

KINGS Artist Run acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we operate. We offer our respect to Elders both past and present and extend this offer to all First Nations people.

KINGS

*Jack Green, Jenna Rain  
Warwick, Moorina  
Bonini, Vasilika Tsingos*

*curated by Jenna Rain  
Warwick*

DESERT MUSIC  
PLAYS

NOVEMBER  
14.11.24–15.12.24

*Artist Run*

Established in 2003, KINGS Artist-Run provides a location for contemporary art practice, supporting distinctive experimental projects by artists at all stages of their careers.

Open 12-5pm Thursday,  
Friday, Saturday, Sunday  
69 Capel Street,  
West Melbourne VIC 3003

Jack Green, Jenna Rain Warwick, Moorina Bonini, Vasilika Tsingos  
Cur. Jenna Rain Warwick  
DESERT MUSIC PLAYS

Australian cinema as a distributor of Australian identity and its ‘necessary “whiteness”’ has historically beckoned its viewers to withstand the natural world, to endure it. Often tied to a journey of self awakening, Australian New Wave cinema signaled a broader self-assessment of national identity, one that tantalised freedom with unpaved adventure and hedonistic abandon. With characters who search and go beyond the city, ultimately changed by their survival of the ‘outback’... [became] a journey of self awakening, both individual and collective. In contrast to previous times [of cinema], Australian New Wave possessed “a vitality, a love of open spaces and a propensity for sudden violence and languorous sexuality.” The “straight-ahead narrative style” of many Australian New Wave films reminded American audiences of “the Hollywood-maverick period of the late 1960s and early ‘70s that had just about run its course.”

This straight-ahead style brought racial and social concerns into centre stage. Bringing about a kind of self awareness, whilst still reinforcing established racialised behaviors. Films that typify Australian New Wave include *In Search of Anna*, *Wake In Fright* and *The Cars that Ate Paris*. This perspective positions Australian New Wave as the result of Hollywood influence, which to a degree is true. However, another contextualisation could be to look to ethnographic and pre-New Wave films, how the commercial and economic need to demarcate ‘Australia’ on screen is directly tied to industry. That the myths and narratives expressed by such industry can be both insidious and a seed of cultural inspiration.

A lingering comment on Australian cinema is that it looks too much to other countries’ inspiration for meaning, and like much of Australian society, suffers from amnesia brought on by white guilt. Therefore a need arises to closely inspect earlier cinema and analyse the relationship between commercial interests, ethnographic films, and the construction of Australia on screen. Existing between educational and commercial propaganda [are] ‘documentaries’ like the 1949 *Alice Through The Centre* and John Heyer’s 1946 *Native Earth*. Films that are hard to find (NFSA make u pay) and are often unacknowledged in the canon of Australian cinema as they are ‘factual’ however I would argue are some of the most significant blueprints for Australian archetypes.

**Jack Green and Moorina Bonini’s works both depict the extraction of earth, the weight of it, and what is left ...**

Moorina Bonini ‘s *WAYIRRA* was made on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri peoples presented earlier this year in *These Arms Hold* curated by Maya Hodge at Incinerator Gallery. In 1929, the incinerator was built to house furnaces which were used to burn Melbourne City’s waste. Three Eucalyptus trees were situated along the west-side of Incinerator Gallery until they were cut down at the beginning of 2024, turned into mulch and distributed across the landscape at the site. Through digging, *WAYIRRA* acknowledges that Country holds agency and through the powerful Aboriginal women’s practice of digging, this cultural agency cannot be owned nor governed.

*"Aboriginal women have utilised physical, spiritual and mental forms of weaponry to protect ourselves, our families and our woka (Country) for millennia. We carry the strength and embodied memories of our matriarchs through practices that manifest into protection. An example of this is our digging sticks which were predominantly used by women to dig for foods such as gona (root/s) which were an important vegetable source in the South-East. Digging encouraged plant production as the practice involved the turning over of soil and the thinning out of gona (root) clumps which was a significant regenerative practice. I use the practice of wayirra (to dig) understanding that this cultural practice enables plant production and knowledge production to happen. The knowledge production comes from recreating an important South-Eastern cultural material, the digging stick, which I learnt from my Uncle Leon Atkinson and my mum, Julie Andrews."*

- Moorina Bonini

In 2020, Garrwa man Jack Green submitted a series of paintings to the parliamentary inquiry into the destruction of 46,000-year-old caves at Juukan Gorge. The paintings depict a powerful submission accompanied by written explanation to what and where his paintings depicted. A visual medium that enabled spiritual explanations, un beholden to English language and legal precedent.

