

# ROBERT FIELDING

*Routes / Roots*



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**DEI**.NEW  
ART

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IMAGE > [Front cover] Robert Fielding, *Echoes #2 (Kapi Pilki Kapi Ilu)* [detail], 2019, C-type print on lustre paper, 80 x 120 cm. Image courtesy of the artist, Mimili Maku Arts and Blackartprojects. > [Left] Robert Fielding, *Roots* [detail], 2020, bronze cast kulata, winta, wana, miru and inti, gold-leaf Kulata, winta, wana, miru and inti made from mulga, kulata (spearwood), malu pulyku (kangaroo tendon) and camel wool, dimensions variable Image courtesy of the artist, Mimili Maku Arts and Blackartprojects.

*Every branch has its history. Once a leaf has fallen off the tree, its life has finished. But the branch keeps on growing, and another leaf will return in its place. Forever renewing, like our culture.*

Robert Fielding, 2020



# ROBERT FIELDING

## *Roots*

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**(1) Alta, ochre, tutu, pirampa. That's who we are as people.**

Last year I set out to research my family roots, to find out more about my heritage. My father was part of the stolen generation, growing up in Colebrook Home (SA) without connections to his family on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. I have been reclaiming this heritage since moving back to Mimili 23 years ago, reclaiming a culture and language that – whilst part of me – were not part of my father's upbringing. Growing up I was moulded by my mother, by Aranda and Muslim practices, practices I have been able to consolidate with the knowledge passed on to me by the Elders of my community Mimili.

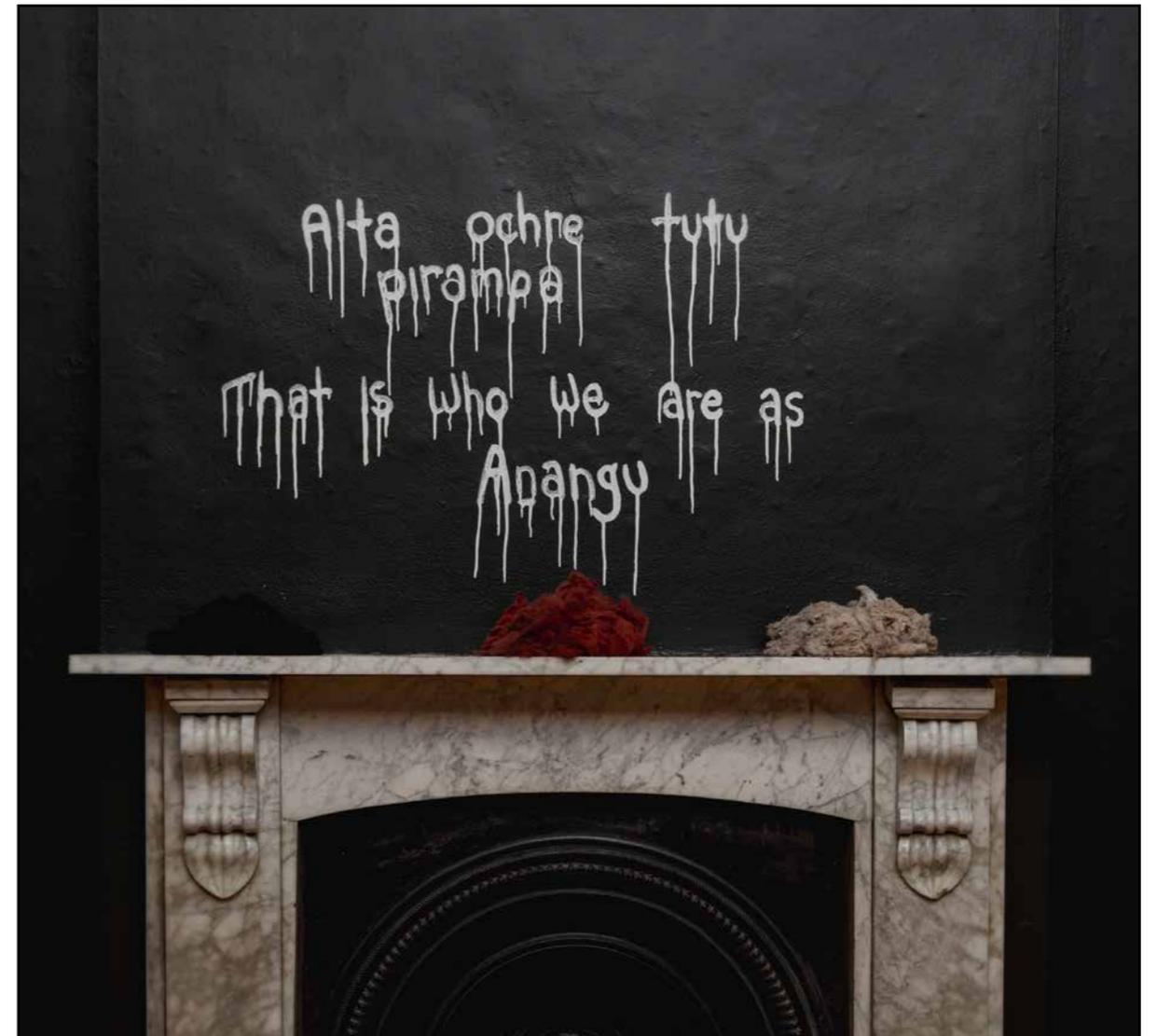
**(2) I have come to know and respect the maku tree as country, country here in Mimili is this tree. They are relatives, they are so close to one another. As are we.**

