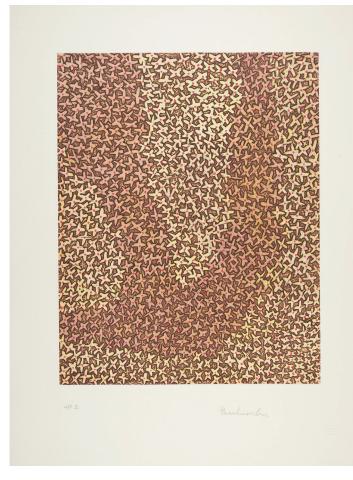
Much of the writing on Indigenous Australian art has been shaped by the medium-specific discourse on painting, and its beginnings in the Western Desert art movement; and later by a focus on artists whose multimedia works were framed as a form of postcolonial critique. Discussions of printmaking have often been subsumed into these two categories, viewed either as a supplement to painting practice (prints were often viewed as mere reproductions of an artist's paintings, even though they were far from it) or simply considered a part of diverse mixed media practices. But when we turn to printmaking histories more specifically, we unfold a plethora of unique contexts, collaborative relationships, and transformative practices.

Take, for example, the work of Judy Watson, who is featured in this exhibition. A whole book might be written on the role of print in her practice—one that has been both formative and sustained. For Watson, a kind of ontology of print permeates her work across different media. Her early experiments with lithography, particularly her development of a tusche wash technique wherein a greasy substance is suspended in water to create aqueous effects, influenced her later mark making across print, stencilling, dying, and painting. Conceptually, print resonates with Watson's interest in ideas of trace and residue. Her layered works both recall and enact the ways that the flows of history and the natural world leave traces on the land, which has been pertinent to her picturing of the tracks and fissures of colonialism. Print is by nature a form of trace left behind, and Watson's use of it often emphasizes the time-based and material properties of print processes—of inks and marks soaking into paper or fabric, or of areas of material resistance (another pertinent metaphor). I begin with Watson's example because it guides us towards a rich material and conceptual language that can be used in reference to print and Indigenous art—something that is lacking in the more purely historical accounts of it.

Another essential element to *Indigenizing* print histories would be to probe deeper into the complex and diverse institutional and cultural contexts through which print has emerged. Key to this story has been a trend emerging from the mid-1990s for print workshops to be run within Indigenous communities—allowing artists access to a medium that often requires significant equipment and technical assistance on their home ground.



3. Judy Watson, big brown world with three stupas, 2004.



4. Gulumbu Yunupinu, Garak, 2008.

In 2023, printmaker Basil Hall, who has worked with Indigenous artists across Australia for over three decades, donated a monumental collection of more than 1300 workshop proofs from the studio he began in 2002, Basil Hall Editions (BHE), to Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection. It is from this vast collection that these exhibitions are drawn. While the works are the output of a single studio, they form an incredibly rich survey of Indigenous artistic practice from the last two decades, allowing us many vantages on the history and development of print practice. Not only

has the studio been remarkably prolific—Hall and BHE's roster of esteemed printmakers has worked with more than sixty Indigenous-run art centers as well as with many renowned independent artists, often collaborating with over a hundred artists a year—but the breadth and diversity of styles, techniques, content, and experimentation by emerging and senior artists alike is staggering. Moreover, the production of such a collection has entailed, as Hall calls it, a literal "cast of thousands," including artists, printmakers, art center workers, collaborators, and gallerists working within vastly different contexts and places across Australia. [For further information on the scale of this collaboration, see the map of Indigenous art centrers associated with the BHE collections at the end of the essay.]

This brings us to a crucial limitation within wider art historical discourses on Indigenous art and its applicability to printmaking, where a reductive focus on notions of cultural authenticity from non-Indigenous perspectives, has often led to suspicion over "outside" influence. While critiques of power imbalances and cultural appropriation within Indigenous artistic contexts have been much needed, something of a double standard has been applied to Indigenous artists and their collaborators, in part, to fulfill Western desires for "untainted" cultural expression. Indeed, the involvement of studio assistants at Indigenous art centers has recently come under renewed scrutiny. Discourse on printmaking, perhaps to avoid these challenges, has often left out the names of printmakers and collaborators. Far from centering Indigenous artists, such omissions end up occluding the dynamic and agentic ways that collaboration can function, and the expansive effects it can have within a transcultural field. The uniqueness of works across the BHE collection are a powerful testament to the way such collaborations can be sensitive to individual practice, as well as to ways these artists are reshaping the world of print through their own cultural lenses.

