

## FAIRWEATHER FIFTY YEARS ON

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Fairweather and the Raft : MAGNT, Darwin September 2002- February 6, 2003

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Darwin is a site of significance in the Fairweather story . Arriving in 1950 , from Townsville, Ian Fairweather lived in Darwin amongst the flotsam and jetsam of the War and the Bombing, until his momentous departure in 1952. He left by raft from the rocky beach just below Bullocky Point, the site of the present day Museum and Art Gallery of the NT. On the fiftieth anniversary of his departure it is fitting that the MAGNT celebrated with a commemorative exhibition.

On show are the museum's own holdings including *The Swimming Pool* , 1951 which shows the tidal baths at Lameroo beach. Everything -the figures seated on the edge, the concrete wall and the steps of the pool - is strongly outlined in white. It is the first example of this practice which Fairweather got from seeing the powerful white ochre outlines of Arnhemland barks. Lameroo beach is in the heart of the city, it was always a regular camp for the Larrakia people and during the recent hearings of the Larrakia Native Title Hearings local Larrakia gave evidence at the site of the old swimming pool.. *Lights Darwin Harbour* 1957 is one of the few depictions of the raft journey although it was painted later on Bribie Island . In it the paint makes bold gestures in thick strokes and there is a density to the colours that make it look like an oil rather than his usual goache . *Palm Sunday* 1951 is on loan from the QLD Art Gallery and shows Fairweather's typical group composition front on figures in a row , fluidly drawn soft curves in the same style as *Hell* , 1950 , the same flat forward frontal picture plane, faces like Balinese masks, figures almost Egyptian except for the feet with their rounded toes like Asian buddhas..

The exhibition derives its interest by locating Fairweather as the progenitor of various contemporary trends ; openness to the influence of Aboriginal art, using beach washup , referencing Asian and particularly calligraphic motifs, the pursuit of the divine in the order of nature . It also notes his inspirational influence on Larrakia artist Koolpinyah Richard Barnes. As a ten year old Koolpinyah recalls watching Fairweather paint and the old mans influence is clear in Koolpinyah's works from the early 60s, *Lion Dance* and *Gundirgwa* with their repeated shapes and forms processing across the page . Even though Koolpinyah,s work has taken many directions since there are still elements of this early influence in his important triptych about the Larrakia Land Claim.

Jackie Fleet's *Raft* 1996 is a sculpture of driftwood washed up from burnt Indonesian fishing boats with a sail made from patches of old batik sarongs and her signature angel riding the prow. The original boat probably came from the small island of Roti where Fairweather washed up in 1952. Painter Peter Adsett during his long time in the NT also did a residency in Jogjakarta and his painting *No 6*. 1999 with its flicks of blazing

white hot fire refers to the divine energy of Merapi, one of the most active volcanoes in the world , alongside is a traditional batik cloth with white Garuda wings and the affinity of feathers and flames is apparent.

The calligraphic is present in work made in Central Australia by Marina Stocchi and Wayne Eager . In Stocchi 's gouaches Outbush 1 and 11, 1999 her idiosyncratic symbols are arranged in a grid like a key guide, and Eagers Dream 1996, is an all over pattern like wood blocks of Chinese letters the edges of each burning orange over a field of pinky brown and dry cream recalling the crazed surface of a Centralian clay pan.

The Legacy of Ian Fairweather lives on in the NT. You can follow a walk around the MAGNT grounds to the place he emarked for his Cytherea, and in nearby Parap, a contemporary gallery RAFT Artspace exhibiting art from the region, indigenous, local and Asian is named after him.

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