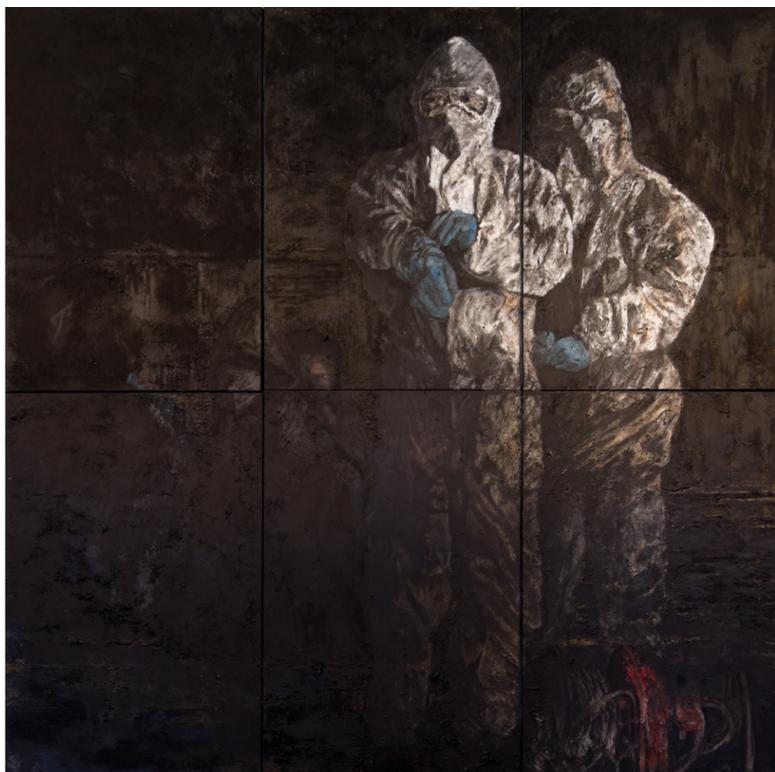




*Vivitur ex raptō* 2014 pigment and oil on linen 300 x 300 cm

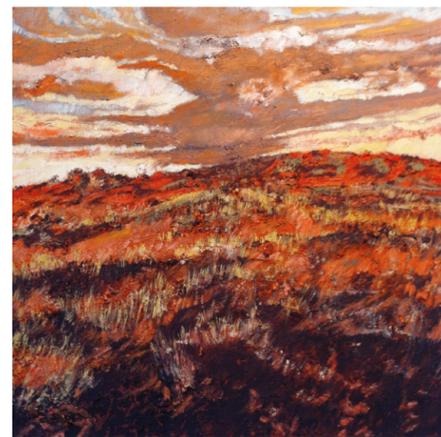


*Incident* 2014 pigment and oil on linen 300 x 300 cm

**MANDY MARTIN**



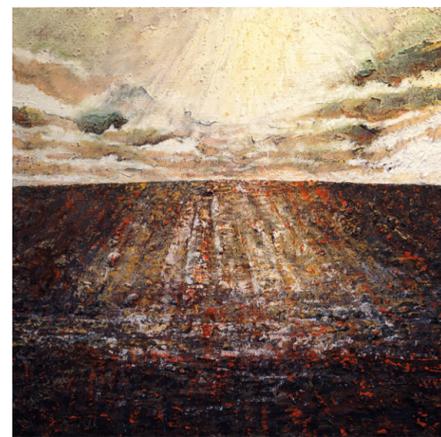
*Dust storm, late afternoon, Diamantina Lakes National Park* 2014 pigment and oil on linen 100 x 100 cm



*Evening clouds, Diamantina Lakes National Park* 2014 pigment and oil on linen 100 x 100 cm



