

Rosella Namok

Regrowth
& other stories



ROSELLA NAMOK

Born: 1979 Lockhart River QLD
Region: Eastern Cape York Peninsula
Language: Aangkum (Ungkum)
Lives and works: Cairns, QLD

Rosella Namok first appeared on the contemporary art scene in the late 1990s as a prominent member of the renowned Lockhart River 'Art Gang'. Growing up she experienced traditional practices - such as attending ceremonies, camping, fishing, gathering berries and shellfish - within and around Lockhart River, Claudie River, Quintell Beach, Chilli Beach and the Iron Range (Kutini-Payamu) National Park.



With an extensive history exhibiting nationally and Internationally, Rosella has been living and working in Cairns as well as more recently completing major commissions in Brisbane studios. Her paintings continue to reflect both traditional stories and contemporary themes across cultural and social concerns with candid observations about changing lifestyles and the environment. Through a technique developed by watching her grandmother drawing in the sand, Rosella often creates patterned, linear arrangements by pulling her fingers through the layers of paint.

Rosella Namok has been collected by all major State and National Galleries including The High Court of Australia in Canberra.

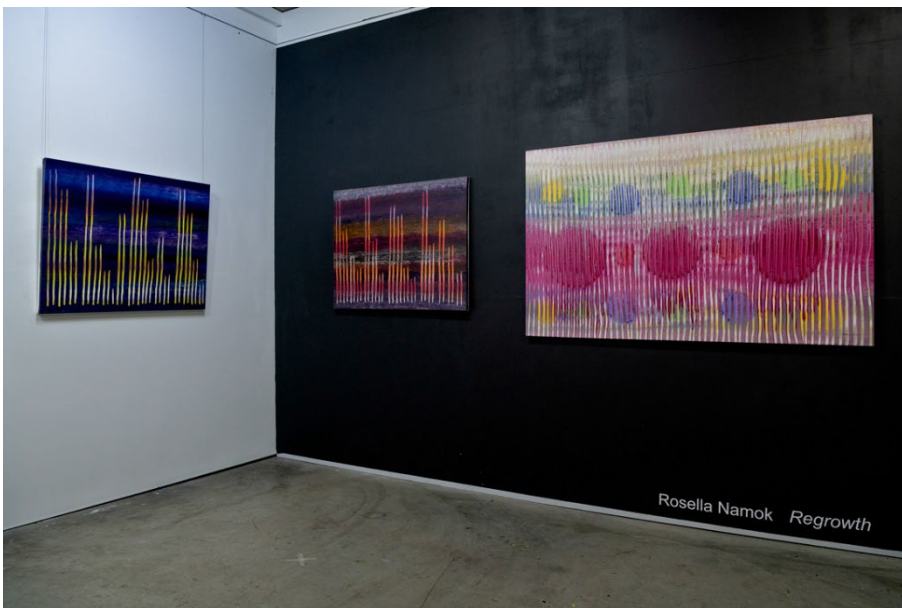
ART PRACTICE

Much of Rosella's work commemorates her traditional culture and country of Lockhart River whilst contemplating its change, the dismantling of customs and urban development.

Although many of her works celebrate her traditional lifestyle and the natural environment of Lockhart River (*Stinging Rain*, *Mangroves* and *Mud Muscle* series) other themes, such as *Moieties* and *New Villages* demonstrate the way the old lores are being eroded and the community lifestyle has changed.

The old people were always keeping culture really strong. We always used to have ceremonies at Christmas where everybody gets together, no arguing or anything. Everybody always enjoyed themselves. But now there's not many elderly people left and they don't have that happiness and don't get together, which is really sad. I miss all that from being with the old people too, it always brings happiness everyone enjoys themselves. But you don't see that anymore now.

Lockhart has changed. It's changed a lot. It's pretty sad, I miss all that.



