BRIEF REPORT GRINDELL’S HUT ARTIST RESIDENCY

It hasn’t rained in the area for four years. Not more than enough to poke a few holes in the dust. The Ranger, Sian, explained that if it rains a good drought breaking rain within the next six-seven years, the country will spring back into life. Rejuvenate. If it doesn’t, it won’t. It won’t ever recover. This is something that will soak into the body of work that develops out of the residency at Grindell’s Hut.

We spent the first few days working with the local community to touch up the faded murals each end of Nipapahnha. I’d co-ordinated these about twenty years ago, working closely with the local people. During this residency I was asked to create a poster to help as an educational aid to teach Adnyamathanha language to school groups that come through. This led to conversations about a more involved community art project in the future, involving Nipapahnha, Iga Warta, Copley and Leigh Creek School, in which Adnyamathanha language would be a focus. During our stay in the communities we visited the Ochre Pits and were most generously gifted ochre by Uncle Cliff Coulthard, to use to create future artworks.

I’d decided early on to create most of my work during the residency on our recycled grocery packaging. Our children helped unfold and prime a variety of surfaces including tea bag packets, cereal packets and banana boxes. They became the majority of the work I created while at Grindell’s Hut. I had a ‘studio’ going each end of the front veranda where I painted the landscape lit by sunrise and sunset every day, on miniature porridge and tea bag packets. I was awestruck by the rolling ragged landscape, and the colours that moved and changed dramatically at each end of the day. I set up an unstretched canvas out the front and the back of the house, held down by rocks. These provided surfaces for us to throw, smear, and stamp local natural pigments into, with the aim of gradually building ‘grounds’ reflecting the local colours and textures. The hurling wind added its mark to these surfaces in scatters of dust and dirt. The kitchen too was a ‘studio’ with an unstretched canvas laid over the table, for collaborative drawing with my family of whatever passed over the surface, letting the narrative of our time there unfold in layers of mark making. This included our findings from bushwalks and explorations of the area – rocks, bones, leaves, sticks, and evidence our daily domestic routines. As space was an issue driving up, I aimed to recycle whatever I could as drawing/painting surfaces. Wanting something bigger than packets, I ended up priming Yusuf’s throwaway clothes, and using them to create ‘landscapes’, which I photographed hanging on the hills hoist clothes line, flapping madly in the wind.

I was particularly interested in finding connections between drawing processes, mark making, and the local Geology, and I plan to research and explore this further, over the coming months. With the children we cast plaster into the surrounding landscape, to make home-made ‘fossils’ of local plants. My dad arrived in the final week to teach me about the rocks of the area. He had mapped it geologically when I was a kid, on field trips we attended. I plan to continue experimenting with plaster as a drawing surface, and to further explore connections between geology and drawing. I’m also interested in learning more about the arid plants and wildlife in the area, how they adapt to the harsh conditions, and to climate change. The source material gathered from this residency, will inspire new bodies of artwork for years to come. I’ve returned deeply excited about letting different elements of these beginnings, unfold and develop. And I’m excited to return, too. This will keep me busy for a long, long time.