For Hall and BHE, the politics and cultural protocols of collaboration are always at the forefront of their practices, with every decision about what goes into a final print entailing much consideration and dialogue—from the early

selection of a technique to digital and physical proofs sent across the country. Workshops tend to entail collaborators from BHE facilitating the production of plates—which only artists will ever mark—and then a later stage of printing back at the studio, where there often needs to be continued back-and-forth around color selection. The nature of these print



5. Photograph of Gulumbu Yunupinu creating the etching plate for the print *Garak*, 2008. Photograph by Basil Hall.

workshops can vary significantly—some have introduced the majority of artists to print for the first time, while others are repeat visits and a continuation of existing relationships; some have been very open-ended, while others are more focused around a particular technique or a collaborative project. Far from the workshop model leading to similar outputs, the diverse social and cultural scenes they entail, and the flexibility of the methods and flows involved, have led to a vast spectrum of positions and practices.

Custodians

This is powerfully illustrated in one of the studio's seminal portfolio series— Custodians: Country and Culture (2008), which involved the creation of ten works by ten senior artists from different parts of the Northern Territory and Western Australia—in some cases working closely with BHE on plates (particularly where a new technique was being used), or else sending plates or acetates to the studio for printing. The portfolio showcases some of the most deeply refined works in the BHE collection, each work distilling significant stories or subjects to which each artist has returned to many times in their careers, and is a testament to the masterful ways that print has been used by senior artists—in this case, predominantly renowned as painters—to continue their interest in conveying important cultural knowledge, and to adapt this storytelling into new forms of mark making and artistic gesture. Indeed, it is a hallmark of the BHE collections that when introduced to printmaking, senior artists have frequently produced significant, iconic works some of which have been the final pieces they would produce in their careers. Hall has pointed out that doing a print edition has been seen as a way for some artists to leave behind a legacy, and they have often chosen important subject matters for these works.

When Basil Hall speaks of collaborations with artists through the workshop model, he never frames his and the studio's role as teachers or instructors; he instead emphasises the idea of artistic minds and practices meeting. "I wouldn't tell senior artists how to make their work," he says. In a time-limited workshop, the goal may not be to teach a variety of technical processes, but to lean into what artists already do best. For the artists in *Custodians*—some

of whom have had a sustained and significant engagement with print—this has meant translating already established and confident styles into the medium. The late Dorothy Napangardi, for example, initially tried applying bitumen to make etchings, but ended up preferring the more fluid motion of painting plastic acetate sheets that were then converted into stencils to make silkscreens, allowing her to keep with the flow of her characteristic fine-dotting technique. In many other cases, a shift in the way marks are made to produce a printing plate can lead to a kind of distillation and refinement of the forms and lines used. "There is a real authority to the line," as Hall describes it, "a crispness to it in the way it punches the paper."

For other artists used to applying thicker paints or ochres, the style they achieve in etchings has led to new forms of materiality that capture different phenomenological effects of Country. For example, in the work of Lena Nyadbi—one of several prominent Warmun-based artists who enthusiastically took up etchings through BHE workshops, many of which were facilitated by printmaker Monique Aurrichio—the bold, iconographic marks of her characteristic Jimbirla (spearpoints) and Dayiwul Lirlmim (barramundi scales) take on a lighter more translucent quality. In a stunning print depicting the repeated circular forms of girndi (bush plum), the late Janangoo Butcher Cherel worked with Hall to use an acid-bite technique to capture similar effects to the watery gouache works on paper Cherel was producing around this time. In a comparable but even more pronounced way, the girndi take on a vibrant, aqueous quality in this print. The late Gulumbu Yunupinu etched her plate three times so that nearly none of the plate surface was left unmarked—to create a dense constellation of her iconic ganyu (stars). The print captures a dynamic, detailed style analogous to her paintings, but which feels especially illuminated and shimmering in this medium, due to the interplay of layers and the depth created.









6-9. Tiger Yaltangki, *Malpa Wiru (Good Friends)*, 1-4, 2015.