Courtesy of the artist, Sally Butler & FireWorks Gallery

ARTIST'S STORIES

KAAPAY & KUYAN (MOIETY SYSTEM)

Across many Aboriginal cultures moiety systems, referring to the two equally balanced social and ritual groupings, are used to organise social structures and kin relationships. These systems dictate marriage customs and appropriate family entitlements and associated responsibilities. For *Ungkum* people (Rosella's clan) these are *Kaapay* and *Kuyan*. Through her choice of colour and composition Rosella explores the broader, universal dualities of life; the macro (lore & culture) and the micro (family & self), the traditional and the modern and even the land and sea.

There are about six tribal lands back at home, like different clan groups. So you can't marry your own, you have to marry someone from a different tribal clan otherwise the old people, they get really upset and it's not how they grew up...Kaapay and Kuyan, have to be together, you have to be different... Has to be from a different clan.

Since 2019 Rosella has been working with a Brisbane team to translate these stories into sculptural forms. This began with smaller 'table sculpture' PVC prototypes based on her 2D designs. These have since developed into a range of sand cast sculptural forms in bronze with patinas reflecting colours and memories of community life such as red ochre, ash white, mangrove & aqua blue/green.

Because traditionally Moieties help to establish one's identity in a community, Rosella uses her signature pattern in the sculpture, *Selfie by the water* to describe a sense of self, just like how we understand today's "selfies". In doing so she makes the connection between her Indigenous heritage and her modern life. For Rosella, her sense of identity is also intrinsically linked to a sense of place and country, as can be seen in her bronze work *My Place*.

