



AN INTERVIEW WITH MR JACKY GREEN

Member of the Garawa,
southwest Gulf country,
Northern Territory

I AM A GARAWA MAN. MY COUNTRY IS
in the southwest Gulf of
Carpentaria.

I was born under a coolabah tree
in one of the creek beds running
out from the main creek at Soudan
Station in the Northern Territory.
I was born in the elbow of Irinju in
Wakaya Country where my father
was working.

When I was young there was no
whitefella schooling for us Aboriginal
kids. My school was the bridle and
the blanket, learning on the pastoral
stations where my father worked.
Our future was set as labourers on
whitefella pastoral stations.

I was taught our law by my
grandfathers, father, uncles
and other senior kin from the
southwest Gulf peoples: the Mara,
Gudanji, Yanyuwa and Garawa.
Knowledge came to me through our
ceremonies, hunting, fishing and
gathering, and travelling through our
country with the old people.

All my life I have fought hard for
our land and culture. For the last
thirty years I have been working
with all the Aboriginal people of
the southwest Gulf fighting to get
our country back in our ownership
and then to protect and care for it.
There's lots of important sacred
sites and song-lines throughout our
country. Many of them are powerful
places that have to be cared for,
looked after the proper way.



Jacky Green co-presented a
seminar with Dr Seán Kerins
from the Australian National
University at AIATSIS on Friday,
20 February 2015. The seminar
was entitled 'Developing the
North: who benefits and who
bears cost? A case study from
the Gulf Country'. You can view
the full video at: [http://50years.
aiatsis.gov.au/publications/
presentations/developing-
north-who-benefits-and-who-
bears-cost-case-study-gulf-
country](http://50years.aiatsis.gov.au/publications/presentations/developing-north-who-benefits-and-who-bears-cost-case-study-gulf-country).

After my days as a stockman I
worked for the Northern Land
Council in the Northern Territory.
For a number of years I was a
director on the Carpentaria Land
Council Aboriginal Corporation in
Queensland, where I represented
Garawa people. I am currently a
council member of the Northern
Land Council.

In 2005 I started the Garawa and
Waanyi/Garawa Ranger groups in
the southern Gulf region. I did this
because many Waanyi and Garawa
people living on their homelands
were forced to move back to the

old mission in Doomadgee and
other places when service delivery
failed on the homelands. When the
people moved off the country it was
suffering from late-season wildfires.

The Northern Territory and
Queensland governments were
trying to get on top of the wildfires
but couldn't do it. It was when we
got involved and started to do things
our way and working with a few
whitefellas who were helpin' us
that we managed to stop the hot
late-season wildfires and replace
them with cooler early-season
controlled fires.

Why I paint

I started painting so I can get my
voice out. I want to show people
what is happening to our country
and to Aboriginal people. No one is
listening to us. What we want. How
we want to live. What we want in the
future for our children. It's for these
reasons that I started to paint. I want
government to listen to Aboriginal
people. I want people in the cities
to know what's happening to us and
our country.

There's a lot of mining going on in
our country. The mining companies
are coming into our country and
they aren't talking with us properly.
They seem to just want us to agree
to things their way. They might talk
to one or two people but not to the
Minggirringi (owners) and Junggayi
(boss for country/managers) for

the places they want to explore or mine. Things are always rushed. It's always about someone else's plan for our country and not our own plans.

You just have to look at the McArthur River Mine. They are destroying an important sacred site that sits in that area. We are worried about the damage to the site and about leaks and pollution from run-off that might come down the river and go into the sea. It worries us that the sacred sites aren't being protected. We can't do what we are supposed to do to protect these places and this makes us feel no good. It plays with our people's minds. It's not good for them. This is serious business. Why won't anyone listen to us?

I want the government and mining companies to know that we are still here. We aren't going anywhere. We aren't dead yet. We are still here, feeling the country.

Jacky Green has had a number of sellout shows in Melbourne and Sydney, and his artworks are held in a number of national and private collections.