Whilst many of my peers, friends and family may not have grown up away from country, they were never able to connect with the

objects, photographs and histories belonging to their families. Too many roots of culture have been taken from country. Objects, stories and memories are now stacked in archival cabinets in the museums of the city. Whilst some museums strive to increase accessibility for community groups, the objects in the archive remain locked for the majority of time. They are available, but not accessible. Dead knowledge, out of context, hidden in vaults and secured with secrecy.

The archives hold many photographs, images collected with little attribution of who or what was being displayed. In some cases, attribution got lost completely over time. There are many objects as well. Objects that have been collected, traded, taken; objects that should have never been removed from country. There are sound recordings that have vanished, and sound recordings that may have been displaced, or hidden by time.

Visiting and viewing these objects in the archives can be a first step towards bringing them back to life, making them an active part of culture once again, making sense of



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IMAGE > Robert Fielding, *Routes / Roots* [installation view], 2020. Image courtesy of the artist, Mimili Maku Arts and Blackartprojects.

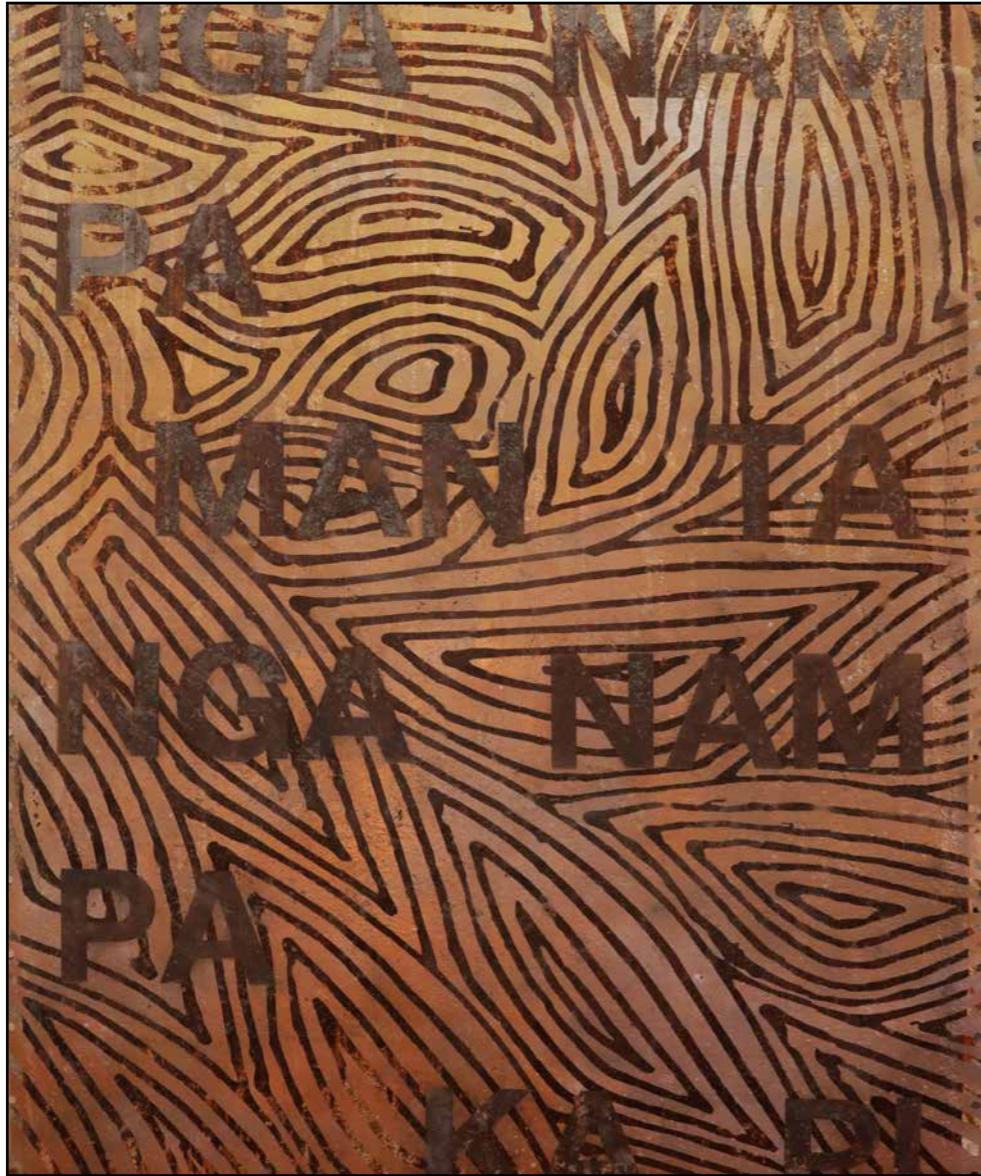


IMAGE > Robert Fielding, *Nganampa Manta Nganampa Kapi (Our land, our water)* [detail], 2019, reclaimed water tank panel, sandblasted, 177 x 120 x 6 cm. Image courtesy of the artist, Mimili Maku Arts and Blackartprojects.

them, giving them sense, continuing their story. This body of work attempts exactly that.

**(3) The miru (spear-thrower) is an instrument of support, giving direction to the strengths of the kulata. There is no power without direction.**

After sharing images of some of the cultural objects in the archive back home in Mimili, I spoke at lengths to my Elders Sammy and Ngilan Dodd. In response to some of the objects held in storage at the South Australian Museum which had been crafted by Sammy's father and grandfather, Sammy and Ngilan made new cultural objects for use in my art practice. These objects carry within them the direction of the old, and the strengths of the new, celebrating the routines attached to contemporary Anangu culture and the important roles traditional objects and ceremonies still play for us today.

**(4) Every branch has its history. Once a leaf has fallen off the tree, its life has finished. But the branch keeps on growing, and another leaf will return in its place. Forever renewing, like our culture.**

The archives hold so much more than only objects. Each object carries within many stories, stories of their maker, their origin, their social role, their cultural role. These stories can only be read by few. We might be the last generation that is able to read them. This is why it continues to be important to take the first step into the memories of our own backyards. There is lots of work to be done, if we want to carry these stories on and outwards, and I will carry on following on the path of this research, guided by my Elders, as we continue to connect to the hidden treasures of the unknown.

