

Back to Country

Duncan Smith

Duncan Smith revisited his cultural homeland early this year to develop new work showing the importance of connection to land and culture. As a Wiradjuri man, Smith's journey took him, with his family, to Wellington and Dubbo in the Orana region of Western New South Wales. *Back to Country*—an exhibition of paintings and digital images—is the culmination of the project.

Back to Country is 11 exquisitely detailed ochre paintings and 20 digital prints. In the digital works, Smith's photographs have been layered with elements from his paintings to create rich tapestry-like images.

While the works are visually beautiful they have strong spiritual significance for Smith. Melding landscape with animal and other totems he has created images with great suggestive power. Air, fire, water, drought, land and river dwellers—kangaroo, koala, wombat, snake, goanna, cockatoo, fish, yabby and eel—are all part of the story of his country. And the waterfalls, waterholes, dry creek beds, craggy rock faces, hilltops and trees they inhabit according to their nature. The totems, white dots of body decoration and intricate patterns of Indigenous storytelling add meaning to images—including locations near sacred sites—from nature.

Smith identifies other, closer places as country now. Anzac Parade and the Australian War Memorial become part of his country by association with a totemic kangaroo. The mystery and spiritual significance of Weereewa (Lake George) (Water 2) is suggested by an overlay of intricate storytelling patterns.

Duncan Smith is well known around Canberra for his painting and performances. He is also deeply involved in teaching about his culture in local schools. Smith was one of three artists involved in the 2007 PhotoAccess Indigenous Digital Storytelling project and NAIDOC Week exhibition in the HUW DAVIES GALLERY.

This project and exhibition were supported by the ACT Government through the ACT Arts Fund, by PhotoAccess through its artists in residence program, and by the ACT Indigenous Arts Officer, Neville O'Neill.

Back to Country breaks new ground for Duncan Smith. It is his first solo exhibition in which photography has a predominating role, and the first to so powerfully and directly speak about his country and the things that make up his culture. PhotoAccess is proud to play a part in helping Duncan Smith to tell these stories through this project and the *Back to Country* exhibition in the HUW DAVIES GALLERY at the Manuka Arts Centre.

David Chalker



Doty



Eels



Died up river

Artist statement

My name is Duncan Smith. I am a Wiradjuri man from Wellington, a small town in Western New South Wales. I have lived in Canberra for 32 years. I run a small business based around my culture and I work in local schools and support Canteen as an Ambassador. I also run an Indigenous dance group, the Wiradjuri Echoes, which has performed for, amongst others, Prince Frederik and Princess Mary, the Australia Day Live concert on the lawns of Parliament House, the King and Queen of Sweden, the Prime Minister and Governor-General of Australia, local schools and government departments. And I personally have appeared on the *Susie* show on WIN Television.

I am an Indigenous artist. I paint traditional and contemporary Indigenous pieces, and I have sold works to ambassadors, government agencies, local schools and private investors.

This exhibition is about the importance of connection to land and culture, and the importance of water to everything: humans, animals and plants—all of these things depend on water for survival.

I travelled back home to Wellington and Dubbo, as travelling back home was an opportunity to show my kids about culture and family. I also travelled back home to photograph landmarks and the surroundings of sacred sites, where I was taught my culture as a kid. Some of the pictures in this exhibition are of the bush surrounding sacred sites.

Duncan Smith, October 2008



Fish



Waterfall



War Memorial



Goanna

Biography

Duncan Smith was born in Wellington, New South Wales. He is a great nephew of Alex Riley, well known in Wiradjuri country as Tracker Riley, the first Aboriginal Sergeant in the New South Wales Police Force.

Duncan started painting with his mother, beginning a life long dedication to sharing culture through painting, music and dance, and photography. His strong connection to culture is expressed in all areas of his life. He is a member, with his children, of the Wiradjuri Echoes dance group, performing traditional and modern dance and teaching about Aboriginal artefacts and tribal markings.

In 2003 Duncan Smith was Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artist of the Year. He has shown in many group exhibitions in the ACT and nearby region, including the National Museum of Australia, and created murals at Woden and Narrabundah. Duncan was one of three artists involved in the 2007 PhotoAccess Indigenous Digital Storytelling project. His digital story, *Wiradjuri Echoes*, was about connection to family—past, present and future. *Wiradjuri Echoes* and a group of Duncan's ochre paintings were shown in the HUW DAVIES GALLERY during NAIDOC Week in 2007.

Back to Country is Duncan Smith's first solo exhibition of photo based art.



Snake



Meeting



Waterfall 2



Water 2



Fire



Kangaroo



Koala

List of works

All works are for sale

Ochre and acrylic on canvas board

1–3	<i>Billa buurang (dry river)</i>	650 x 450 mm (925 x 705 mm overall) (each)
4	<i>Billir (Black Cockatoo)</i>	655 x 460 mm (930 x 715 mm overall)
5	<i>Guuya dhal (fish eating)</i>	655 x 460 mm (930 x 715 mm overall)
6	<i>Nharrang yirri (lizard in the sun)</i>	500 x 600 mm (665 x 775 mm overall)
7,8	<i>Billabang buurang (water drying up)</i>	455 x 660 mm (730 x 915 mm overall) (each)
9	<i>Guulang (Wombat)</i>	460 x 655 mm (735 x 910 overall)
10	<i>Yabbie</i>	450 x 650 mm (725 x 905 overall)
11	<i>Kangaroo</i>	650 x 450 mm (925 x 705 mm overall)

Unique archival inkjet prints on photo rag paper

12	<i>Eels</i>	305 x 458 mm (450 x 603 mm overall)
13	<i>Black Cockatoo</i>	305 x 458 mm (450 x 603 mm overall)
14	<i>Fire</i>	305 x 458 mm (450 x 603 mm overall)
15	<i>Fish hunting</i>	305 x 458 mm (450 x 603 mm overall)
16	<i>Dotty</i>	305 x 458 mm (450 x 603 mm overall)
17	<i>Fish</i>	305 x 458 mm (450 x 603 mm overall)
18	<i>Dried up river</i>	305 x 458 mm (450 x 603 mm overall)
19	<i>Goanna</i>	305 x 458 mm (450 x 603 mm overall)
20	<i>Kangaroo</i>	305 x 458 mm (450 x 603 mm overall)
21	<i>Koala</i>	305 x 458 mm (450 x 603 mm overall)
22	<i>River</i>	305 x 458 mm (450 x 603 mm overall)
23	<i>War Memorial</i>	305 x 458 mm (450 x 603 mm overall)
24	<i>Wombat</i>	305 x 458 mm (450 x 603 mm overall)
25	<i>Yabbie</i>	305 x 458 mm (450 x 603 mm overall)
26	<i>Water 2</i>	305 x 458 mm (450 x 603 mm overall)
27	<i>Waterfall</i>	305 x 458 mm (450 x 603 mm overall)
28	<i>Waterfall 2</i>	458 x 305 mm (603 x 450 mm overall)
29	<i>Meeting</i>	458 x 305 mm (603 x 450 mm overall)
30	<i>Snake</i>	458 x 305 mm (603 x 450 mm overall)
31	<i>Rivers run</i>	458 x 305 mm (603 x 450 mm overall)

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