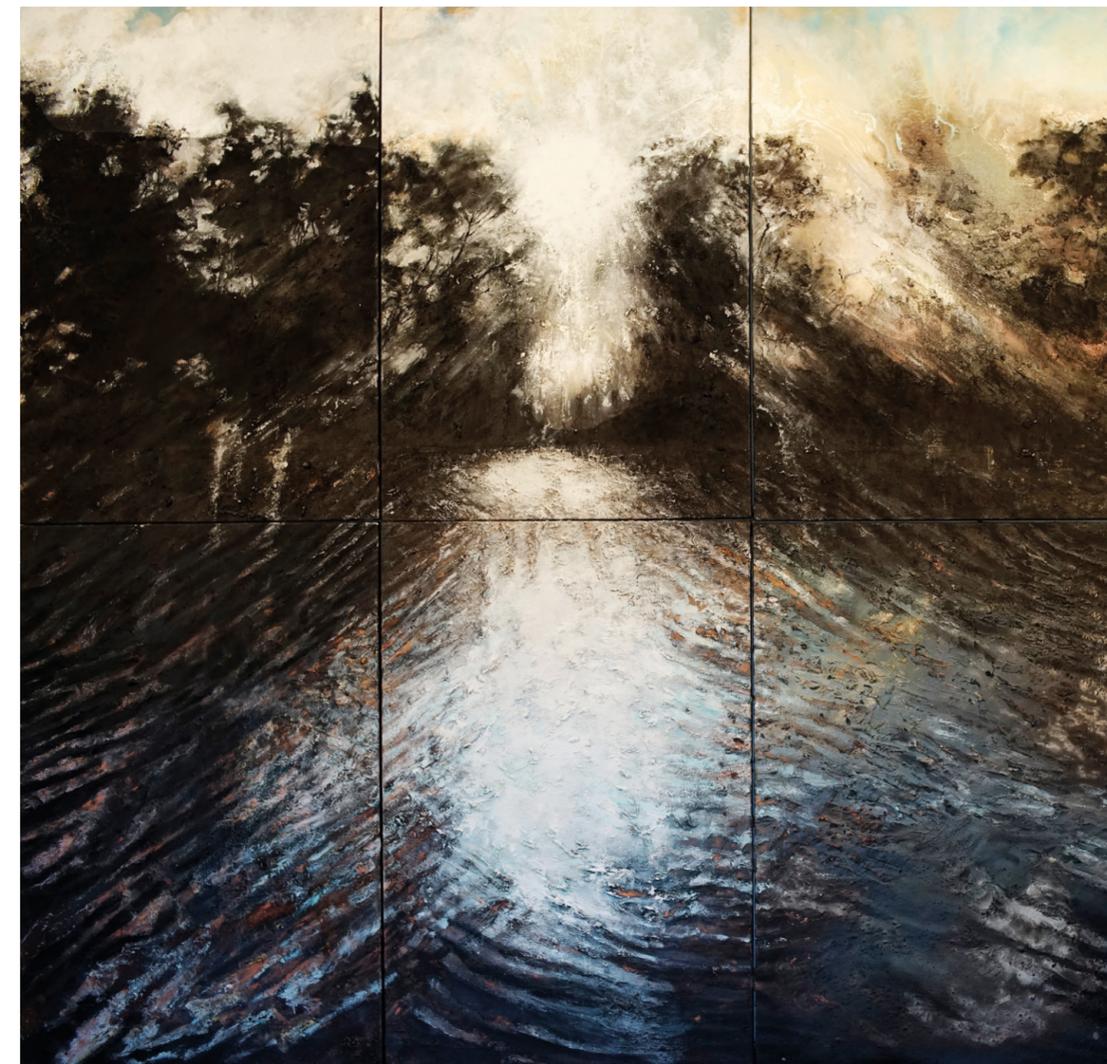
*Whistling Duck Creek, Diamantina Lakes National Park* 2014 pigment and oil on linen 100 x 100 cm



*Gibber harvest, Diamantina Lakes National Park* 2014 pigment and oil on linen 100 x 100 cm

*Cover: Conversations about the night parrot at Whistling Duck Creek* 2014 pigment and oil on linen 300 x 300 cm

**MANDY MARTIN**



*Playing with fire*  
11 November – 7 December 2014

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Right: *Conversations about the night parrot*  
at Whistling Duck Creek 2014  
Installation photograph of work in progress by Hugo Sharp



### BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE

Human beings, even those who aren’t pyromaniacs, like to burn stuff. Straw effigies, old buildings, harvested fields, scraps of paper. We even put burning weeds in our mouths in order to strike up a flame, host a glowing ember within inches of our faces, and inhale the smoke. These behaviors are not entirely irrational. Burning a piece of meat allows us to extract more caloric value from it and may have helped increase the size of the human brain over evolutionary timescales. And burning land has been used by us as a hunting and farming tool for a very long time, indeed. One of the places that has helped us understand the role of burning in ecology—human social ecology as well as land management—is Australia. Which is one reason why Mandy Martin has been playing with fire for years.