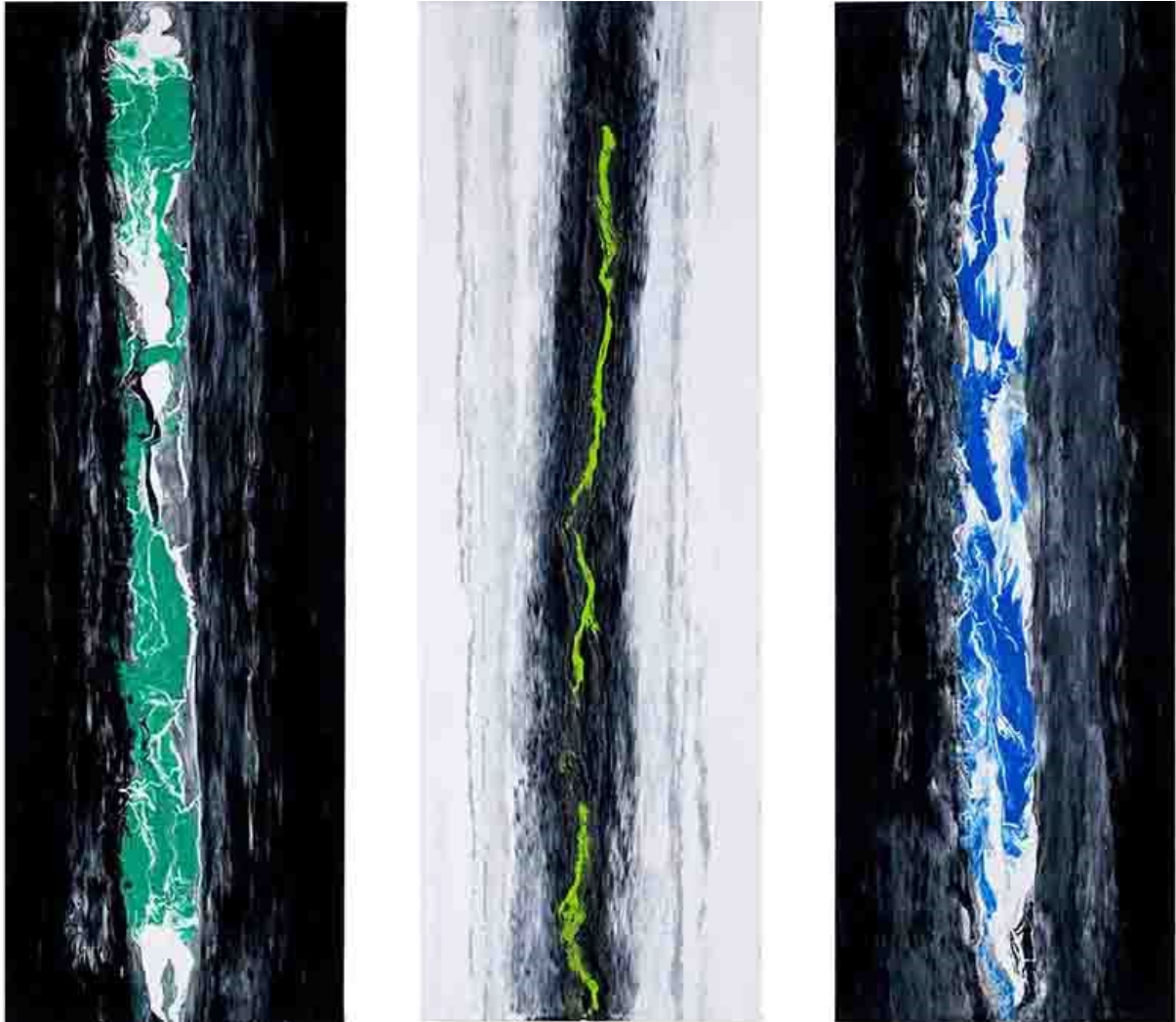


Left: *Kaapay & Kuyan* (Two Moieties Land & Sea) installation
Right: *My place* (Mangrove) featured in *Regrowth 2022*

UNCHII TREE

The paperbark or *Unchii tree*, found all over northern-coastal Queensland, are frequently used motifs by the artist to express both seasonal and life changes. Visual impressions of the bark texture in rich duotone arrangements dominate these compositions. (The *Beach Wood, Red Cedar & Regrowth*, series' are variations of these designs).

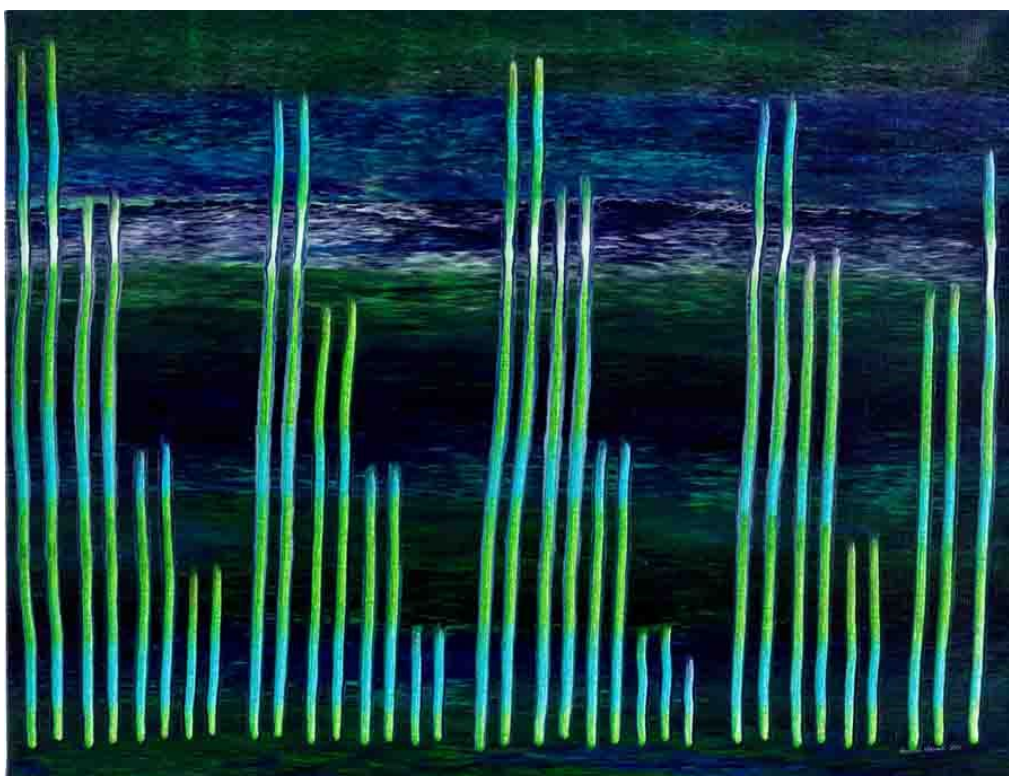
Rosella's most recent series of *Unchii tree* paintings reframe the theme *regrowth*. These recent works denote the botanic regrowth after bushfires and backburning (often required for germination) as a perpetual metaphor for personal development and cultural reflection.