10. Regina Pilawuk Wilson, Syaw (Fishnet), 2008.

Intermediality

While Custodians shows the adept way predominantly painting practices have been expanded into printmaking, the BHE collections are riven with different forms of intermediality. Rather than seeing print as a secondary medium to an artist's work in another primary medium, it is insightful to consider the way that print reveals interesting relationships between and across different media. This in itself is a major part of how we can see print being *Indigenized* revealing a lineage, a trace of practices that have shifting cultural meanings as they move across different contexts, forms, and techniques. One of the ways Hall has encouraged artists to become comfortable with printmaking is to suggest that artists bring their own tools to the plate-making process. This has seen mark marking for prints being done with powja (Tiwi painting combs); carving tools used to mark Boab nuts; reed or hair brushes used to create bark paintings; or simply an artist's favorite brush. At art centers in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, they have created woodblocks by burning plywood sheets with hot pokers in a manner similar to traditional punu wood carving, with the final prints being dubbed punugraphs. The familiar, translated into the print context, becomes newly experimental.

Intermediality occurs not only at the level of techniques crossing over from one media to another, but also informs the conceptual, material, and representational elements of printed works. Basil Hall has spoken about how the smooth line work often used in print bears resemblance to the way fingers are used to create traditional sand drawings or pulled across the body for ceremonial body painting—indeed, both of these forms have been the subject of many prints in the collection. There is a pronounced trend within the BHE collection of works representing weaving practices—the intricate linework enabled in etching resonates well with the depiction of thin woven strands, while collagraphs capture their dimensional forms. This is seen strongly in recent works by artist Kieren Karritpul, which show the embossed form of baskets with fine linework within. Regina Pilawuk Wilson's practice has long explored overlapping materialities across her weaving, painting, and printmaking. In her piece for Custodians, a deeply etched layer of horizontal lines is traversed by equally variegated vertical lines, which dynamically capture the form and movement of the depicted syaw (fishing net). Artists

who primarily produce drawings—such as the late Nura Rupert and Tiger Yaltangki—have not only found analogous mark making techniques, but leaned into the serialized nature of print to create dynamic groupings of figures. Rupert's work is notable for the way she completely changes the style of her figures to suit different print mediums, such that we get many vantages of her favored *mamu* (spooky spirits). As stories and forms travel from one medium to another and back again, experimentation in printmaking has proven to be a crucial and expansive stage for many artists across the collection.

Cultural Archive

This notion of print practices being in dialogue with other cultural forms has been ambitiously realized in a number of portfolio projects that have taken on an archival scope. Each of these projects was developed to respond specifically to historic moments of cultural production, with the structure of a collaborative project echoing and continuing earlier forms of passing on important cultural knowledge. A project through Northern Editions involved Basil working with the late Paddy Japaljarri Sims and Paddy Japaljarri Stewart, two of the senior artists who worked on the Yuendumu Doors—a series of thirty classroom doors painted by five Warlpiri men in 1983 depicting *kuruwarri* (ancestral designs) and constituting a formative moment in the Warlpiri art movement. Through a highly dialogic process, and referencing archival material, the two men created a responsive series of 30 small etchings, drawing on the same *kuruwarri* referenced in the original doors, but in more distilled forms. Hall remembers well each artist poring over and discussing the proofs laid out on the ground and the significance given to this archival reenactment.

Of similar scope was the 2008 Berndt Etching Series, a print collaboration responding to the Yirrkala Drawings (1946-47)—crayon drawings on brown paper made by twenty-seven senior men in the 1940s. Twenty-seven contemporary Yolnu artists, many of them descendants of original makers, created works using pencils to dislodge wax on soft-ground etching plates as kindred gestures of mark making and knowledge sharing. Finally, in another nuanced example of using print as a means of reengaging another form

of cultural production, the Injalak Hill Suite— Kunwarrde Bim (2006), involved the creation of a series of etchings by nine artists making work in response to the significant rock-art site at Injalak Hill in western Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. Hall remarks that the artists "were able to sit under the work of their ancestors and make prints that responded to that." The effects are striking, paired-back images that are closer to the rock paintings than the more detailed forms artists were generally creating at this time. In each of these cases. the serial and collaborative



11. Nura Rupert, Mamu kutjara, 2003.

nature of a portfolio project allowed it to both resonate with analogous historic forms of cultural production and to allow for artists to enact a dynamic reengagement with their own cultural archives.