# ABOUT MIMILI MAKU ARTS

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Mimili Maku Arts is a vibrant contemporary art studio owned and governed by a strong board of Anangu directors. The art centre supports artists across different disciplines such as painting, photography, and publishing.

Mimili Maku Arts is a place for intergenerational exchange and learning, where Anangu knowledge is celebrated daily. It was envisioned by Anangu Elders in order to address the serious disadvantage faced by communities on the APY Lands, and to create potent platforms for Anangu voices to be heard all across Australia. Being a sustainable business for future generations of Anangu living in community, the art centre is not only a space for artistic excellence but also a tool to support real social change.

Mimili Community lies within the beautiful Everard Ranges, around 500 kilometres south-west of Alice Springs. At one time known as Everard Park, a cattle station, the area was returned to Aboriginal ownership through the 1981 APY Land Rights Act. Today, Mimili is home to about 250 Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people who refer to themselves as Anangu.



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IMAGE > Aerial view of Mimili. Image courtesy of Mimili Maku Arts.



## ABOUT THIS EXHIBITION & RESEARCH PROJECT

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*Roots / Routes* is a cross section of visual research Robert Fielding has been conducting over the past 12 months. What commenced as the tracing of his family routes, grew into a much larger project. During a visit to the archives at the South Australian Museum in Adelaide the artist encountered many unattributed objects that were taken from his home of Mimili Community, formerly known as Everard Park Station.

The work displayed explores a number of ceremonial objects, whilst keeping cultural protocol in mind. It also engages with the more recent history of the area, which saw the arrival of settlers, the establishment of a cattle station, and the handback of country to traditional owners through the *Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Rights Act* in 1981. Through the ongoing consultation

with local community Elders, the artist has woven together old and new histories of a place, engaging in conversations about the repatriation of sacred objects currently held in museum archives. This exhibition is the first impulse to a much bigger conversation asking what meaningful engagement with our cultural collections could look like.