Unchii: Regrowth after bushfire (triptych) 2021 acrylic on canvas 180x190cm FW20687

LOCKHART LIFESTYLES (MUD MUSSELS & MANGROVES)

Although Rosella currently resides in Cairns, many of her works show a great appreciation for having grown up in Lockhart River and having been taught the traditional (hunting & gathering) ways by the old people. Many of her painting themes tap into these memories of collecting food from the land, such as **mud mussels**/Akul (circular shapes) from the **mangroves** (linear patterns).



Mangrove 2021 acrylic on linen 84x110cm FW20115

STINGING RAIN

The *Stinging Rain* imagery has become a powerful and evocative landscape arrangement for Rosella. After trowling layers of multi-coloured high gloss paints, the artist allows some layers to dry and with the final wet coat she will 'whip' the painted surface with long thin sticks, creating the rhythmic patterns of the driving rain that are commonplace in the northern tropics. It's an action painting that brings the physicality of Rosella into play.

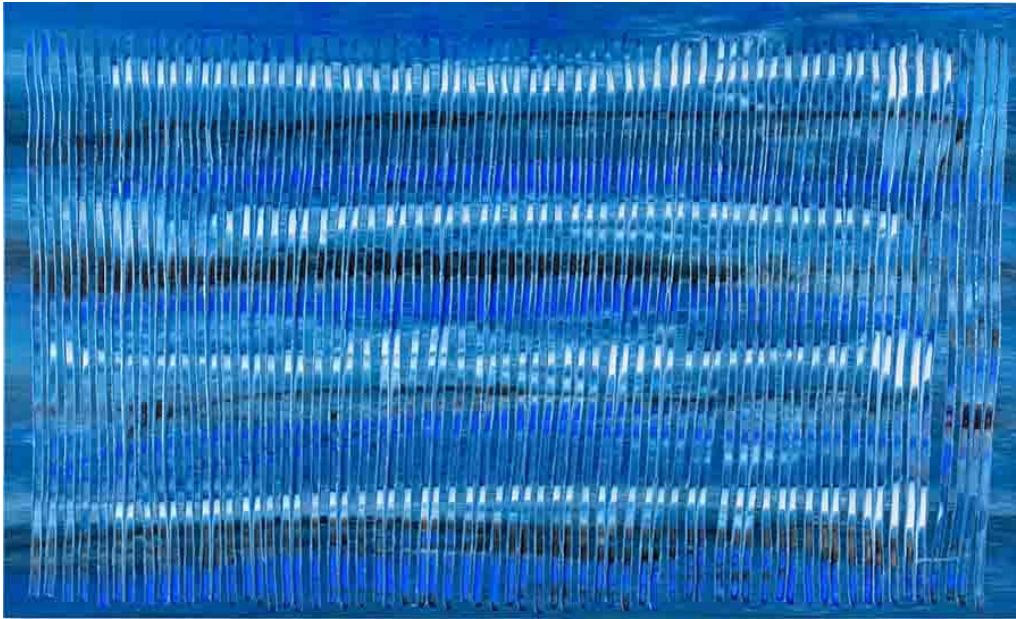


Left: *Evening rain* 2021 acrylic on linen 109x180cm FW20124
Right: *Rainforest lagoon* 2021 acrylic on canvas 120x120cm FW20519



DIFFERENT TRIBES

Rosella also paints about the different clan groups from Lockhart River, the *Kuuku Ya'u*, *Wuthathi*, *Kanthanumpu*, *Utaalnganu*, *Umpila* and *Kaanju* peoples. They will often come together for ceremonies and dance festivals.