Burning can be beneficial to the land, and in recent years Martin has been spending time with Aboriginal people in the outback of Western Australia, where Traditional Owners sometimes drive down the road throwing lit matches out of the vehicle in order to create a patchwork of fires. This trims back and regenerates the spinifex, and reopens terrain for small marsupials, animals that are an important food source as well as critical to the health of the bush. The plants of Australia, including every variety of eucalyptus ever discovered, adapted to burning ignited by lightning strikes far before humans entered the land, and people learned how to benefit from the practice, as well.

Martin, along with a host of other artists, writers, conservationists and scientists, worked for two years in the Paruku Indigenous Protected Area around Lake Gregory, a site near the top of the Canning Stock Route in southern Kimberly. Camped where the official handover of IPA lands back to the Traditional Owners was conducted, she produced a series of sketches and studies that were the basis for many of the paintings in this exhibition. Fire scars surrounded the camp from years of burning the land in careful sequence, even as smoke blanketed the horizon from multiple fires burning both on purpose and not within Paruku. It’s a scene that New Burnt Patch from Handover Camp captures with genuine verve, the vivid close details of crisped vegetation, the brooding sky. This painting and the other small to mid-sized square paintings from Paruku and the Tanami Desert are laden with her signature raw ground pigment and paint, as fierce and dense with color as are the land and fires. They serve as testament to an environmental stewardship that reaches back to the Pleistocene, even as they are contemporary works of art from the country’s most well-known painter of sublime landscapes.

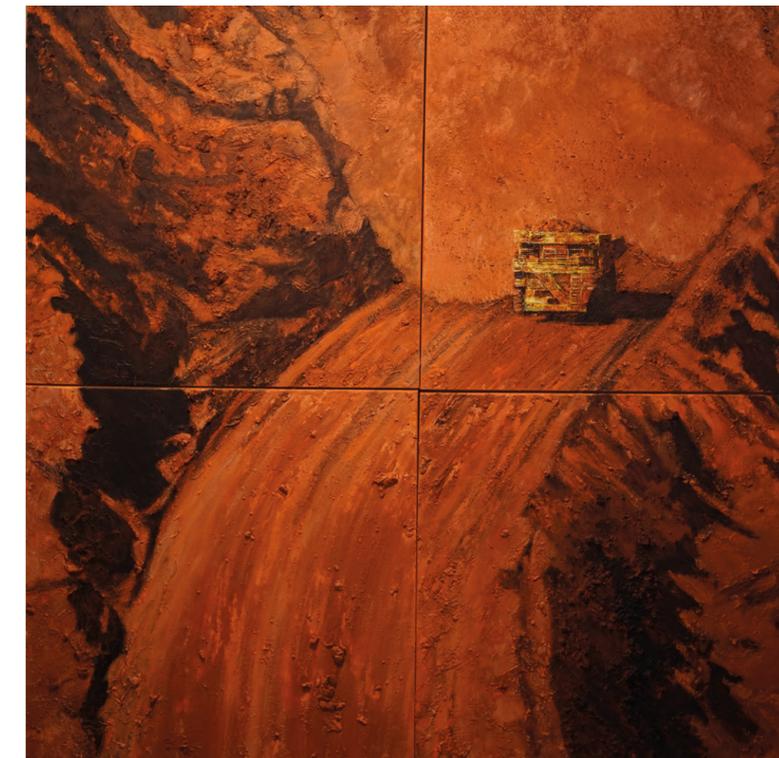
Another kind of burning is conducted by humans that is far less benign and beneficial, the kind of conflagration that has laid a signature of carbon around the globe that is so distinct it forms a new geologic strata. Scientists have proposed a new epoch for this burning, the Anthropocene. If the Pleistocene was the age of ice, and the Holocene (or “Recent Era”)

the expansion of the human footprint over every inch of the globe, then the Anthropocene is the time of the Great Burning. Coal and other fossil fuels were created when sunlight was converted photosynthetically into plant material that was then fossilized. Coal is heat energy that’s been stored in the ground for eons. When dug up and burned, that coal adds energy to the sunlight that is already warming the planet today. You upset Earth’s heat balance by flooding the planet with more ignited carbon than its natural systems can handle. This is the catastrophe known as global warming, climate change, global change—pick your phrase.

