

# KARLA DICKENS

*My Mother's Keeper*



# ACT NOW

*As Indigenous Australians we connect with Country and refer to the planet as Mother Earth.*

*Recently a small group of First Nation Adults and children from different parts of Australia gathered in Bingara NSW to create a visual story.*

*Our short film speaks of our concerns and the importance of healing 'The Mother' with the help of our youth, who are our future and our only hope.*

*Known and respected for his great words Uncle Bruce Pascoe will not speak in this film - it is the viewers' responsibly to look hard, learn quick and listen deeply.*

*What will you see?*

*What action will you take?'*

Karla Dickens, 2019

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IMAGE > [Front cover] Karla Dickens, *Mother's Little Helpers V* [detail], 2019, inkjet print, 67 x 120 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Andrew Baker Art Dealer. > [left page] Karla Dickens, *Mother's Little Helpers*, [image capture], 2019, single channel video [07:32]. Image courtesy of the artist and Andrew Baker Art Dealer.

# INTRODUCTION

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In February 2019, Karla Dickens was invited to collaborate with Bruce Pascoe as part of a project called *An Artist, A Farmer & a Scientist Walk into a Bar*. The project was initiated by the Kandos School of Cultural Adaptation, an organisation committed to supporting creative practices that respond to cultural change across a broad range of disciplines<sup>1</sup>. The work that Dickens and Pascoe produced focusses on the urgent need for us to protect and conserve the land and to cease the many destructive practices that are threatening our environment.

Over two days Dickens worked with Blacklock Media to make a film of Pascoe walking through Gamilaaraay Country near the town of Bingara in the north-east of NSW. Walking alongside Pascoe are a group of Aboriginal primary school students from Bingara Central School. The children represent the next generation, who must be equipped with the right skills and

knowledge to implement positive changes to look after the land.

Pascoe's role in the film is that of Mother Earth. His silence throughout the film is a poignant signal that Mother Earth is displeased with our actions, and that we have not been listening. Dickens has explained that casting a male in this role highlights the need for men to also take a protective and nurturing position. Pascoe is wearing a jacket made by Dickens, inscribed with the words 'Mother Earth Country'. The children wear capes also made by Dickens, inscribed with words such as 'Listen', 'Care' and 'Culture'. Dickens has described the children as "little superheroes"<sup>2</sup> who can use the values written on their capes to save the world. The environment, motherhood and addiction have been recurring themes in Dickens' practice over the past 25 years. Her engagement with these topics is inspired by her own life experiences,



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<sup>1</sup> For more information visit <https://www.ksca.land>

<sup>2</sup> From a conversation with the artist Karla Dickens and Curator Juliette Hanson, 13.12.19

IMAGE > Karla Dickens, *My Mother's Keeper* [installation view], 2020.

Image courtesy of the artist and Andrew Baker Art Dealer. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.



though she deftly moves from the personal to the global. Dickens' work encapsulates broader social issues in a way that demands a reevaluation of how we judge other people, the values that we might take for granted and the way that we treat the natural environment only as a resource to support our own human addictions such as technology or power.

Dickens has been involved in environmental activism for most of her life. Having committed so much time to this issue, *My Mother's Keeper* is not overly optimistic. The mood of the film is sombre, and Pascoe delivers a brooding and downcast Mother Earth. The children represent the best way to move forward. The words on the children's capes denote the things that will be of vital importance in countering the environmental crisis that is currently affecting so many communities.

The team endured very challenging conditions during the filming of *Mother's Little Helpers*, including extreme heat and wind, as well as dust storms resulting from the lengthy drought affecting the area. At the completion of filming, it rained for the first time in 18 months, creating a rainbow. This was a fitting way to finish a project that is ultimately grounded in hope for the future.

**Juliette Hanson**  
Curator

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IMAGE > Karla Dickens, *Mother's Little Helpers II* [detail], 2019, inkjet print, 67 x 120 cm.  
Image courtesy of the artist and Andrew Baker Art Dealer.