Jack and Moorina's work presented together reckons with the conception of self as much as they decry colonial forces and infringements on Country. Humming with a promise of being known because our soil exists, but also not having a choice but to depict the degradation of it and being beholden to historicisation of one's oppressor. They offer a placeholder for portrait and celebrity. Delegitimising the 'consumption' (for lack of a better word) of persona, reinstating autonomy... in an economy of image making.

**SUGAR, OIL AND MANGO TREES** is a video that features clips from the 1973 film *Mango Tree*. Filmed on Wakka Wakka, Wulli Wulli, Goreng Goreng, Djakunda, Jangeri Jangeri, Kabi Kabi, Gurang, Taribelang Bunda and Bailai Country (Bundaberg QLD) and in a large part financed by the colonial sugar company CSR, a financier that historically depended on Blackbirding. This practice saw 62,000 Pacific Islanders trafficked to Queensland from 1860, forced to work on Queensland cotton and sugar fields for little to no pay.

At first it was the filming location that beckoned further investigation, I'd never heard of a film being shot on that country in the 70s ... so I watched. I watched the cane fields take center stage and the freshly arrived British and Irish immigrants adopt a new Australian identity. In a sense, it was a pleasurable viewing, to see untouched bush without a racist depiction of my people. I watched big church hats and WWII soldiers returning from the war and ones in the making. A European fantasy taking place on top of Bundaberg.

I would also just like to pay respects to the man that played one of the soldiers, Tony Foley ... your memory lives on, I never got to edit your film.

Prior to *Desert music plays* I made a work that investigated the Shell Film Unit, and its impact on Australian film from the 40s until it was disbanded around the 80s. It was this film unit that financed the groundbreaking / progressive film *Back of Beyond*. Portraying a postal service worker along the grueling Birdsville track, one of the many travelways made by First People (almost every main road in Australia is built upon an older one, a network of travelways and trading routes). The film unit operated in tandem with government agencies to make and distribute ethnographic documentary-

style films. The research trips for such films were often used as cover for further oil exploratory missions all throughout West Queensland and the Central Desert. So while my initial intention was to give credence to the Countries that these colonial fantasies were projected upon, it became clear that Country was showing me something else ... there are also many such similarities between Kodak, the postcard industry and its ethnographic legacies –keep in mind that film is made from crude oil.

*Back of Beyond* directed by John Heyer in 1954, was screened in almost every school and celebrated for its inclusion, albeit entirely fictionalised black narrative and characters. However it marked a shift in what white audiences would tolerate on their screen. Again, it was the filming location that drew my attention ... as a Luritja woman before Pearce and Thomas our name was Tinjinjinjalpa. Matrilineally I belong to Country south of Mparntwe – I thought I might find some footage of my Country but uncovered the Shell Film Unit. The film both romanticised the outback while also proclaiming that the desert remained a hopeless, barren place that had to be survived and endured. Nevertheless, it was largely successful at placing the automotive industry as not only a necessity but an intrinsic part of the Australian identity.

In fact it was a surveying trip for *Back of Beyond* that inspired Sidney Nolan's carcass paintings. Friends with the film crew at the time, Sidney joined the research trip, depicting the bleakness and deadness of the Birdsville track. There is an identical shot of cow bones in Heyers film as there is in Nolan's *Carcass*, surely both just saw a dead cow ... a comment on colonialism, as there are no hoofed animals native to this continent, is unclear. What is clear is that both men are in part responsible for the creation of the 'outback' whilst on a sponsored survey trip by the Shell Film Unit.

Commercial extractive enterprises have played a major role in the Australian arts industry, shaping not only our screen for financial benefits... The depiction and subsequent understandings of Australia on screen have been deployed and remade in the interest of extractive industry, such as the song of the colonial project.