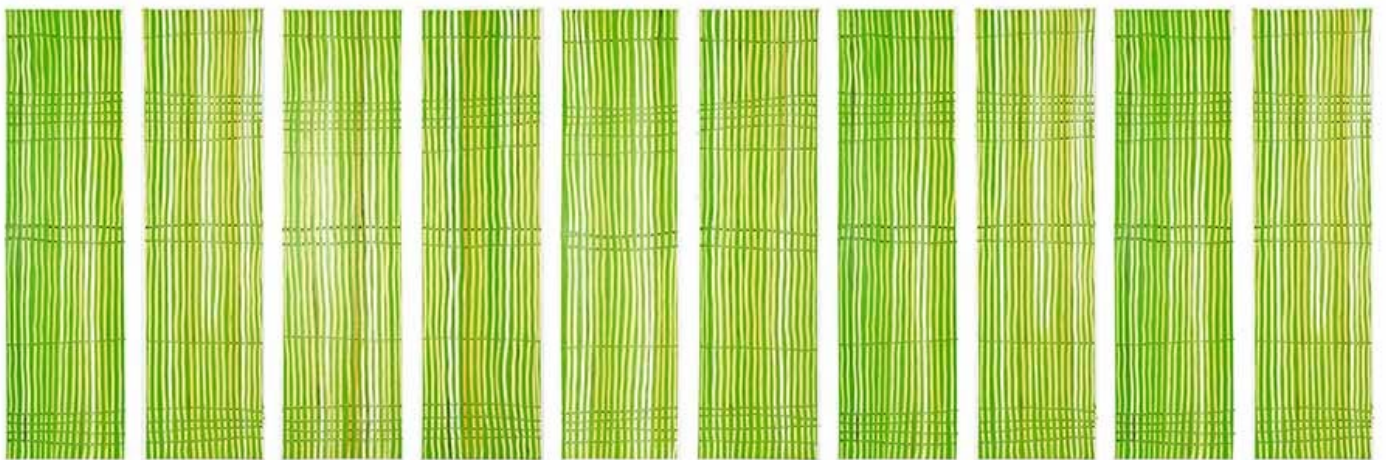


Different tribes up north 2016 acrylic on canvas 107x177cm FW17282

BAMBOO AT WATCHEE

The work takes the viewer on a 'cool walk' into Rosella's freshwater country, *Watchee*, south of Lockhart River. Here Rosella explores memories of catching freshwater turtle, jewfish, catfish and camping with her family. Rosella employs repetition of rhythm and pattern with definitive marks painted largely with her fingers.

I grew up with the old people. We always do body ceremony and body paintings too for wedding ceremonies. So I've always been helping out with my dad painting up the young boys. That's why I always use my fingers. The paintings that I do, it's all my fingers, or little scraping tools, but it's finger paintings that I love more, especially back at home, helping out body painting ceremony.