# MOTHER'S LITTLE HELPERS

*By Karla Dickens*

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The deathbed rattles  
reality has arrived  
with an offbeat heart  
her veins die

Thirsty and hungry  
no shelter to hide  
screaming and crying  
as water levels rise

No coloured pills  
for mother today  
overdosing on crooked Band-aids  
shakes from withdrawal stay

Battered and bruised  
sweating in pain  
the time has come  
to nurse her back

Too late for flowers  
hold her hand  
hug her tight  
love her through long, dark nights

Sleepless chaos  
no more fight  
I see you, I hear you  
I stand to fight

As mother recovers  
looking unsure  
and drained  
she feels connection

Not blissfully  
but respectfully  
a world where humans  
are brave enough to listen

An environment  
that builds  
trust in survival  
where money is not the hero

Another realm  
without excuses  
hate or cunning  
or self searching gain

Stay crazy for a minute longer  
imagine a sustainable future  
your heart full of hope  
and an openness to learn

Where governments and those in power  
make change  
with a sense of intelligence  
and childish wonder

Let's keep tripping

Act now



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IMAGE > Karla Dickens, *Mother's Little Helpers VI* [detail], 2019, inkjet print, 67 x 120 cm.  
Image courtesy of the artist and Andrew Baker Art Dealer.

# KARLA DICKENS

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Karla Dickens is an award-winning multidisciplinary artist whose work addresses aspects of the nation's history, providing provocative reflections on Australian culture as well as exploring religion, race and sexuality. The environment and the theme of motherhood have also been recurring themes in her work.

Dickens is a Wiradjuri woman, currently based in Lismore. She gained a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the National Art School in Sydney in 2000. Since 2004, Dickens has presented more than 20 solo exhibitions, whilst also being included in many significant group shows, both in Australia and internationally. Dickens has undertaken artist residencies across Australia, Europe and Asia and her work is represented in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia, National Portrait Gallery, Art Gallery of Western Australia, and the

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, among many others.

This year, Dickens' work will be included in the Sydney Festival, the 2020 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Monster Theatres and the 2020 Biennale of Sydney.

Dickens is represented by Andrew Baker, Art Dealer, Brisbane

<http://www.andrew-baker.com/kd.html>

<https://www.ksca.land/projects/afs-home>



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IMAGE > Portrait of Karla Dickens. Image courtesy of the artist.

# LIST OF WORKS

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*Mother's Little Helpers I*, 2019  
inkjet print, 67 x 120 cm  
\$4,400 (unframed)

*Mother's Little Helpers II*, 2019  
inkjet print, 67 x 120 cm  
\$4,400 (unframed)

*Mother's Little Helpers III*, 2019  
inkjet print, 67 x 120 cm  
\$4,400 (unframed)

*Mother's Little Helpers IV*, 2019  
inkjet print, 67 x 120 cm  
\$4,400 (unframed)

*Mother's Little Helpers V*, 2019  
inkjet print, 67 x 120 cm  
\$4,400 (unframed)

*Mother's Little Helpers VI*, 2019  
inkjet print, 67 x 120 cm  
\$4,400 (unframed)

*Mother Earth Country*, 2019  
acrylic on cotton, dimensions variable  
\$8,800

*Care*, 2019  
acrylic on cotton, dimensions variable  
\$4,400

*Culture*, 2019  
acrylic on cotton, dimensions variable  
\$4,400

*Hear*, 2019  
acrylic on cotton, dimensions variable  
\$4,400

*Listen*, 2019  
acrylic on cotton, dimensions variable  
\$4,400

*Protect*, 2019  
acrylic on cotton, dimensions variable  
\$4,400

*Respect*, 2019  
acrylic on cotton, dimensions variable  
\$4,400

*Mother's little helpers*, 2019  
single channel video [07:32]  
\$4,400

All prices are inclusive of GST



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IMAGE > Karla Dickens, *My Mother's Keeper* [installation view], 2020.  
Image courtesy of the artist and Andrew Baker Art Dealer. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.

# EVENTS

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## NOTABLE OBSERVANCES

> INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

10.03.20 > \$20

## BILINGUAL EXHIBITION TOUR IN RUSSIAN

29.03.20 > FREE

## CRAFTERNOON FOR KIDS

02.04.20 > \$15

## CRAFTERNOON FOR ADULTS

19.04.20 > \$55

## STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

> ANALOGUE VS. DIGITAL AT THE ESPLANADE HOTEL

21.04.20 > \$20

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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For their work on the film *Mother's Little Helpers*, 2019, Karla offers her thanks to:

## CAST:

Uncle Bruce Pascoe

Tamimya Bloomfield

Sharkiah & Lashaya Dixon Toomey

Shakaya & Ezra Geesu

Rawri Simmonds

## DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY:

Brendan Blacklock

## EDITOR & SOUND:

James Hardage

This work was produced with the support of Create NSW, and forms part of the project 'An artist, a farmer & a scientist walk into a bar...!'. This project was initiated by the Kandos School of Cultural Adaptation in partnership with Cementia Inc., Starfish Initiatives and The Living Classroom in Bingara.

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