DESECRATING THE RAINBOW SERPENT

Jacky Green (2014)/Waralungku Arts



At the top of the painting (above), guarded by the Junggayi (boss for country) and Minggirringi (owner of country), are the eyes of the Rainbow Serpent. The Junggayi and Minggirringi are worried that the Snake is being desecrated. The Rainbow Serpent is one of our spiritually powerful ancestral beings. It rests under McArthur River in the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria. Under our law we hold responsibility for protecting its resting place from disturbance, and responsibility for nurturing its spirit with ceremony and song—just as our ancestors have done for eons.

The left of the painting represents a time when we had authority over country. We lived on country, hunted, fished and gathered our food on country. We used fire to care for it, and, most importantly, we protected our sacred places within it. By protecting and nurturing our sacred sites we protect and nurture our spirituality and our wellbeing as GudANJI, Garawa, Mara and Yanyuwa peoples.

The right of the painting represents the present time (2014) when we still have no authority over all of our ancestral country. The artwork illustrates how the resting place of the Rainbow Serpent looks now. It's been smashed by McArthur River Mine. Country, torn open to make way for one of the largest lead, zinc and silver mines the world has ever seen. To do this they cut the back of our ancestor—the Rainbow Serpent—by severing McArthur River and diverting it through a 5.5 kilometre diversion cut into our country.

A lot of people have died because of the desecration of our sacred places. Interfering with these powerful places, it pulls people down. The stress of seeing our land suffer means we suffer. Men tried to fight but got pulled down. I might be the next one, or the Junggayi will go down. The mining executive might go too. All this pressure, it's no good.

SAME STORY, SETTLERS—MINERS

Jacky Green (2012)/Waralungku Arts

This painting (right) shows Wet season time when the storms bring life to our land and fill the rivers and creeks with water. Its story is about how we tryin' to pull up the mining companies and stop them from wrecking our country. We live in this country. It belongs to us. In the bottom left of the painting are the miners entering our country. First they come with their 'agreements', but they override us, they still come, it doesn't matter what. Then they come with their dozers. Lined up on the edge of the river are Aboriginal people with spears ready to drive the miners out of our country. It's not the first time that we have had people invade our country. It happened, first time, back in the 1870s when white explorers with their packhorses started moving through our country, looking round to see what was there. Aboriginal people were watching them from a distance, staying back, not wanting to be seen. Others were ready to spear them. You can see this story in the bottom right-hand side of the painting. Above this is a group of Aboriginal men at the foot of the stone country. They have been watchin' what is going on and talking about what to do, how to protect our country. Nothing has really changed since whitefellas came into our country. First time it was horses and now it's bulldozers.



FIFO

Jacky Green (2013)/Waralungku Arts

I call this painting (left) *Fly in and fuck off*. It tells the story how the government mob and mining mob fly into our country to talk at us. They fly in and tell us one thing and then they say they will be comin' back but we never see them again. They fly in, use complicated words and then fly right back out, real quick. The people sitting on the ground in the painting are us Aboriginal people. We all focused on the government people standing with their whiteboard. They bring ladies in sometimes who do all the talkin'. But we not really understandin' what they sayin'. Many of us don't read and write, so the words on the board mean nothing. It's really hard, getting our heads around what it really means. That's why some of them just sittin', scratchin' their heads and others they got their hands up wantin' to ask questions. Why they here in our country? The government story doesn't go through to us properly. Their paperwork and their story always two different things. They just put something in front of us and when they think they got it right they outta here real quick and we don't know what they really meant. This top-down way of talking with us been going on too long. Things gotta change. We want things to be explained to us proper way so we can sit and talk about it amongst ourselves. We be switched on then and make our own decision to say yes or no. None of this gotta hurry up 'cos our aeroplane is leavin'. They gotta give us time. No more of this Fly In and Fuck Off stuff.



stories for paintings