Recurring Motifs

Continuing this idea of cultural palimpsests is a trend seen across the collection for artists to use the serial nature of print and the capacity for varied reproductions to experiment with repeated forms. Some artists, renowned for creating densely layered, large-scale painted canvases, seem to turn in their print works to smaller, reduced icons that take on a new materiality, refinement, and repetition. This can be seen in the late Lorna Fencer's series of small, detailed, vibrant etchings of *wapirti* (small yam)—a major motif within



12. Karen Mills, Untitled, 2015.

her use of the Yam Dreaming Complex in her works; or in the remarkable series by the late Harry Tjutjuna that repeat, with quick painterly gestures, the circular forms of *Kungka Tjuta* (many women) over many works, referencing the impressions left by women after sitting on the ground to do *milpatjunanyi* (sand drawings). The movement of fleeting repeated traces left in the sand is re-enacted in a series that, displayed together, takes on something of the scale and connectedness of these performed gestures over time.

This language of repeated forms seems to bear some relation to ideas of impression or trace more generally, of re-inhabiting ancestral marks. There are the doubled Kaapay and Kuyan moieties in Rosella Namok's work as luminous, shifting ovals; and the delicate floating circular "brush stroke" forms reiterated within prints by Karen Mills evoking the stone tools and stone flakes of her ancestral homelands in the East Kimberley of Western Australia. While painting often emphasizes the singularity of the work, creating aura around the direct contact between an artist's hand leaving an original mark on the canvas, the repetitive grammar of print can connect to ideas of the cyclical, the reenacted, and the re-performed. Whether small yams, traces in sand, flaked stones, or kinship pairings, the power of these forms lies in their cyclical returns over time. The visual format of a print series meditating on the same forms (sometimes pulled from the same original plate) captures this sense of repetition and difference, return and renewal.

An *Indigenized* language and materiality of printmaking reveals itself when considering the vast Basil Hall Editions archives. We see intersecting trends within and across art centers emerging; the creation of new visual languages and an experimentation with distilled forms and series; new adaptations of techniques and tools wielded in novel ways; expansions to artistic practices and dialogue across different media; important collective re-engagements with cultural archives; and everywhere the authority of the line, and the custodial power of the story.

Jessyca Hutchens

Dr. Jessyca Hutchens is a Palyku woman living and working on Noongar boodja, and an art historian, curator, and writer. She is a lecturer at the School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Western Australia, and inaugural First Nations curatorial fellow at the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection at the University of Virginia. Her fellowship and residency was supported by Creative Australia, Kluge-Ruhe, and the University of Western Australia.

"Basil Hall Editions has operated from three studio venues over the last twenty-two years: Darwin, Braidwood, and Canberra. However, much of the drawing, painting, carving, and plate making takes place in remote Aboriginal communities across the country, many hundreds of miles from the studio. Equipment must be sent ahead of time by truck, ship, barge, courier, and four-wheel drive. Plates must be returned to the workshop the same way, often taking many weeks to complete the round trip. Proofs are made, images sent by email for approval, and editions are run off. The prints then travel the length of the country for signing. Finally, the signed workshop archive copies are returned to the BHE studio, often many years later!"

— Basil Hall









Images, top to bottom: 1. The town car, occasionally used for workshops nearer Darwin; 2. Basil Hall etching a small plate at Mimili in 2013; 3. Water over the road early in the wet season near Daly River; 4. Nena Zanos using the tailgate of the vehicle as a makeshift printmaking studio, Peppimenarti, 2011.

Indigenous Australian Art Centers

This map shows Indigenous-run art centers that collaborated with Basil Hall Editions between 2002-2023. BHE has made it a policy to work through government-funded, Indigenous-run art centers in the communities, who support and nurture their artists' careers. To date, BHE has worked with more than sixty art centers across Australia, as well as with many independent artists, including from Badu Island in the Torres Strait, Lockhart River in Queensland, and major cities such as Sydney, Brisbane, and Canberra.

Tiwi Islands

- 1. Munupi Arts & Crafts Association
- 2. Jilamara Arts & Crafts Association
- 3. Tiwi Design

Arnhem Land

- 4. Marrawuddi Arts & Culture
- 5. Injalak Arts
- 6. Maningrida Arts & Culture
- 7. Milingimbi Art and Culture
- 8. Bula'Bula Arts
- 9. Elcho Island Arts
- 10. Buku Larrŋgay Mulka

Daly River

- 11. Woodycupildiya
- 12. Durrmu Arts
- 13. Merrepen Arts Centre

Roper Gulf

- 14. Mimi Aboriginal Art & Craft
- 15. Djilpin Arts
- 16. Ngukurr Art Centre
- 17. Numbulwar Numburindi Arts
- 18. Waralungku Arts