The elephant in the room with *Mango Trees* is that that are no Blackfullas made obvious by all empty cane fields, and the issue with *Back of Beyond* is the racist depictions. Thus the following era can be seen as a manifestation of anxiety surrounding the uncertainty and blaring fallacies of Australian culture, as realised through its depiction in cinema. It both thrashes against its previous era and recommits to its guiding principles to replicate a sense of Australianness on screen.

Wilma Reading's depiction is an offering ... she should have been a movie star.

She never got the fame she deserved, her star power makes me think she should have been a movie star. A Kalkatungu and Torres Strait Islander woman from Cairns who got more recognition from Black America than she ever could here. Her undeniable talent, glamour and grace contrast the insidious nature of the Australian entertainment industry.

Jenna Rain Warwick

*Jack Green, Jenna Rain Warwick, Moorina Bonini, Vasikila Tsingos*  
*Cur. Jenna Rain Warwick*  
DESERT MUSIC PLAYS

**Jack Green** is an artist and activist born in the early 1950s under a Coolibah tree on Soudan Station on the Barkley Tablelands, Wakaya country. He is a Mambaliya man, Garrwa on his father's side and Marra on his mother's side. He grew up on cattle stations, travelling with kin for ceremonies, and settled in Borrooloola in the early 1970s. Jack uses his art to campaign for land rights and the protection of his traditional Country and region, particularly against the adverse impacts of mining.

**Moorina Bonini** is a proud descendant of the Yorta Yorta Dhulunyagen family clan of Ulupna and the Yorta Yorta, Wurundjeri and Wiradjuri Briggs/McCrae family. Moorina is an artist whose works are informed by her experiences as an Aboriginal and Italian woman. Her practice attempts to disrupt and critique the eurocentric foundations that centralise Indigenous categorisation within western institutions. By unsettling the narrative placed upon Aboriginal people as a result of colonisation of Aboriginal Australia, Moorina's practice is based within Indigenous Knowledge systems and brings this to the fore. Her work has been exhibited in various shows across Australia and also internationally.

**Vasilika Tsingos** is a multidisciplinary artist, interested in themes of how we legitimise a subject within the confinements of the frame. Her work interrogates the intentionality of the 'edge' and displaced familiar objects through coexisting moments of figuration and abstraction. A tension between the 'edge' and the 'edgeless', a driving force of desire.

**Jenna Rain Warwick** is a proud Luritja woman, born and raised in Queensland she now resides in Melbourne Victoria working as a curator for ACMI. She is a fiction writer (fiction), filmmaker and curator with a passion for supporting First Nations storytellers, to realise ideas and promote critical reflection in film studies. Concerned with the construction and distribution of national identity on screen, her research interests intersect broadly with video and film from around the globe. Her curatorial projects hope to present thought provoking and unexpected comparisons, challenging how we might think about identity and cinema.

*The curatorial mentors for the Emerging Curators Program in 2024 are Tamsen Hopkinson and Ashley Perry.*

*Desert music plays* is exhibited as a part of the KINGS Emerging Curators Program 2024.

In 2024 the KINGS Emerging Curators Program is supported by the Arts and Creative Partnerships Program from City of Melbourne

Artwork details (left to right)

GALLERY ONE

*Wilma Reading on the Wheeltappers and Shunters Social Club, 1974*  
looped video 02:59

Jack Green, *Untitled, 2022*  
acrylic paint and ochre on canvas.

Jenna Rain Warwick, *Sugar Oil and Mango trees, 2024*, video 02:45

Vasilika Tsingos, *Wilma Reading, 2024*,  
oil on canvas 50.7 x 61cm

Vasilika Tsingos, *Wilma Reading, 2024*,  
oil on canvas 50.7 x 61cm

GALLERY TWO

Jenna Rain Warwick, *Food for thought, 2024*, looped video 02:00

Research materials:  
*Cinema Papers, Issue 13, June 1977*

*Venture into the Unknown: 50 Years of Exploration by Shell in Australia, November 1989*

*Shell presents: The Back of Beyond, 1954*

*Nothern Safari: A souvenir programme by Keith F. Adams, 1956*

*A History of the Royal Dutch/Shell Group of Companies, 1983*

GALLERY THREE (STRAY VOLTAGE)

Moorina Bonini, *WAYIRRA, 2024*,  
looped video 02:37