

Four Artists Awarded Kluge-Ruhe Residencies by Creative Australia

The Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia is pleased to announce the recipients of Creative Australia’s artist residencies for 2025-26 and 2026-27. After a very competitive open call, residencies were awarded to Robert Fielding, Michelle Woody, Sonja Carmichael and Jenna Lee.

Awardees were selected by a committee made up of alumni of Kluge-Ruhe’s artist residency program. “They, better than anyone else, understand the unique opportunities available to artists through engaging with the University of Virginia and the local community,” explained Kluge-Ruhe director Margo Smith.

Kluge-Ruhe hosts Indigenous Australian artists for up to four weeks during which time they can work on projects with students, experiment in the studio and deliver artist talks. Building on the artist’s strengths and interests, Kluge-Ruhe assists them in designing programs for American audiences and establishing networks with other artists and First Nations people in the U.S.



Robert Fielding. Photo by Meg Hansen.

Robert Fielding

Robert Fielding is an artist of Western Arrernte, Yankunytjatjara, Pakistani and Afghan descent who lives in the Mimili Community on Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands. He combines strong cultural roots with contemporary views on the tensions between community life and global concerns. His practice includes new media, painting, and

traditional craftsmanship. From June 26, 2025 – January 11, 2026, Kluge-Ruhe will show a selection of Fielding’s work drawn from the exhibition, *Tjukurrpa Handle It*, organized by Maitland Regional Gallery.

“Over the past years I have had the opportunity to connect with other First Nations leaders across Australia, engaging in a process of *napartji-napartji* (reciprocal learning, side by side). This residency is an opportunity for me to further expand my relationships with other communities and share ideas through art and conversation,” Fielding said.



Michelle Pulatuwayu Woody Minnapinni with Marriwiyi (pandanus skirt) and Ngiya Murrakupupuni (My Country), 2020. Image courtesy of the artist and Jilamara Arts, Photography by Will Heathcote.

Michelle Woody

Michelle Pulatuwayu Woody Minnapinni is a Tiwi leader who celebrates her culture through a commitment to strong Indigenous governance and making celebrated contemporary artwork. She often uses the distinct Tiwi *kayimwagakimi* (ironwood painting comb) to create depictions of *Murrakupupuni* (Country), *winga* (saltwater) and *jilamara* (Tiwi body paint design) in her paintings.

Woody proposed exhibiting her work with objects in Kluge-Ruhe's collection. "It will be good to look at the collection from my ancestors at Kluge-Ruhe. I am making ceremonial ornaments and paintings on bark and *tunga* (bark baskets) to show in the gallery. I will also teach students and share my culture with visitors through workshops," she said.



Sonja Carmichael gathering ungaire on Minjerribah. Photo by Jo Anne Driessen.

Sonja Carmichael

Sonja Carmichael is a Quandamooka woman of the Ngugi people, one of three clans who are the traditional custodians of the waters and lands around Mulgumpin (Moreton Island) and Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) in southeast Queensland.

She draws inspiration from the many stories connected to Quandamooka weaving, working both with traditional fibers from Country and 'ghostnet' marine debris that washes up on beaches.

Carmichael's master's thesis in art history—*Regenerating Quandamooka Weaving: Solving the Knot*—celebrates the resilience of traditions. Explaining her motivation, Carmichael said, "I continue sharing our practices intergenerationally to ensure knowledge of our weaving never comes close to disappearing again."



Jenna Lee. Photography by James Westland, courtesy Craft Victoria.

Jenna Lee

Jenna Lee is a Gulumerridjin (Larrakia), Wardaman, and KarraJarri woman with Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, and Anglo-Australian (Irish and Scottish) ancestry. Her practice centers on exploring language, materiality, and the transformation of inherited narratives. Deeply intrigued by what is lost in translation, Lee explores the spaces between words—the felt but unseen—capturing the subtleties surrounding language and channeling this into immersive installations, works on paper, sculpture, and multimedia.

Lee said, "At this pivotal moment in my practice, international residencies have become essential to expanding my work. I am eager to focus on print archives in the U.S., taking time to consider how First Nations stories have been documented and how we, as contemporary artists, can reclaim these narratives."

Although there are some common elements to Kluge-Ruhe's artist residencies, each one is unique. "This program is created afresh with each resident artist," said Smith, "it offers members of our community so many different ways to engage with artists and an experience they won't find anywhere else."



Margo Smith introducing Sharon Adamson and Barbara Moore during their residency at Kluge-Ruhe, 2019. Photo by Tom Cogill.

In Honor of Margo Smith AM

Margo Smith steps down as director of Kluge-Ruhe on May 19, although she will remain at UVA in an advisory capacity to assist with onboarding her successor until the end of June. To honor her 27 years of service at Kluge-Ruhe, the museum has established a special gift fund. At Smith's request, contributions to this fund will support Kluge-Ruhe's artist residency program.

"The artist residency program is one of the most remarkable things Kluge-Ruhe does," said Smith, "and it's where the magic happens."

"Meeting people face-to-face is the best way to bridge cultural differences and connect in meaningful ways. I can't count how many times I've seen friendships and professional relationships that were established during the residency flourish well beyond our sphere of influence."

Although the artist residency program is supported by Creative Australia, Kluge-Ruhe covers local expenses and the cost of the associated exhibitions, often seeking grants and donor gifts to finance the residencies.

Over the next couple of months, Kluge-Ruhe will reflect on past residencies and share some of the artists' recent projects. "It should come as no surprise that each artist who spends time at Kluge-Ruhe develops a local fan base in Charlottesville," said Smith. "We are interested in what they are doing now and want them to know they are always welcome here!"

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