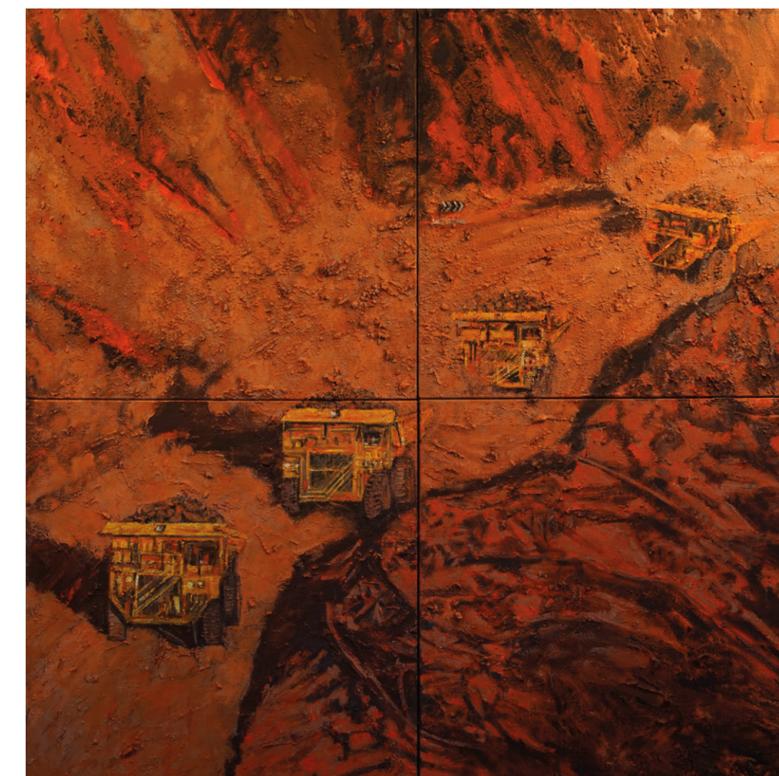
Incident 1 and Incident 2 painted this year depict scenes from a fire in Latrobe Valley’s Hazelwood open cut coal mine. The first fire at the mine was in 2006, the second in 2014, both ignited by grass fires which were burning out of control during intense hot spells exacerbated by the global warming—a warming abetted by the human burning of coal. These conflagrations are evidence of a dizzying spiral in ecological collapse that is unprecedented in the speed at which it is occurring. Martin’s paintings of trucks traversing iconic mines, including the Cadia gold mine near her home, signify the unending trail of irrational consumerism that underlies clear cut mining. Most gold mined around the world is used for jewelry, and the massive disruption of habitat is a steep price to pay for vanity.

Each of the paintings in this exhibition continue Martin’s longstanding use of the sublime to critique our interaction with nature. As she said recently about the largest work in this exhibition, *Conversations about the night parrot at Whistling Duck Creek*: “The sublime is a useful tool to help me deal with the inconceivable, the incomprehensible and the unknown.” The painting is at once an elegy for the disappearance of species such as the parrot during this sixth great extinction event, as well as for the landscape itself. What is unknown is whether or not humans can continue to survive in our environments. We burn the world both to preserve habitat and, inconceivably, to destroy it. What is sublime about Martin’s work is that the dangers portrayed in them are so very, very beautiful.

William L. Fox  
Director, Center for Art + Environment  
Nevada Museum of Art  
2014



Vivitur ex raptio 1 2013 pigment and oil on linen 200 x 200 cm



Vivitur ex raptio 2 2014 pigment and oil on linen 200 x 200 cm



Incident 1 2014 pigment and oil on linen 150 x 150 cm



Incident 2 2014 pigment and oil on linen 150 x 150 cm