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.

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IMAGE > Ngilan Dodd teaching the spinning of camel wool on a traditional intji (spinner) in response to Robert Fielding's research. Pictured (f.l.t.r.): Sammy Dodd, Zavaan Fielding, Robert Fielding, Ngilan Dodd. Image courtesy of Mimili Maku Arts.

# ROBERT FIELDING

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Robert Fielding is a contemporary artist of Pakistani, Afghan, Western Arrente and Yankunytjatjara descent, who lives in Mimili Community in the remote Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands.

Fielding won the work on paper category at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Awards in 2015 and 2017. He also won the 2015 Desert Art Worker Prize. Following solo exhibitions in Adelaide and Melbourne, he celebrated his first international solo exhibition at the Fondation Opale in Switzerland in late 2018. Fielding's artwork is held in major institutions and collections in Australia and overseas.

Fielding has worked as an arts worker at Mimili Maku Arts since 2015. He represented Mimili at the West Farmers Indigenous Leaders Conference in 2013 and led the way for the arts worker program at Mimili Maku Arts.



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IMAGE > Portrait of Robert Fielding. Image courtesy of the artist, Mimili Maku Arts and Blackartprojects.

# LIST OF WORKS

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*Echoes #1 (Tjalini)*, 2019

C-type print on lustre paper,  
edition of 3 + 1AP  
80 x 120 cm, framed  
\$3,500

*Echoes #2 (Kapi Pilki Kapi  
Ilu)*, 2019

C-type print on lustre paper,  
edition of 3 + 1AP  
80 x 120 cm, framed  
\$3,500

*Echoes #3 (Tili, Kurkul, Alta)*,  
2019

C-type print on lustre paper,  
edition of 3 + 1AP  
80 x 120 cm, framed  
\$3,500

*Holding*, 2020

series of 9 C-type prints on  
lustre paper, framed  
220 x 110 cm overall (42 x  
40 cm; 60 x 40 cm; 104 x  
40 cm)  
\$13,000

*Nganampa Manta*

*Nganampa Kapi (Our land,  
our water)*, 2019

reclaimed water tank  
panel, sandblasted  
177 x 120 x 6 cm irregular  
\$8,000

*Jackaroo*, 2019

reclaimed water tank  
panel, sandblasted  
177 x 120 x 6 cm irregular  
\$8,000

*Tjukurpa Manta Miil-milpa*,  
2019

reclaimed water tank  
panel, sandblasted  
177 x 120 x 6 cm irregular  
\$8,000

*Kulata munu Miru (spear &  
spear-thrower)*, 2019

reclaimed water tank  
panel, sandblasted  
177 x 120 x 6 cm irregular  
\$8,000

*Our Routes*, 2019

carved board, ochre, LED  
light box  
60 cm x 60 cm each  
\$9,000

*Roots*, 2020

bronze cast kulata, winta,  
wana, miru and inti, gold-  
leaf Kulata, winta, wana,  
miru and inti made from  
mulga, kulata (spearwood),  
malu pulyku (kangaroo  
tendon) and camel wool,  
dimensions variable  
\$18,000

*Piti munu wana*, 2020

Multi-metal cast of piti,  
bronze-cast of wana with  
gold-leaf details  
\$12,000

*Tracking the Past*, 2019

carved plywood with  
natural pigment  
set of 9, 60 x 90 cm each  
\$7,700



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IMAGE > Robert Fielding, *Routes / Roots* [installation view], 2020.  
Image courtesy of the artist, Mimili Maku Arts and Blackartprojects.

# EVENTS

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MEET THE ARTIST > ROBERT FIELDING  
22.02.20 > FREE

BILINGUAL EXHIBITION TOUR IN MANDARIN  
中文普通话 > INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN ART  
22.03.20 > FREE

ON HOLIDAYS AT LINDEN > KELLY HORSES  
28.03.20 – 12.04.20 > FREE, DROP-IN

BILINGUAL EXHIBITION TOUR IN RUSSIAN  
29.03.20 > FREE

MEET THE CURATOR > ROUTES / ROOTS  
30.04.20 > FREE

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Robert would like to acknowledge the support offered by the Australia Council for the Arts, David Hagger and Blackartprojects as well as the opportunities made available through the South Australian Museum.

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[gallery@lindenarts.org](mailto:gallery@lindenarts.org)  
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