Kimberley

- 19. Nagula Jarndu Art Centre
- 20. Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre
- 21. Mangkaja Arts
- 22. Warruyanta Art Centre
- 23. Warlayirti Artists Balgo
- 24. Yaruman Art & Culture Centre
- 25. Yarliyil Art Centre
- 26. Warmun Art Centre
- 27. Waringarri Aboriginal Arts

Central

- 28. Nyinkka Nyunyu Art & Culture Centre
- 29. Arlpwe Art & Culture Centre

- 30. Artists of Ampilatwatja
- 31. Utopia Art Centre
- 32. Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi
- 33. Bindi Enterprises
- 34. Iltja Ntjarra Many Hands Art Centre
- **35.** Tjanpi Desert Weavers
- **36.** Papunya Tula Artists
- **37.** Yarrenyty Arltere Artists
- **38.** Greenbush Art Group
- **39.** Irrkerlantye Arts
- 40. Keringke Arts
- 41. Tapatjatjaka Art & Craft
- **42.** Hermannsburg Potters
- 43. Ikuntji Artists
- 44. Papunya Tjupi Arts
- 45. Warlukurlangu Artists
- 46. Maruku Arts

APY Lands

- 47. Iwantja Arts
- 48. Mimili Maku Arts
- 49. Kaltjiti Arts
- 50. Ernabella Arts
- 51. Tjala Arts
- 52. Tjungu Palya
- 53. Ninuku Arts
- 54. Minyma Kutjara

Western Desert

- 55. Papulankutja Artists
- **56.** Warakurna Arts
- 57. Tjarlirli Art Centre
- 58. Kayili Artists

Western Australia

- **59.** Martumili Artists
- 60. Tjukurba Art Gallery
- 61. Spinifex Arts Project
- 62. Mungart Boodja Arts Centre