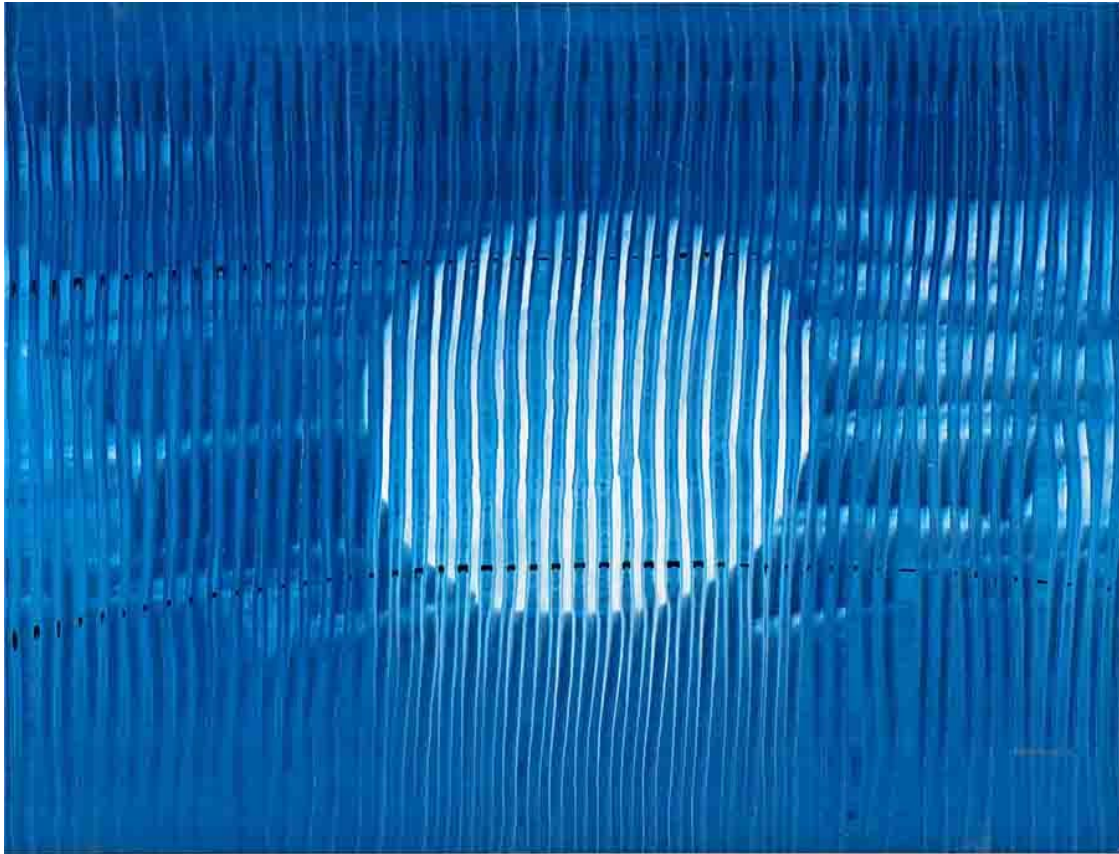
NEW VILLAGES / COMMUNITY HOUSES

The New Villages series references Namok's geometric patterning as a form of urban development in Aboriginal communities. Themes and variations arise from the artist's personal response to lifestyle changes for her family and communities, including concerns with urban development, in amidst her reflections on the timeless charm of her homeland habitat. The expansion of housing and infrastructure are portrayed as an inevitable force of nature and change within the artists own visual language.



FULL MOON

The *Full Moon* series depicting a moon hovering in the sky is an iconic image dripping with Rosella's finger-patterned linear arrangements.



SAND SCRIBE

This series often depicts the everchanging marks in the sand from tidal movements and the presence of elders' stories.



Marks in the sand 2016 acrylic on canvas 110x229cm FW16970

COLLECTIONS

Art Gallery of New South Wales
Art Gallery of South Australia
Art Gallery of Western Australia
Artspace Mackay
ATSIC Collection
Australian Heritage Commission
Brisbane Club
Cairns Regional Gallery
Columbus State University Georgia USA
Emerald Shire Council
Federal Court of Australia
Flinders University
International Education Services
Macquarie University
Monash University

National Gallery of Australia
National Gallery of Victoria
Northern Territory University
Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art
Queensland Health Rights Commission
Queensland University of Technology
State Library of Queensland
The Esk Collection Tasmania
The High Court of Australia
The Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the
University of Virginia Charlottesville Virginia USA
University of Queensland Art Collection
Warrnambool Art Gallery
Wollongong University



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