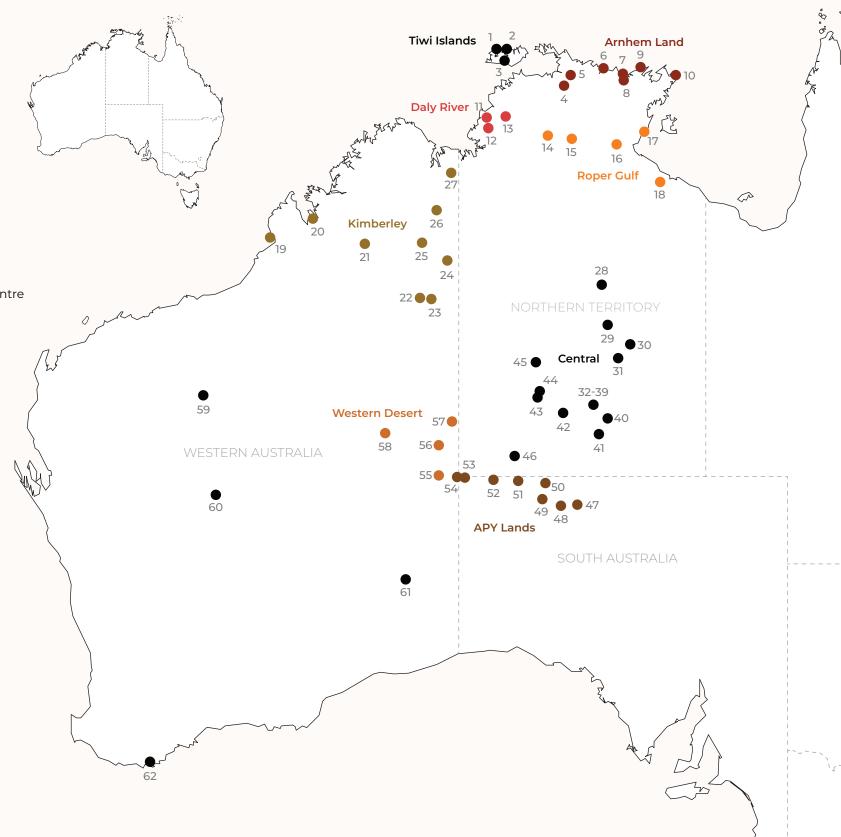


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- 1. Janangoo Butcher Cherel, 1920-2009, Gooniyandi, *Girndi*, 2008, Etching and silkscreen print on Hahnemühle paper, Collaborator: Basil Hall, Printers: Basil Hall, Merran Sierakowski, and Clinton Barker, Gift of Basil Hall, 2023, Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia, 2023.0006.011.009, image courtesy the estate of the artist and Mangkaja Arts Resource Agency.
- 2. Image of Basil Hall and Butcher Janangoo Cherel at Mangkaja Arts making the etching plate for the print *Girndi*, 2008. Photograph courtesy of Basil Hall.
- 3. Judy Watson, born 1959, Waanyi, *big brown world with three stupas*, 2004, Etching on Hahnemühle paper, Collaborator: Basil Hall, Printers: Monique Auricchio and Jo Diggens, Gift of Basil Hall, 2023, Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia, 2023.0006.848, image courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Meeanjin / Brisbane.
- 4. Gulumbu Yunupinu, 1943-2012, Clan: Gumatj, *Garak*, 2008, Etching on Hahnemühle paper, Collaborators: Basil Hall and Jacqueline Gribbin, Printers: Jacquelin Gribbin and Monique Auricchio, Gift of Basil Hall, 2023, Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia, 2023.0006.011.001, image courtesy the estate of the artist and Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre.
- 5. Image of Gulumbu Yunupiŋu creating the etching plate for the print *Garak*, 2008. Photograph by Basil Hall.
- 6.–9. Tiger Yaltangki, born 1973, Yankunytjatjara, *Malpa Wiru (Good Friends)*, 2015, Etchings with chine collé and pigment on Hahnemühle paper, Printers: Basil Hall and Rebecca Drew, Gift of Basil Hall, 2023, Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia, 2023.0006.029.001/006/005/003, images courtesy the artist, Iwantja Arts, and Alcaston Gallery.
- 10. Regina Pilawuk Wilson, born 1948, Ngan'gikurrungurr, *Syaw (Fishnet)*, 2008, Etching on Hahnemühle paper, Collaborators: Basil Hall and Jacqueline Gribbin, Printers: Jacqueline Gribbin and Monique Auricchio, Gift of Basil Hall, 2023, Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia, 2023.0006.011.002, image courtesy the artist and Durrmu Arts Aboriginal Corporation.
- 11. Nura Rupert, c. 1933–2016, Pitjantjatjara, *Mamu kutjara*, 2003, Linocut on Magnani paper, Collaborator: Basil Hall, Printers: Matthew Ablitt, Gift of Basil Hall, 2023, Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia, 2023.0006.197, image courtesy the estate of the artist and Ernabella Arts.
- 12. Karen Mills, born 1960, Balanggarra, *Untitled*, 2015, Etching on Hahnemühle paper, Collaborator: Basil Hall; Printer: Basil Hall, Gift of Basil Hall, 2023, Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia, 2023.0006.842, image courtesy the artist and Alcaston Gallery.

Acknowledgements

In 2023, Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia received 1,316 limited edition, fine-art prints by leading Indigenous Australian artists. The prints were a donation from master printmaker Basil Hall and represent twenty years of collaboration with Indigenous artists. The gift is the largest single donation of artworks to UVA since John Kluge's 1997 donation, which established Kluge-Ruhe as the only museum dedicated to Indigenous Australian art in the United States. The gift will further distinguish Kluge-Ruhe as a center for the study of Indigenous printmaking.

In 2001, Hall founded the atelier Basil Hall Editions to facilitate workshops in remote Indigenous communities across Australia and to work with many renowned independent artists. Over the past twenty-two years, Basil Hall Editions has produced more than 1,500 editions for 500 artists, which are held in collections around the world, including the National Gallery of Australia, the British Museum, and the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth. Prints have been made in collaboration with an esteemed roster of printmakers working for Basil Hall Editions, including Matthew Ablitt, Antonia Aitken, Monique Auricchio, Clinton Barker, Beth Conway, Jo Diggens, Neil Emmerson, Belinda Fox, Jacqueline Gribbin, Jonathon Larsen, Michael Roseth, Natasha Rowell, Merran Sierakowski, Sean Smith, Katie Stackhouse, Mats Undén, Simon White, and Nena Zanos.

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We are grateful to Molly and Robert Hardie for their appreciation of Indigenous Australian art and for their generous support of *Shifting Ground*.

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Part One: March 9, 2024 - October 6, 2024

Part Two: October 12, 2024 – March 2, 2025

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